Faculty Journal Articles   Faculty Scholarship

2022

Neither Race nor Ethnicity: Latinidad as a Social Affordance

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Neither race nor ethnicity: Latinidad as a social affordance

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1 | INTRODUCTION

The philosophical literature on Latinidad as a social identity in the US shows a lack of clarity about what exactly this category is. Although Latinidad's numerous complexities are recognized with nuance and insight, it is often in a piecemeal way that prevents a comprehensive account from emerging. In response, we seek a unified conception of Latinidad that would help Latinxs and non-Latinxs understand how this social identity works. Such a unifying conception captures the flexibility and fluidity of Latinx as a social identity: diversity in geographical background, cultural features, physical markers, a variety of connections to a foreign land or to a border, and connection to a language other than English. Additionally, our conceptualization illuminates where Latinidad stands in relation to the more stable (relatively speaking) Black/White binary, the umbrella terms "people of color" and BIPOC, demographic groups and trends, the political landscape of the country, and legal, social and institutional struggles concerning equity in representation and treatment.

Latinxs in the US stand at crucial junctures in social, economic, demographic and political life. Courted by Republicans, Democrats, and independents, we are told that Latinx voting preferences have the power to decide swing states. Their purchasing power moves industries to cater to them, even if only by assuming that most of them speak Spanish. Right-wing commentators and politicians stir nationalist sentiments against the coming hordes—caravans coming to steal jobs, commit crime, live off of welfare, and spread COVID-19—or White supremacist fears of being replaced. Yet, who are they? What are they? What kind of group is it? Latinxs are often spoken of as if they comprise a monolithic group, yet attitudes toward them vary: they are exoticized, feared, pitied, demonized, and belittled. The popular imaginary, seeking well-worn categories to apply, treats them as race-like with ethnic characteristics. Is this a racial group or

an ethnic one? Both? Neither? Can a set of characteristics be found such that we can define, once and for all, who is and who is not Latinx? If no such set of characteristics is to be found, is any unifying concept possible at all? And what would be the point in developing one?

After all, many choose to identify only as Chicanx, Puerto Rican, or Cuban-American and not as Latinx, although those choices do not determine how they are viewed by others. Comparing the 2000 and 2010 census reveals the difficulties of racial and ethnic self-identification: changes to and from Hispanic or Latinx, and "some other race" represented the largest change of that kind between the censuses (see also Mora et al., 2021; Pew Research Center, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2020). Further still, Afro-Latinxs have long faced anti-Black racism from within their own national groups, and historically the very concept of Latinidad across the Americas has been used to erase Afro-Latinx identity. As a result, racism, colorism, and anti-Blackness as they pertain to Latinxs must be central to any attempt to understand Latinidad.

We contend that it is mistaken to understand Latinidad as a race or ethnicity, or as the more comprehensive ethnorace. None of these captures the complexity of Latinidad, the myriad ways that it is lived, known, dealt with, and understood by both ingroup and outgroup members. Latinidad as a social affordance is meant to replace the characterization of Latinidad as a race, as an ethnicity, or as an ethnorace as the *primary descriptor* of the group: the plasticity and multidimensionality of Latinidad overflows those extant categories. We do not argue that ethnicity, race, or ethnorace are *unnecessary or useless* for understanding Latinidad, only that no combination of them is *sufficient*. We retain them as necessary categories under the umbrella of social affordances, as they remain helpful (sometimes indispensable) as *secondary qualifications* of Latinidad.

A different sort of category is needed: *social identity affordances*. Latinidad is anchored in the things that Latinxs do because of our Latinidad, as well as those things that others do to us, with us, and upon us because of our Latinidad. We approach the topic from a broadly pragmatist perspective, rejecting the need for a set of extensional criteria to define who "Latinx" refers to (Vidal-Ortiz & Martínez, 2018). We begin *in media res* with those already broadly participating in and engaging with Latinidad—understanding themselves (or others) as, acting (or acting upon others) as, or being treated as Latinx in the United States. We speak of *Latinidad*, not as "Latin culture," but as that which Latinxs have, so to speak.[1] With Latinidad we name that which is common to those identified as Latinx, Latine, Latina, Latino, Latin@, or Hispanic.

In Section 2, we evaluate the extant options for understanding Latinidad as race or ethnicity. In Section 3, we sketch our view on what a social identity is and in Section 4, we delineate the concept of social affordances. In Section 5, we apply social affordances to Latinidad to show that this conceptual space reflects Latinidad's varied pragmatic nature. Section 6 explores four dimensions of the social reality of Latinxs that show why race, ethnicity and ethnorace fail, and why social affordances succeed: the fact of *mestizaje* and *hybridization*, a vexed relation to the land, the political horizons and histories of this population, and the multiplicity of sensory-based cultural practices of Latinxs.

2 | EXTANT DEBATES AND DEFINITIONS: GRACIA AND ALCOFF

This section outlines the debate within contemporary Latinx philosophy around conceptualizing Latinidad. We focus on the core claims and stakes in the work of Linda Martín Alcoff and Jorge J. E. Gracia.[2] One point of contention between them is whether the name and the group

it represents should be thought of as ethnic, racial, a combination of the two, or neither. They furthermore disagree about the sufficiency of mere descriptive adequacy. Though in this paper we focus largely on descriptive accuracy, we agree with Alcoff against Gracia that the descriptive and political aspects of Latinidad are equally important and impossible to fully separate.

