

## Doctorateness: where should we look for evidence?

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### Abstract

This chapter approaches the issue of the contribution to the arts of doctoral research by looking at a recent dispute in the educational debate about doctorateness. The dispute can be explained by looking more closely at the evidence that is being used, and in particular by looking at the broader social context in which doctorates are evaluated and how knowledge production and evaluation varies between fields. The chapter claims that by engaging in a professionally legitimised activity, the candidate demonstrates membership of a community and a field.

This thought experiment with notions of professional competence and community legitimization reveals the way in which our notions of what is normal, transgressive, or even "madness", are grounded in consent, particularly amongst persons who are societally authorised to "tell us what to think". For example, in the art world expert representatives of the community, such as curators, find value in some practices that are regarded as madness by the general public. It gives rise to the "institutional theory of art" in which "what is art" is performatively defined by what curators assert is art. This implies the possibility of an "institutional theory of artistic research" that would define "what is artistic research" through the performative utterances of what academics say is artistic research. The institutional theories of art and artistic research are not the same principally because those who are authorized by society to make value judgements are not the same, i.e. curators on one hand, and academics on the other.

Previous studies have differed about the criteria for doctorateness in different fields, owing to different perspectives. This chapter does not argue that we should resolve this plurality by creating a hybrid of rules and criteria from academia as a whole, but instead it argues for a fundamental reassessment of what impacts on our concepts of doctorateness and research, and how these might be expressed in ways that are inclusive of the creative arts. The paper proposes four quadrants in which one might look for evidence and thereby attempts to contribute to an institutional theory of artistic research. The quadrants are named "explicit", "implicit", "generic", and "specific". These four sources of data form a Boolean square within which one may consider the contested term "doctorateness".

The chapter concludes that certain common principles may be found in each quadrant, but their manifestation in the discourse of each discipline is very different. As a result of adopting a socio-cultural approach it does not conclude that there are specific criteria for doctorateness, but instead that a meaningful evaluation can only be made with reference to the values and worldviews of specialist communities. As new disciplines are incorporated into academia, so the language we use to describe the fundamentals of any kind of research is altered. In due course, artistic research will seem less strange not only because it will become more familiar but also because we will have to re-describe research in all disciplines as a consequence of the way in which we describe artistic research.

## Doctorateness: where should we look for evidence?

Discussion and debate about the nature and role of the doctorate, and therefore how it should be evaluated, can be found in all disciplines. However, there are certain disciplines in which the debate seems particularly wide-ranging and therefore the topic of evaluation has less consensus. In the creative arts, including music, architecture, creative writing, fine arts and design, etc. the debate about doctoral research often includes fundamental issues about art and knowledge (Eisner 2008), and consequently what the creative arts can contribute to academic research (Knowles and Cole 2008). In education, the debate is often focussed on the transferable concept of level of achievement or competencies called "doctorateness" (Trafford and Lesham 2009). In this chapter I intend to approach the issue of the contribution to the arts of doctoral research by looking at a recent dispute in the educational debate about doctorateness. In this dispute, Wellington and Poole adopted different analyses of doctorateness, resulting in opposing conclusions.

Wellington offers five main arenas in which the concept of the doctorate can be discussed: the purposes of doctoral study; the impact of doctorates; written regulations for the award of the doctorate; the examination process; and the voices of those involved in it (2013: 1491). He assumes that what is being evaluated is the written thesis rather than the competencies of the candidate, and despite analysing various constituent categories in each arena he concludes "we should give up a search for some sort of 'inner essence' of doctorateness" (2013: 1501). Wellington believes that "doctorateness" is an "essentially contested concept" and that it suffers from the same kind of indeterminacy as Wittgenstein's concept of a game (Wittgenstein 1953: §66)<sup>1</sup>. His main positive conclusion is that being "publishable" is "the single most necessary (though not on its own sufficient) quality that makes up a doctorate" (2013: 1502). Poole (2014), on the other hand, rejects this response to the polysemous nature of many of the terms used in the debate about doctorateness. He argues that by unpacking some of the plurality or ambiguity we may yet refine the concepts and reveal the causal variants between the disputants. For example, he finds many conflicting assumptions made by Wellington and others, including whether it is the thesis or the candidate that is being evaluated, whether it is the process or the outcome, whether the examiner is acting as gate-keeper or community-builder, and where on the "cline of originality" we require a successful thesis to lie (Poole 2014: 7).

The disagreement between Wellington and Poole reveals two different approaches to where one should look for evidence. Wellington's interpretation is based on case studies of doctoral supervision, whereas Poole's is based on a structural analysis of the doctorate as a process. Both agree that the outcome should be significant to the community, but disagree whether this consists in making an individual "contribution" (Wellington) or in meeting community-endorsed criteria (Poole). These differences can be explained by looking more closely at the evidence that is being used, and in particular by looking at the broader social context in which doctorates are evaluated.

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<sup>1</sup> Rolf Hughes also makes the same Wittgensteinian claim for doctorateness as indeterminate or "open in texture" (in this volume). However, I would disagree with both Hughes and Wellington that Wittgenstein illustrates certain conditions that apply to doctorateness in artistic research because his analogy with "games" serves to show that "explanations come to an end somewhere" (1953: §1). Thus Wittgenstein's claim is that *all* our terms are fundamentally indeterminate and are constituted by how we use them socially.

## Social Authorization

Our expectations of the nature of doctoral study do not arise out of the blue – advanced study of any kind is rooted in the requirements and expectations of individual disciplines, and framed within overall notions of training, accreditation, and qualification in institutional settings such as universities, training colleges, industry, etc. The doctorate is differentiated from other levels of education by its requirement that the candidate contributes to the knowledge or understanding we already have in the subject. This places two obvious requirements on the doctoral candidate. The first is that they gain a thorough understanding of the subject (sometimes known as the literature review) so that they know what is the current state of knowledge and where an original contribution might be made (sometimes known as the gap analysis). The second is that the candidate has techniques (sometimes known as research methods) that will allow him or her to make a valid contribution that is accepted by the community and other stakeholders (Park 2007: 7f.). The second requirement is normally satisfied by what is known as discipline-specific research training, that connects generic knowledge-production techniques to the specialist interests of particular academic or professional communities.

What one understands by “research training” looks very different from one discipline to another. For example, in the hard sciences, research training is often a training in specific techniques that constitute the industry standard for competent professional practice, such as “the leaching test”. In the humanities, there tends to be less standardisation about what are current professional competences and so research training tends to involve exposure to different interpretational frameworks such as post-structuralism, critical theory, etc. In the creative arts the situation is even more diverse than it is in the humanities. Here one finds that research training takes a wide variety of forms but still has the same role in a doctoral programme, that is, to make the candidate aware of the ways in which different intellectual and critical approaches to an issue change the responses that would be appropriate and the kind of artistic outcomes that would result. Thus as one moves from the hard sciences through humanities and social sciences into creative arts, one sees that the nature of research training changes from training in specific technical competencies into training in a particular intellectual or artistic stance. I believe that both professional competencies and critical rigour are necessary in all disciplines and so perhaps it would be better to say that in the hard sciences the emphasis is on technical competencies with less emphasis on, but still a presence of, intellectual and critical awareness; and that in creative arts the emphasis is the reverse. As a thought experiment one can imagine that a doctoral candidate in science who failed to exhibit technical competencies would probably fail, but equally a doctoral candidate in creative arts who only exhibited technical competencies would also probably fail.

This balance of intellectual and technical competencies relates to the values of the individual disciplines. I have claimed elsewhere that research training enables the candidate to make a valid contribution to knowledge and understanding in their discipline (Biggs and Büchler 2007). Part of the validity of this contribution consists in demonstrating that the candidate understands how knowledge is currently produced in the field. It is a professional competence that in the humanities one reaches for an intellectual position rather than a piece of laboratory equipment in order to gather or interpret data. By engaging in a legitimized professional activity the candidate demonstrates membership of the community. The candidate also demonstrates that he or she is able to understand the current state of knowledge in the field and to undertake a gap analysis precisely because the intellectual and professional framing of the discipline is an integral part of identifying the content of the discipline. One therefore has a virtuous circle containing the knowledge and understanding of the

discipline, the training that is necessary for a doctoral candidate, gap analysis and contribution of the candidate that ultimately feeds back into the shared knowledge and understanding of the discipline. This fairly traditional structural description of research practice is equally applicable to the creative arts and sciences given a certain flexibility about the reference of each of the terms beyond their traditional uses, e.g. what constitutes a "literature review".