Jorge Gracia has developed what he terms the familial-historical conception of ethnicity, arguing for Hispanic identity that features unity in diversity (we use Gracias's preferred term in discussing his work) (2000, pp. 44–69). Gracia develops the meaning of unity in diversity by connecting Hispanic identity to *Hispania*: the Iberian peninsula. He is adamant that "Hispanic" does not pick out a race because many of those seen as Hispanic belong to different races, with race being understood along the lines of physical features and common genealogy (Gracia, 2000, pp. 11–2). He also rejects traditional conditions of ethnicity, as they equate the descriptor "ethnic" with "outsider" and have been constructed without regard for self-meaning and direction of the group (Gracia, 2000, pp. 41 and 45).

Gracia argues that Hispanic is the identity of *extended families* that came to be by certain historical relations between members, where these *relations* have produced features or properties that help identify members of the group and distinguish them from others (Gracia, 2008, pp. 17–8). Hispanic is rooted in its historical foundational relations: the inhabitants of the Iberian peninsula in 1492 and what became its colonies in the Americas, and their descendants, though the importance of the year 1492 is contested (Gooding-Williams, 2001, p. 7). That historical background produces a web of connections forming a historical unity among different peoples (Gracia, 2000, p. 49). It is due to the nature of those relations that "Hispanic" is not tied to the Spanish language. Since Spanish is not the only language of the Iberian Peninsula, the lusophone Americas also count as Hispanic.

Regarding Gracia's view, first, in his account Hispanics developed Hispanic identity, which denies that the identity is the product of processes and dynamics that are not only the doing of Hispanics. He complains, for instance, about the idea that Hispanic identity has in some way come to be by bureaucratic or institutional recognition: "the term 'Hispanic' was in use long before United States bureaucrats adopted it to refer to people like me and that it was picked by United States bureaucrats precisely because it was available" (Gracia, 2008, p. 14). It is true that people have identified as Hispanic since before the name existed institutionally, but it is false to imply that the identity itself has been constituted in isolation from social and institutional dynamics. As we see it, what it means to be Latinx at any point in time includes the way the identity functions socially, and this includes the way it functions institutionally. In our view, to be Latinx involves the possibilities for Latinxs to act and the possibilities for others to act upon Latinxs.

Second, Gracia does not attend to *ethos*, to character revealed in attitude and action, to what Hispanics do: practices, cultural or otherwise, are absent from his definition. His account is largely genealogical, generative: identities are the products of historical processes (Gracia, 2008, p. 14). *Ethos*, for Gracia, is a consequence of *ethnos*. To act in certain ways is for him a simple consequence of membership to the group, whereas for us it is constitutive of it. For someone to be Latinx is due partly to the fact that they act in ways that are part of the variegated repertoire of what different Latinxs do, inclusive of both actual and possible behavior.

Linda Alcoff has long been in dialogue with Gracia over these issues. At the heart of her disagreement is her insistence on the "racialized nature of Latino ethnicity" (Alcoff, 2005a: 543). Throughout Latin America, racial categories are largely subsumed under ethnic ones, while in the United States the situation is reversed. That differential emphasis is illustrated by Jesse Jackson's call for the popularization of the term African-American as a replacement for Black,

an attempt to shift a racial category to an ethnic one (Alcoff, 2006, p. 239; López, 2007; Martin, 1991, p. 83). The new term, however, became racialized and eventually came to be seen as a synonym for Black. The lesson that Alcoff draws is that, in attempts at de-racialization, visual markers win out: race is bodily. In the United States, even when we "speak culture," we often "think race" (Alcoff, 2006, p. 242). Indeed, visibly "marked" groups have a more difficult, perhaps even impossible, time having their cultural traditions or expressions be seen as "American" (Alcoff, 2006, p. 231).[3]

Precisely because those experiences of racialization, however arbitrary, are inescapable for those living in a society so organized, Latinidad comes to be predicated of those that others label as Latinx racially. It is not that Latinidad is itself a race, but that all Latinxs are *raced* (differentially so, to be sure), and *how* they are raced cannot be removed from their experience of being Latinx. This is an element of *pathos*, of something that a person undergoes or that happens to oneself, we find missing in Gracia.

This leads Alcoff to appeal to David Theo Goldberg's concept of ethnorace (Alcoff, 2006, p. 246, 2009). It applies to a group that has both types of characteristic, giving it a peculiar perspicuousness (Alcoff, 2009, p. 122). Ethnorace supplements race by bringing an element of agency (of *ethos*, as we put it above)—Latinidad is not only ascribed externally. Alcoff thus finds elements of agency and self-creation that give the group and its members a subjective element: "it connotes subject-hood, not mere object-like physical description, and thus is potentially more consonant with notions of human dignity" (Alcoff, 2009, p. 118).

Alcoff's embrace of an ethnic aspect to Latinidad is both *descriptive* and *political*. Descriptively, there are cultural commonalities comprising language, mode of life, religion, and origin across different Latinx ethnic groups, which makes true the self-identification of individuals from those different groups as being Latinx (Alcoff, 2006, p. 236). Politically, her view expresses the motivation to embrace ethnicity as a way partly to reject the essentialization of racialization, an ordering of social categories in the United States that has installed the Black/White binary as the paradigm of social categorization (2006, pp. 240, 247–63). Indeed, Alcoff's discomfort with Gracia's use of "Hispanic" is that it elides important political issues connected to colonialism and the relationship between the United States and Latin America (Alcoff, 2005b).

Alcoff understands ethnorace as a linguistic option that better understands current realities (Alcoff, 2009, p. 122). We agree with her view that, with regard to Latinx folks, the seemingly clear cut distinctions between race and ethnicity do not hold. As she notes, both race and ethnicity are "generally viewed as based in artificial origin stories," however stable they seem. As a result, "the distinctiveness of race and ethnicity is shallow at best" (Alcoff, 2009, pp. 118–9). Ethnorace is meant to be a solution to those problems, better capturing the realities of Latinidad. But it remains a concept of social kinds, a disjointed one at that. Ethnorace aims to pin down Latinx identity as a specific social kind while at the same time opening it up to the variegated social possibilities that, insofar as there are social kinds, seem to be excluded.

Alcoff's recourse to the idea of ethnorace does shed important light on the tensions within Latinidad (Rosa, 2019), but given the current state of the debate, it is important to ask if what we need is a vague account of kinds that embraces the pragmatic elements involved, or whether a move away from the language of kinds toward a concept centered in the pragmatics of social possibilities would offer the better descriptive tools Alcoff is also after.

We submit that ethnorace therefore remains unable to fully address the questions of how to classify, and what is it to be, Latinx. Our proposal carves out a theoretical space that takes into account the fluidity of Latinidad, its *ethos- and pathos*-laden reality, its multifaceted nature that includes but is not limited to racial and ethnic predicates and possibilities.

It should be noted that understanding Latinidad solely as a race is not taken up in the literature, while J. L. A. García argues that Latinidad should be understood as neither race nor ethnicity (2001). Although it might appear that our position agrees with García's insofar as we are arguing for neither a racial nor an ethnic reading of Latinidad, our view differs from his because he rejects any talk at all of group identity. Gracia has also responded to García's claims (García, 2001, pp. 52–4).

3 | TWOFOLD SOCIAL IDENTITY

We speak of Latinidad as denoting a social identity, by which some people are identified, correctly or not, as Latinx by others and by which they do, or do not, identify themselves. But what goes into a social identity so conceived?

Our view of social identity is indebted to Akeel Bilgrami and Linda Alcoff (Bilgrami, 2006). A social identity has to be distinguished from others ways of thinking about group membership and social categorization, and from narrower conceptions of personal identity. By social identity we do not mean sociological categorizations, used for example for actuarial purposes when determining how risks apply to a certain population or in public policy making. We also do not mean group membership decided by voluntary identification (e.g., to be a coffee drinker), or in a narrower yet deeper sense the way someone thinks of themselves (e.g., as a person of integrity). We are interested in social identities in a way that includes the broader social conditions that make certain identities legible, with some consistency, for others, and which, because of their anchoring in people's histories and society's basic architecture, also form part of persons' self-conceptions. These identities are not chosen (at least not typically) but organize social life significantly, for individuals and for society, in terms of the division of labor, the structuring of power, the distribution of the burdens and benefits of prestige, money, and other social and political goods.

There are two aspects to someone's social identity: a subjective aspect and an objective aspect.

The subjective aspect is a matter of self-conception: how persons conceive of themselves. The objective aspect, conversely, is about how others see individuals in terms of group membership. The subjective aspect has some measure of traction on the objective (this precludes cases of subjective-only identification). Additionally, individuals can mean different things when they think of themselves as having a given identity. That is, the subjective aspect can be teased out differently from the objective aspect by different individuals. Social identities are real and have to come to be part of the world by the continuous enactment of social practices in which they appear as possibilities.

The subjective aspect has traction on the objective because the objective aspect is perceivable, and as such it is public. Both persons and their identities are perceived, and have social and historical dimensions in addition to perceptual elements like looks, accents, smells, flavors, clothing, languages, and people someone is typically associated with.[4]

The objective side has traction on the subjective also, but a complexity arises because the analysandum is a social identity, and social identities exist in interaction rather than being static or asocial. The relationship between the subjective and objective, and how each gains traction on the other, is something we find always already in progress. The subjective gains traction on the objective because our individual self-conception is partially a product of how others perceive us, and the fact that we know that we are perceived by others. We therefore respond, intentionally or not, to our potential perception by others as we conceive of ourselves. The objective gains traction on the subjective because others perceive us partially based on how we

present ourselves, and so others' perception of us can potentially change in light of changes that we make to our self-perception and self-presentation. A person's identity, which includes a sense of their social identity, must include the recognition that one looks or sounds to others a certain way, regardless of how one wants to be taken.

A second phenomenon at play in the interaction between social identity bearers is how one's own self-conception affects oneself as a perceiver, as someone who enters the social space with a particular "eye," which implies that the social environment does not reveal itself the same to all perceivers. Alcoff, drawing on Bilgrami, connects this general phenomenon to social identities (Alcoff, 2010): our understanding of and interaction with others is influenced by the social identity we perceive them as having, and what we take those identities to mean, broadly. Alcoff illustrates her point through a discussion of the confirmation process of United States Supreme Court Justice Sonya Sotomayor, who was pilloried by conservatives for being a Latina and for having foregrounded her identity as constitutive of who she was as a jurist. What it is to be a Latina in the social space is not independent of the way others see Latinas.

Alcoff's view, also informed by G. H. Mead, is that the self is inherently social and does not pre-exist operations of self-perception from within a context in which we are already being perceived. We are born into contexts, perspectives, and horizons that are defined by shared and intersubjective meanings. This communal perspective renders those contexts objective in some sense, and as individuals we then engage our agency within that collective space (Alcoff, 2006, pp. 117–20). For Alcoff, identities make an epistemic difference, in that they "operate as horizons from which certain aspects or layers of reality can be made visible." Identities are positions of lived experience, where individuals and groups work to construct meaning in relation to history (Alcoff, 2006, pp. 42–3). This account of social identity entailing positionality will inform our approach to the specific type of affordances we have in mind for Latinidad.