The virtuous circle of knowledge is endorsed and authorised by the professional community, and the broader intellectual context in which it is situated gives a clue as to how one might deal with paradigm shifts or novel worldviews (Guba and Lincoln 2005). The difference between a paradigm shift and what is simply incompetent professional activity lies in the ability of the community to perceive an advantage in the new way of thinking. This may take time and there is always a certain amount of intellectual inertia or resistance. However, a permanent failure to persuade is perhaps the indicator of incompetence rather than revolution. Artistic practices are sometimes called transgressive, but the difference between what is transgressive and what is madness also lies in the ability of the community to find value in what is presented. Indeed, what is madness is also a notion of society and collective agreement rather than having objective criteria. Park (2005, 196) claims that the doctorate, rather than being an objective construction, is a social construction, echoing a broader contemporary trend in philosophy of science (cf. Bloor 1991 [1976]) towards social rather than epistemic foundationalism.

This thought experiment, with its notions of professional competence and community legitimization, reveals the way in which our notions of what is normal, transgressive, or madness, are grounded in consent, particularly amongst persons who are societally authorised to "tell us what to think". For example, in the art world expert representatives of the community, such as curators, find value in some practices that are regarded as madness by the general public. This gives rise to the "institutional theory of art" which defines "what is art" through the performative utterances of what curators say is art. The content and boundaries of disciplines and intellectual practices are not fixed, and we can expect that doctoral candidates who are working at the highest levels of intellectual training, and creative artists who normally work at the maximum reaches of innovation, might find themselves working in sites of tension. These tensions will also be exacerbated because of the societal situation in which the establishment, e.g. the University, is authorised to endorse a candidate as someone who understands the limits of the discipline and becomes qualified to extend those limits. Both Dryssen and Franck (in this volume) observe this institutionalization of knowledge, and Franck describes a similar tension between academic and professional authority in Switzerland where routes into architecture, and therefore legitimation, are kept structurally distinct. This implies the possibility of an "institutional theory of artistic research" that would define "what is artistic research" through the performative utterances of what academics say is artistic research, with its concomitant tensions between academia, the art world, and society as a whole.

### **Professional and Academic Values: what to look for**

The assessment process has three principal stakeholders: the assessor, the person or work being assessed, and the context in which the assessment is used – for example within an institution or within a social group who recognise the validity of that judgement. This social context may authorise the assessor to make judgements on behalf of the community, e.g. we authorise certain assessors to make judgements about the competence of medical practitioners on our behalf and we accept the

consequence that some people are therefore allowed to practice medicine while others are not. Whether at a micro or macro level this process of assessment is normally undertaken by one group on behalf of, and with the consent of, another. At the moment, most doctoral evaluation in the arts often lacks representation from the professional art world, reflecting the perception that artistic doctorates are relevant in academia but not necessarily in the gallery. As a result the dominant concept of doctorateness in creative arts constitutes an "institutional theory of artistic research". I was once in discussion with a Swedish curator who said to me that she would only be interested in doctoral research in the arts when it produced good art; which revealed an erroneous assumption on her part that the institutional theories of art and artistic research are the same.

The difference between these two theories lies in the difference between professional and academic values in the arts, and whether the professional objectives of curators and gallery owners are the same as the academic objectives of doctoral programmes or advanced academic training in the arts. There is no intrinsic reason why these objectives should be the same, although there may be political reasons why academic objectives should be brought more in line with professional objectives, for example in order to demonstrate that taxpayer/stakeholder investment is meeting real-world needs. The academic structure of research in any discipline does not necessarily result in commercial benefit, although it may so result. The commercial exploitation of knowledge in the form of R&D is often a separate process to the generation of theoretical or academic knowledge (by which I do not intend to imply any hierarchy of values). So it is that a process that satisfies the academic requirements for a doctorate or of doctoral training in the arts does not necessarily result in good gallery art. Similarly, good art does not necessarily warrant the award of a doctorate. The institutional theories of art and artistic research are not the same principally because those who are authorized by society to make value judgements are not the same, i.e. curators on one hand, and academics on the other.