As Miriam Kyselo argues, the person is "never fully separable from the social environment, but instead determined precisely in terms of the types of social interactions and relations of which it is, at the same time, a part" (Kyselo, 2014, p. 12). One's expressive behavior is responsive to the behavior of others (Gallagher, 2020, pp. 203–7). Social identities, then, involve how we see ourselves as well as how others see us. Neither is indefeasible on its own for determining an individual's identity, so we need a dialectical account of how they affect one another (Alcoff, 2010, p. 134). Part of this dialectic is that the two aspects of identity form a hermeneutic horizon: "Individuals are forced to engage with and negotiate the available meanings, opportunities, and social structures in their context" (Alcoff, 2010, p. 135). Society also engages hermeneutically with the meanings and possibilities available for someone with the identity they are perceived to embody.

What are the implications of insisting on the perception of social identity as a contextual issue? The perceivability of persons' physical traits has often been the basis on which a racialized identity has been assigned, while the perceivability of material culture (clothing, food, music, etc.) has been the basis on which ethnic identity has been assigned. In both cases, the key element is that certain people are perceived to be of a certain race or ethnicity.

To go beyond mere categorization and to take oneself to carry a certain social identity is to situate oneself in relation to the social world in concrete, pragmatic ways. To that we now turn.

4 | AFFORDANCES

Our main contention is that Latinidad in the United States is best understood as a social affordance. This means, broadly put, that being Latinx consists in embodying the possibility of

being interacted with in specific, yet diverse, ways by others, as well as the possibility of inter-acting with others in specific ways. These possibilities or opportunities for interactions are a function of the historical and sociocultural frameworks in which there is such a thing as being Latinx. These possibilities are consequential in life: they assign social burdens and benefits, they make difficult or ease up possibilities in life, they impact people's self-image and self-confidence, and they structure social and political relationships. Latinidad as a social identity, we claim, is constituted by what it *affords* Latinxs and others in relation to Latinx folks.

The idea of affordances comes originally from ecological psychology and has been further developed in the enactivist approach to perception and action (for general accounts of affordances see Chemero, 2003; Gibson, 1979; Heras-Escribano, 2019; Lobo et al., 2018; Rietveld & Kiverstein, 2014; Sanders, 1997). Affordances are the possibilities for action that the environment offers to an organism. For instance, a surface is perceived by an organism as affording physical support depending on the organism's weight, size, and behavior. A twig affords support to a small bird but maybe not to a large frog, whose jumping locomotion may require a more solid type of support. A child's desk would afford comfortable seating to a small child but not to a tall adult. In our view, an affordance does not indicate a property of the organism such as a capacity, or a property or disposition of the environment independent of a perceiver (see Chemero, 2003 for an overview of a variety of the main positions within the affordances literature). Rather, it relates features of the environment with the physical make-up (as to size, shape, etc.), abilities, practical interests, and in general the behavioral repertoire of the organism (Brancazio & Segundo-Ortin, 2020; Gibson, 1979, p. 129).

Harry Heft has argued that a close look at the manner in which features of the environment depend on individual organisms opens up the concept of affordances to be used in understanding social life. Heft's analysis describes affordances as "functional significances of environmental objects taken relative to what an individual *can do* with respect to them" (Heft, 1989, p. 15; emphasis is ours). This "can do" must be read broadly because the possibilities for action are not only about capabilities. What an individual *can do*, in this context, is properly specified also in relation to the individual's practical interests and their behavioral repertoire. Heft privileges a focus on the intentions of individuals, which captures the condition that specific intentions are situated in pragmatic contexts. This specification widens the applicability of affordances to the socio-cultural world (Heft, 1989, p. 17). In this context, Heft argues, the process of enculturation can be seen as the progressive acquisition of "a repertoire of acts, each act being situated with respect to a particular set of environmental features" whose significance comes from concrete social life (Heft, 1989, p. 18).

The richness of the theory of affordances lies partly, then, in that it is indexed, on the side of the organisms, to their *way of life*, a concept drawn from the pragmatist literature and understood, in the case of humans, in terms of social practices. The range of behaviors an organism is capable of engaging in delimits the affordances that may arise for it. The more complex a form of life, the more complex its affordances may be. In particular, sociality appears in increasing levels of complexity for different organisms. In that sense many affordances are from the beginning *interactional*. J. J. Gibson, the initial proponent of the concept, writes that not only objects of the environment afford things for an organism, other organisms do too: "The other animals afford, above all, a rich and complex set of interactions, sexual, predatory, nurturing, fighting, playing, cooperating, and communicating. *What other persons afford, comprises the whole realm of social significance for human beings*" (Gibson, 1979, p. 120, emphasis added).[5]

Saray Ayala has recently argued that the affordances that arise for humans are partly a matter of social positionality: the way social categories and social norms apply to individuals or

groups determines a wide spectrum of social possibilities.[6] In particular, Ayala's analysis explores how linguistic performance depends on the broader social structure, and not only on factors like linguistic competence (Ayala, 2016, p. 882).