### **Analysis of Sources of Data: where to look**

Depending on the country in which the doctoral examination takes place, the evidence for awarding a doctorate may be intrinsic or extrinsic. Evidence that I describe as intrinsic would include the written thesis, and any portfolio of artwork or previous publications that may constitute the formal submission. In Australia this is normally all that the examiner has as evidence, whereas in Europe the examiner is also presented with the candidate at a *viva voce* examination. Evidence that I describe as extrinsic would include all those extra-textual references that are not included in the submission, and the academic and societal context to which the study refers and against which it could be evaluated. In addition to differentiating intrinsic and extrinsic evidence we can differentiate between the generic and the discipline-specific aspects of the work. At a generic level we have the requirement that the doctoral candidate has been trained in some way as a researcher. At a discipline-specific level we have a requirement that the candidate or the study makes a contribution to the discipline. These four sources of data form a Boolean square within which one may consider the contested term "doctorateness".

|                  |                       |                         |
|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
|                  | <i>generic</i>        | <i>specific</i>         |
| <i>extrinsic</i> | <b>social context</b> | <b>academic context</b> |
| <i>intrinsic</i> | <b>competences</b>    | <b>contribution</b>     |

Figure 1: The contested field of "doctorateness"

The extrinsic-generic quadrant comprises the social context in which there is a class of persons with doctoral qualifications who normally pursue a career as a researcher. The examiner comes from this class, and whether she is acting as a gatekeeper or a community builder, society authorises her to make judgements on its behalf. These judgements may have consequences that permit the candidate to work as a professional in sensitive areas such as medicine or managing the national economy. It is therefore a position of trust. As a society we have developed a construct in which going to university and completing a doctorate in some way equips the candidate to have the competencies that we demand in order to undertake certain roles. Whether this is actually a training or merely a rite of passage is a meta-level question that lies outside the diagram. What can be noted is that the pathway to the professions is determined by society, and one could easily find societies in which formal academic education were not a prerequisite to undertake these societal roles. Indeed, our own society has changed over time as to whether academic qualifications are necessary to practice as a mechanic, a psychologist, an artist, etc., and we are currently in a period of increasing academicization.

The extrinsic-specific quadrant comprises the academic context in which one finds a subset of society as a whole who operate in academia and/or in the same discipline as the candidate, depending on whether one wants to take a macro or micro view of the quadrant. Here one finds the discipline-specific values and rhetoric that characterize "artists", "designers", "musicians", etc. Each discipline tries to mark itself out as a tribe through a process of differentiation and distinction that creates its own culture (Biggs and Büchler 2012). At least one, but perhaps not all, of the examiners will come from this subset, reflecting the requirement in many disciplines that the successful candidate will be part of a wider community and not merely a member of his or her own discipline, and that the examination team should therefore include both generalists and specialists.

The intrinsic-generic quadrant comprises the idea that to be a researcher one must learn certain skills and competencies. These are the competencies that will enable the candidate to earn a living as a professional researcher. Research training may include problem analysis, learning various research methods and approaches whether or not they are actually used in the candidate's research project, writing and presentation skills, etc. Appeals to the importance of transferable skills in the criteria for doctorateness refer to this quadrant, e.g. Poole.

The intrinsic-specific quadrant comprises the contribution that the research makes to the specific discipline of the candidate. This normally requires that the candidate understands the scope of existing knowledge and understanding in the field through a literature review or its equivalent, and the identification of a claim for a particular addition to that field. The claim constitutes the intellectual property of the candidate. The fact that such a contribution could only be identified by an indigenous professional or peer, and therefore the hermetic tendency of such judgments, results in a resistance to generalization and criteria, and an emphasis on individual cases, e.g. Wellington.

Considering Wellington and Poole as particular instances of the broader debate about doctorateness, one can further examine relationships within the Boolean square. The issue of whether the examiner is acting as a gatekeeper or community builder lies in the extrinsic-generic quadrant. Here one can also place national quality standards and policy documents, e.g. QAA (2011), that are designed by society and its representatives to ensure that those who are authorized to make certain decisions do so within a framework that is socially acceptable, i.e. that the experts do not lose sight of their social responsibility. Societal failure to control the experts leads to the kind of rupture of confidence that we saw in the example of the madness of the art curator in the eyes of the general public.