In a similar vein, we extend this analysis into social identities, particularly into the social identity Latinx in the United States. The complexity of this social identity appears in the extant accounts discussed in the previous section and constitute part of the desiderata for our proposal: its historical dimension, the insertion of this identity into the dynamics and meta-discourses about social identities (in particular about race and ethnicity), its different value-laden aspects, and the ways relations of power play out in Latinidad.[7]

As a way of illustrating the sociality of affordances involving persons, consider an interaction between buyer and seller, where each affords the other something specific, selling or buying. Someone approaching a vendor at a street market from the side of the public affords the seller the possibility of selling to that concrete buyer. Such a possibility is not afforded before the market opens to the public, or when someone comes from the opposite side of the vending stand. Some features depend on the environment: the type of society's economic system this takes place in, the specific social situation (a street market), the physical arrangement of stands, the orientation of their elements, the gestures of buyer and seller. And these features constitute affordances for someone with certain capacities and interests: physical, mental, and social capacities to navigate the market, and economic capacities to engage in purchasing. In some specialized markets, other skills and abilities come into play, such as in an auction. Likewise, for persons with other specific locations, such as beggars, a street market affords something different, which it does partly because of the interests, capacities, and skills of the beggar, as well as the features of the society that produces them. Our argument is that what is predicated here on the social identities of buyer and seller (including, naturally, the interactions with the sociomaterial world in its symbolic richness) applies mutatis mutandis to Latinx people.

Understanding Latinidad as a social affordance is to say, following these two cases, that insofar as the actions of another person are marked by their social location, and specifically in virtue of their twofold social identity, we come to act with them, and understand them, as a function of social affordances—both theirs and ours. Take the case of a region of the United States where the majority of Latinxs that a well-off White teenager knows of are seasonal agribusiness workers, landscapers, or servers. Engaging with a server, simple action-coordination plays out in being served water: offering a glass in such a position that it can be filled. But other activities are precluded from this interaction, thus contributing to place Latinxs in the "landscape of affordances" (to use the Bruineberg and Rietveld phrase) as folks who afford getting water from (Bruineberg & Rietveld, 2014; Rietveld & Kiverstein, 2014). To the extent that the teenager has little contact with Latinx people in their other domains of life—as writers, doctors, teachers, entrepreneurs, or scientists—their understanding of Latinx folks, of their worlds, would be limited, for the teenager's pragmatic engagement with those worlds is narrow. Scientist-like affordances such as being authoritative with respect to expert knowledge would not be, for this person, a possibility Latinx folks afford. Now put into the picture another Latinx person who is familiar with the first, the server. In the myriad possibilities that appear for this new person, based on their shared sense of Latinidad, we will find another landscape of affordances, now based on mutual recognition among Latinx folks. It is still important not to get too simplistic here: even among people who recognize each other as Latinx there may be wide differences in their worlds, such that their affordance landscapes may not have much in common.

5 | WHAT CAN AFFORDANCES DO FOR LATINIDAD?

The framework of affordances captures the diversity of practices that constitute a social identity. In terms of affordances, a social identity is delineated by the possibilities of different types of interactions: linguistic (what to call, how to theorize about), political (what is granted, sought for, or challenged in the political sphere), personal-identity-making (the way it impacts self- and other-conception), economic, everyday interactions, etc. For our purposes, we use *affordances* descriptively, though with normative shading. An implication of describing the world of social identities as consisting of certain action possibilities for participants is partly to say there exist some practices that fit the social world—that are sanctioned, understood, common, yet without claiming that these possibilities are the same for all individuals. As Gallagher puts it: "we perceive the other in the 'I can' (or 'I cannot')." In the other, he continues, "we perceive affordances for possible responsive actions" (2020, p. 206).

As such, it is central to Latinidad that its social significance depends on the possibility of its recognition by others: the possibility of taking someone to be Latinx in virtue of perceivable aspects, ranging from accents, names, looks, personal associations, to clothing, foods, or place of habitation. In all situations of recognition, as Gallagher discusses, understanding social identities as social affordances responds to the need for identities to appear in the social space, where they are context-and perceiver-dependent (Gallagher, 2020). These dependencies that basic affordances get from their action-perception basic structure carries over into social, interpersonal affordances, now in terms that are not only but also perceptual: "The fundamental perceptual level of understanding others as persons is essentially context dependent—an aspect that any theory of social cognition must account for" (Gallagher & Varga, 2014, p. 196).

Our pragmatic take is that interactions are in a normative space because they correspond to habitual ways of doing things, and affordances in the sociocultural space are often of this kind because they rely on "historical-cultural situatedness and group membership," including "culturally sanctioned beliefs" (Gallagher & Varga, 2014, p. 194). It is because some affordances are common currency in a given society—a given historical-cultural milieu—that we say normativity is in place. It is often one of the affordances of Latinidad, for instance, to be assumed to know Spanish or to be Mexican, and to be acted upon accordingly. This is an example of a social affordance that has been influenced by beliefs about Latinx folks, which are further confirmed by the practices that unfold, and which over time become epistemically pernicious in that they depend on habit, regardless of the truth of the matter, highlighting "that the science of social cognition needs to take into account the role of ideological constructs, cultural narratives about otherness, phenomena concerning in-group and out-group dynamics, and, we would add, class and power relations in societies" (Gallagher & Varga, 2014, p. 196).

Nick Brancazio has proposed that persons constitute interpersonal affordances for others, and has drawn from enactive and participatory-sense making theory to flesh out this complex dynamic. On the one hand, persons are "public" for others: they are seen and heard in the public space. On the other hand, persons are agents and subjects. Brancazio notes, "selves can manifest in different ways, depending on particularities of context, social roles and cultural knowledge, power dynamics, marginalization and oppression, and other aspects that shape the way that an agent will take up an interaction" (Brancazio, 2020, p. 7). Interpersonal affordances are perceived as a product of "the agent-*agent* relationship, and involves seeing the other as a subject" (Brancazio, 2020, p. 8). Built upon the particularity of the interpersonal recognition at play here, Gallagher has proposed that the recognition is a dynamical process where two subjects not only display expressive behavior, but behavior that is contingent on the other person's

behavior and therefore "participant … goes beyond what each individual qua individual … can bring to the process" (Gallagher, 2020, p. 198).

In our proposal for understanding Latinindad as a social affordance, we agree with Brancazio that interpersonal affordances are a subset of social affordances. In our view, a further distinction can be made to specify cases in which social identities, such as Latinidad, are a specific type of interpersonal affordance characterized by the peculiar positionality of the subject that comes from having one or many, possibly overlapping or intersectional, social identities. This specific type of interpersonal affordance we label "social identity affordance" and is the genus of Latinidad.[8]

A person's self-recognition as Latinx (or not) factors in a twofold way in the dialectic of affordances—what Gallagher (2020) refers to as the dynamics of mutual recognition and interactions. First, it configures a certain landscape of affordances, whether or not the person who knows themselves to be Latinx is aware that certain possibilities are open for them, including but not limited to the interaction with other Latinxs. Second, it gives the person a certain understanding of how they are perceived, affordance-wise, by others. In other words: it helps understand how one is part of a certain landscape of affordances for others, where such awareness itself furnishes a certain lucidity in regards to one's social life. The significance of a person, for perception and action, is never settled either in the perceived person nor in the perceiver: the perceived also knows she can change, or must change, to afford something different. It should also be noted that the dynamics of social cognition include both conscious and unconscious aspects.

The framework of affordances is more plastic than either that of race or ethnicity. Our proposal invites, and fairly so, the question of whether race and ethnicity and other identities are then to be understood as social affordances. We do tentatively conclude that all social identities are best understood as affordances, but that is not an argument we can provide here. Understanding Latinidad as a social affordance provides an entry point to explore social identities more broadly as social affordances. Social identities as affordances highlight the blurry, ambiguous, and contested lines that we draw to make sense of identities in our social worlds. Race and ethnicity are more uni-dimensional than social identity affordances. And ethnorace, as we discussed above, points to a multidimensional understanding but is burdened by remaining a theory of kinds.

Rather than being a specific social *kind*, Latinidad is an identity that is constituted by a landscape of affordances. Depending on the context, some of those affordances might be racial and some of them might be ethnic, but *how* they are so will vary considerably due to the diversity of those who are Latinx. Other domains of affordances that are central to Latinidad are the political, a relation to the land, and the sensory aspects of everyday, culturally rich life. The point is not that these latter affordances are nonracial or nonethnic, but that *how* they are racial or ethnic might be vastly different for different Latinx folks. That specific way of being a complex identity is what Latinidad-as-affordance does for us.

Social affordances provide nothing less than a framework of intelligibility for Latinidad, and for the specific varied ways in which it exists and changes. It is our task now to show, in the multiple complexities of Latinidad, that its social significance, its historical background, and its power relations find expression in what Latinxs *afford* themselves and others. That is what is needed to show that such an account is appropriate for understanding what it is to be Latinx in the United States. We need the specific attention to nuance, context-dependence, historical sensitivity, openness to the internal diversity and variations without which Latinxs are unintelligible.

6 | LATINIDAD'S INTERNAL VARIATIONS

We now review four ways that show how the dynamics of Latinidad as a social identity express that idea that bearers of this identity are perceived as affordances—in the "I can" or "I cannot" mode, as Gallagher puts it. These affordances are interpersonal and involve mutual recognition and dynamic interaction. In other words: Latinx folks are perceived as affording certain (im) possibilities for interaction, and this dynamic process is one of mutual recognition.

Our focus on persons—as opposed to notions like *selves*—ties with the normative shading we find present in social identity affordances. Persons are not simply objects we perceive. Due to having both a point of view and agential powers, persons are responsive to others in social interactions. The process of figuring others out, of recognition, is thus normatively, ethically loaded. The ethical demands that arise from persons, from their subjectivity and agency as persons, are then part of what persons afford: unlike a pebble in the street, a person does not afford being randomly and inconsequentially kicked. Thus, people *afford* ethically: they offer situated possibilities and impossibilities charged with moral value. This is because person-hood is embedded in the action-potential of persons. This is how value and affordances are joined together.

In this section we sketch some of the richness and specificity of Latinx folks: areas of social life where they afford certain interactions, and through which they come to be dynamically defined as what they are in the social space. These four variations highlight Latinidad's variability and challenge both race and ethnicity as the primary available descriptive categories. It is important to note that none of these four areas are sufficient or necessary conditions for Latinidad, as if they were criteria of individual membership.

6.1 | Mestizaje and hybridization

Latinx people are the heterogenous product of ongoing combinations, exchanges, and modifications. This heterogeneity rejects the logic of purity, asserting Latinidad's motley way of being in the world (Lugones, 2003, pp. 121–33; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2018). For reasons of space we cannot provide a full analysis of mestizaje here, including its origins, and sociological and psychological aspects (Alcoff, 1995).

Racially, Latinxs are the diverse products of groups that occupy different places in the racial landscape. This multiplicity extends the standard sense of *mestizaje* as the "mixture" of Spanish and Indigenous peoples to include other groups: African-descended peoples, other Europeans, and, over time, mestizos themselves. Add to these the post-colonization migrations to Latin American, from the Middle East, Europe, Africa, and Asia. They all have generated, in different ways and historical contexts, a diverse population that cannot be placed in any specific racial category. Culturally, those that are called Latinxs in the United States. have also developed and inherited a diverse and often mixed array of practices. Those cultural practices, which include not only belief systems and habits, but also cultural products like music, clothing, food, etc. are important not only as melanges, or mixed products. Sociohistorically, speaking of Latinxs in the United States. requires mention of (1) migrations and other displacements, of people and of borders involving Latin America and the United States (Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and other waves of migrations from different countries; González, 2011, esp. part II), and (2) the histories of US-born people of Latin American descent, histories that often must be qualified depending on the specific location in the United States and the historical moment.