Whether the candidate has sufficient competencies to undertake the role of a professional lies in the intrinsic-generic quadrant. The candidate has to be trained for his or her role as a researcher and some aspects of this are not discipline-specific, e.g. techniques for identifying whether research is original through a systematic literature review. Furthermore, there is an expectation that this training is a training as a researcher in addition to any training there may be in a specific discipline, e.g. as an artist. Discipline-specific training includes knowledge of current practices and practitioners, and falls within the intrinsic-specific quadrant.

Finally, in the extrinsic-specific quadrant one can locate the academic debate about knowledge production as it applies to specific disciplines, including the debate mentioned previously about how the arts can contribute knowledge (Eisner 2008) and in so doing whether the arts bring with them any particular and unique requirements such as a combination of connoisseurship and criticism (Dunin-Woyseth and Nilsson 2012).

The two extrinsic quadrants are linked by the variety of types of doctorate mentioned by Wellington (2013: 1490). In recent times – for the concept of a doctorate is fairly recent – we have created a societal role for those with the title “Dr”. Since the award is only made by universities, and is their highest award, the title has generally implied academic as well as, or perhaps instead of, professional competencies. With the advent of professional doctorates the title is also being conferred on those with advanced professional competencies, such as one might have formerly found in commercial R&D and applied areas. Thus the societal expectation, and perhaps status, of “Dr” is being modified by actions in the extrinsic-specific context. According to one’s causal explanation, these might be motivated by an increased requirement for vocationalization or as a consequence of political reorganisation in the extrinsic-generic quadrant (Deer 2002).

The two intrinsic quadrants contain the debate about whether it is the thesis or the candidate that is being evaluated. Even in countries where the candidate is not required to be present at the evaluation, there are implications that the training and personal skills of the candidate will be evidenced in the thesis. The two extrinsic quadrants contain the debate about whether the successful candidate is entering a community of researchers (RCUK 2008) or entering a specific profession (Abbott 1988).

The two generic quadrants contains Wellington’s and Poole’s disagreement about whether there are any common criteria to doctorateness. Although the advocates of doctorateness identified by Wellington (e.g. Park 2007; Trafford and Lesham 2009) can be located in the extrinsic-generic quadrant, Wellington’s objections arise from the disagreement between individual disciplines that is located in the extrinsic-specific quadrant. This explains why Wellington is forced to conclude that the

problem suffers from indeterminacy, i.e. that evidence from one quadrant cannot be used to resolve issues in another. Poole, on the other hand, can be located together with his evidence in the extrinsic-generic quadrant, and therefore finds no problem in continuing the quest for a structural rather than a case-based account of doctorateness.

The two specific quadrants contain the debate about whether arts practice can contribute traditional academic knowledge or whether its entry into academia fundamentally reframes our notions of knowledge and expertise. I think this can be compared to the development of qualitative methods in 1970s, and the impact this had not only on sociology, by providing more relevant methods, but also the way in which quantitative methodologists had to re-describe what they were doing in terms of discipline-specific values and assumptions instead of making truth-claims (Guba 1990: 25f.).

Somewhere in the extrinsic quadrants one needs to locate the examiner's training. Winter *et al* (2000) note that whilst effective evaluation depends greatly on experience, passing on that expertise directly as training is not common. The generic aspect of creating career paths in research, in this case as a doctoral examiner, are problematized by a low desire for inexperienced examiners, coupled with a structure that relies on a master-apprentice model. Whether this examiner training is found, or perceived as necessary, in the intrinsic or extrinsic quadrants depends on whether one regards examination or peer review as something that belongs to the academic community as a whole, thereby reinforcing a notion of transferable academic values (doctorateness), or whether one regards it as something discipline-specific, thereby accounting for why it is sometimes deemed unnecessary to have additional representation from the professional world on examination teams.