It is worth noting that these processes of mestizaje are laden with power relations. It is in that sense that Alcoff refers to the "initial" mestizaje as involving "half colonialist aggressor, half colonized oppressed" (1995, p. 139). Such *casta* arithmetic ignores the population of enslaved Africans, significant because mestizaje has also been used to maintain a deep-seated anti-Black racism. Mestizos, it seems, feature a mix of races, but one that is often understood as *not Black* (Sexton, 2008, p. 35). Mestizaje, itself a social identity, does not represent simply an objective, neutral reality—as if the history of Latin America were a happy melting pot. It has been a way of maintaining racial divisions as a path to adopt an identity that While *not White*, is neither Black nor Indigenous (note the relationships between European, Indigenous, and African peoples outlined in Bolívar, 2004a, 2004b).

Mestizaje and hybridization challenge established assumptions about the importance of purity, tradition, and stability (Lugones, 2003; Pacini Hernandez, 2010). They also undermine any assumption that the starting point of identity is a domain of "pure" identities (Alcoff, 1995, pp. 142–4). But mestizaje and hybridization make us ask if we should be eliminativists about Latinidad: that there is nothing to call Latinidad, because there is no set of properties common to individuals of the group. We reject this possibility on pragmatic grounds: it does not accord with the experiences of the members of the group and the practices available to them, nor with the non-Latinx practices and institutions to which Latinxs are subjected. Latinidad is a category because people do things to and with Latinxs. What eliminativism fails to capture is that social identities need not consist of a common set of properties shared by members of a group. In this sense, Gracia places *relations*, successfully in our view, at the core of Latinidad, though we disagree with the details and scope of the relations he proposes.

As a social affordance, Latinidad is a site of possibilities and impossibilities to do and be done unto, themselves contextual and perceiver-dependent. To see someone as a mestiza, or to claim oneself to be such, does not mean only one thing. It can mean the affirmation of the non-purity and historical hybridity of the "new world"—a carving for oneself a peculiar space in the racial topography. This carving allowed and prompted at a time the union of "criollos" in the independentist movements in the Caribbean and south of the Río Grande, and it helped others make sense of themselves in relation to "pure" groups. But "mestizaje" is also for many Black Latin Americans and Afro-Latinxs, one more reminder of the widespread prejudice and bias that they are subject to. To take one striking example, in his memoir of growing up in Spanish Harlem in New York City, Piri Thomas illustrates the starkness and urgency of these vexed relations within even his own family. José, Piri's lighter-skinned brother, insists that since they are Puerto Rican, they cannot be Black. Piri's experiences with the police and other aspects of society have shown him otherwise (Thomas, 1997, Chapter 15).

6.2 | Vexed relation to the land

Alongside the complexity of an identity marked by mestizaje, we must also consider Latinidad as carrying a vexed relation to the land, which we approach in three senses: as related to other-land, to a border-land, and, often problematically, to US land. Gloria Anzaldúa has written movingly about the relationships between borders and identity (Anzaldúa, 2012). Ofelia Schutte also illustrates the potential complexity of a single individual in the diaspora when discussing the variability of Latinidad within her identity. It is not only the case that each Latinx individual may feature this multiplicity, but also that often a central part of Latinidad is the experience

of negotiating different sides of certain borders: it is to be tied to somewhere else and to be here, and needing to adjust both experiences.

Schutte differentiates between three primary lenses through which Latinxs in the United States situate themselves: assimilationist, culture-of-origin (encompassing locations both within and outside the United States, as with Cuban and/or Miami Cuban-American, e.g.), and Latinx. Regarding her own positionality, she writes, "It is the sharing of the cultural history and my investment in continuing the narrative of that cultural history, adding my own modifications to it, that makes me a Hispanic" (Schutte, 2000, p. 67). That process entails constant negotiations of the representations of Latinidad in the world, where different facets of identity can find themselves in tension with one another. Rather than smooth those tensions away, Schutte sees them as integral to her understanding of herself. She therefore aims to think through the different referents of our different identities to recognize how they play different roles at different times, not canceling each other out, but complementing one another.

Many Latinxs in the United States are migrants and the term "diaspora" describes an aspect of their experience, but the cultural and political development in the United States also made diasporas of people who never moved. Those in Southern Texas may be said to have always been in their homeland, but geopolitical events out of their control meant the border crossed them, rather than the other way around, as is common knowledge in many Latinx communities: *no cruzamos la frontera, la frontera nos cruzó* (Los Tigres del Norte, 2021).

So while Eduardo Mendieta can point out that Latinxs, in contrast with prior immigrant populations, "have retained extensive and continuous ties with their places of origin," the fact of the Latinx diaspora is not only a tale of migrations (Edmonds, 2012, p. 120). Quite often the experience of both landlessness and having more than one land has been central to the Latinx experience in the United States. For instance, the experience of the Spanish in 16th century Saint Augustine, Florida, whose (colonial) "firstness" in this land was eclipsed in American myth by Plymouth Rock. It is also the experience of those first-Mexicans-then-Americans, before and after the Mexican-American War, who were left dispossessed and at the mercy of laws suited to newcomers to their lands (de la Guerra, 2004). It is the experience of Nuyoricans and Dominicans, of Cubans; and it is more recently the experience of more than 10 million undocumented immigrants who, not recognized as being fully American, still find an anchor for their identities in broader Latinx communities and with their own national, ethnic, or linguistic identities.