## Conclusion

I have previously claimed that the evaluation of what is relevant as research in creative arts, and what kind of activities produce significant outcomes for the creative arts community, is something that has to be undertaken within the value and belief structure of the community itself. Hence my controversial and often misunderstood assertion that artistic research rarely produces outcomes of significance to the artistic community (Biggs and Büchler 2011: 89). The lack of significance is not a comment on the quality of the research, but a consequence of the activities and methods being borrowed from other disciplines rather than arising naturally from within the arts themselves. This results in outcomes that are irrelevant and lack impact or significance for the arts community. In other words, one cannot simply import evaluation systems from other disciplines because they will have been developed in relation to different aims and objectives. On the other hand, I have also resisted the "isolationist position" in which creative arts practitioners might therefore infer that they are free to claim whatever they wish as valid research (Biggs and Büchler 2008). The Boolean square clarifies how both opposing positions can be argued, by revealing that there are four quadrants that provide both criteria and evidence, and not just one. How the world looks depends on the quadrant from which one is viewing it.

In the extrinsic-generic quadrant there are certain general qualities that research must meet in order to be recognised as research. These qualities have been appealed to in order to refute isolationism (Borgdorff 2011: 54), and satisfy cross-disciplinary demands for transferable "doctorateness". In addition, and not as an alternative, in the extrinsic-specific quadrant one finds the discipline-specific values

of the creative arts community. These values have been used to define a novel paradigm particular to creative arts research that is distinct from traditional models of research. Elkins calls this paradigm "The Nordic Model" (Elkins 2013: 11). A compromise is sometimes formed between these two quadrants (Borgdorff 2011), but I believe they can best be synthesised not simply by adding certain requirements to artistic practice, but instead by re-describing our understanding of research in all areas (Coessens, Crispin et al. 2009). In the 1970s when qualitative research legitimized the subjective researcher with his or her opinions into the activity of research, the new discourse revealed the essentially human and constructed nature of all research, even in apparently objective scientific domains (Bloor 1991 [1976]: 5). In the same way, the legitimation of the visual, the tacit, the embodied, and the non-linguistic in creative arts research, reveals the multiple ways in which we engage with our world and find out about it.

Thus my conclusion is that certain common principles may be found in each quadrant, but their manifestation in the discourse of each discipline is very different. This does not only apply, as one might expect, in the specific quadrants but also in the generic quadrants. For example, when we speak of "methodology" in the sciences we probably refer to current accepted practices that lead to valid outcomes, but when we speak of methodology in the humanities we probably refer to the selection of an interpretative framework within which judgments are made. What exactly we mean when we use the term methodology in relation to creative arts is, as yet, unclear. However, we should expect that the meaning will incorporate the "artistic values" of the Nordic Model in addition to a reframed notion of the critical competences necessary to "be aware of the knowledge landscapes in which professional researchers have to find their way... and to be able to position themselves and expand knowledge in their own fields" (Dunin-Woyseth and Nilsson 2013: 147). At the same time we can expect that the extrinsic-generic quadrant will be modified by what is happening in the neighbouring extrinsic-specific quadrant, in ways comparable to how the extrinsic-generic scientific descriptions have been impacted by Bloor's extrinsic-specific Strong Programme in Sociology of Knowledge.

As a result of adopting a socio-cultural approach, this chapter does not conclude that there are specific criteria for doctorateness, but instead that a meaningful evaluation can only be made with reference to the values and worldviews of specialist communities. We should therefore expect that "meaningful and significant" outcomes (Hirsch 1984) will look very different from one discipline to another, yet will share certain common features qualifying the candidate as being of doctoral standing. Previous studies have differed about what these criteria should be, owing to taking their criteria and evidence from different quadrants of the Boolean square. This chapter does not argue that we should resolve this plurality by creating a hybrid of rules and criteria from academia as a whole, but instead it argues for a fundamental reassessment of what impacts on our concepts of doctorateness and research, and how these might be expressed in ways that are inclusive of the creative arts. The chapter differentiates four distinct quadrants in which one might look for evidence and thereby attempts to contribute to an institutional theory of artistic research.

As new disciplines are incorporated into academia, so the language we use to describe the fundamentals of research is altered; to be more accommodating of social rather than scientific concepts for example. In due course, artistic research will seem less strange not only because it will become more familiar but also because we will have to re-describe research in other disciplines as a consequence of the way in which we describe artistic research. Each shift in the discourse reveals the cultural assumptions of academic disciplines. In addition, the external conditions in which research is conducted are themselves changing. Changes in the extrinsic social

climate affect what is needed and expected intrinsically in doctoral submissions. Thus any institutional theory of artistic research will be a product of these rhetorical and social factors.

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