The diasporic element in Latinidad is an affordance that makes things possible and impossible for Latinxs. It affords a challenge to make their land home, despite political and cultural movements that attempt to ensure otherwise. It affords alienation and a feeling of longing for a land many cannot describe. It also affords the possibilities of inhabiting problematic territories, and challenges people to navigate those spaces.

6.3 | Political horizons

The third site of Latinidad are the political horizons constitutive of Latinidad in the United States. By horizon we mean the challenges, possibilities, and overlapping or competing motivations and interests that emerge from Latinidad's internal diversity and that call for negotiation in the fights for various forms of civic and legal standing. These horizons include emancipatory movements such as the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements of the 1970's, but they also include the assimilationist drive of some Latinxs, which in part builds on a combination of

anti-Black racism found in Latin America and on its counterpart in the United States. Regarding the latter, there is no doubt that part of what comprises the political horizons of Latinidad is the potential to co-opt Whiteness. Patriarchal elements of Latin America and the United States can combine as well. In these two regressive modes of culture and politics we can make out the allure of the US conservative movement for some Latinxs in the United States (recall the many articles and news segments wondering how any Latinx person could have voted for Trump). And alongside emancipatory movements grounded in Latinidad, we can see the political ambiguity of the identity. Latinidad affords both assimilation and emancipation.

Cristina Beltrán outlines two emancipatory pathways of Latinidad, highlighting the specific differential political situations within the movement politics of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans in the 1970s (Beltrán, 2010, Chapter 1). Her exploration of the unique moments of activist history highlights one important aspect of Latinidad, which is its internal diversity. Beltrán also pinpoints, however, a specific danger. She points out how the language of unity runs through both movements as an ideal, and that such a focus leads to internal exclusion and an effacement of difference. Her primary example is how feminists within each movement were treated, with male leadership preaching movement unity, positioning feminists within the communities as dividing them unnecessarily (Beltrán, 2010, pp. 47–55; see also Morales, 2016). Beltrán's point is that, "neither movement challenged the legitimacy of unity as a guiding political principle" (Beltrán, 2010, p. 55).

From the political movements of the 1970's through the development of the "Latino vote" in the 1980's, then to immigrant mobilizations in the early 21st Century, Beltrán finds an underlying logic of unity that is always on the verge of being revealed as an illusion (Beltrán, 2010, p. 13). Treating Latinidad as something that resists closure means treating it as a verb, while the presumption of any shared political consciousness is "continually challenged by the reality of Latino ideological diversity, both within its constituent subgroups and in larger notions of a pan-ethnic whole" (Beltrán, 2010, p. 157). Latinidad as a verb highlights "a moment when diverse and even disparate subjects claim identification with one another," a practice that is driven by affinity, sensibility, and affect just as much as by perceived interests. Such identification makes commonality and community possible, but understands that it is never a guarantee (Beltrán, 2010, pp. 168–9).

Against any appeal to unity, she wants to think of Latinidad as an unstable and always incomplete category. We therefore find much in Beltrán's work that resonates with our argument, even as she approaches the topic from a different methodological perspective. Using the tools of political theory, she argues for democratic openness against the impulse toward closure, pressing the point that any political community is never fully "achieved" as a fully coherent and unified "people" (Beltrán, 2010, p. 69).

Situating the person as a social affordance, Brancazio notes the multiple influences on such a social being, such as "the myriad ways that sociocultural norms, practices, multiplicity, and neurodiversity can influence self-perception and experience" (Brancazio, 2020, p. 8). Political dynamics in the context of shifting demographics and ideological trends are important sociocultural practices that define the participants in a society (Rosa, 2019). Latinx folks in the United States are so positioned in the social space and this positionality we spell out in terms of social identity affordances. Just as "Latino politics is something subjects *do*," Latinidad in the broader social world is also about doing. Beltrán ends her book by writing, "further thinking about the political and theoretical possibilities of Latino pan-ethnicity demands more attention to such affective practices" (Beltrán, 2010, p. 170). We aim to do that by showing how such practices are constitutive of Latinidad throughout the social world.

6.4 | Perception and the social world

Latinxs are taken to be Latinx often because they are familiar with and enjoy certain foods, listen to or are familiar with some types of music, dress in this or that way, prefer certain colors to dress and decorate, or speak in this or that way. The engagement with some of these practices, in suitable contexts, is taken, also in suitable contexts, as evidence of Latinidad. To put it in our language of affordances: saying that these practices can be seen as something Latinidad affords, for Latinxs and for others relating to Latinxs, is to say that people are partly identified and engaged with as Latinx *because of* their partaking in these practices. Yet once again, as with the other dimensions we have explored, the practices we are referring to are quite diverse and not common to all Latinxs, and they are not necessary for someone to be Latinx. Yes, all empanadas, arepas, and tacos—in all their variety—are known to be things Latinxs eat, but that does mean that all Latinxs eat all of them, or at least one of them. As it obviously does not mean either that any person who is familiar or eats them is taken as Latinx.

One of the features of our social identity affordances proposal is that it is influenced by ecological psychology and situated cognition, and their insight that the social world of perception is significant for a person. In this section, we are looking at how our perceptual engagement with the world is already infused by sociality—how Latinidad plays out in the social perceptual world. We described affordances as possibilities offered by the environment to a specific organism, where the complexity of social interactions co-varies with the complexity of affordances. As Gibson writes, "other animals and other persons can only give off information about themselves insofar as they are tangible, audible, odorous, tastable, or visible" (Gibson, 1979, p. 127). This connection underlies how social identity affordances encompass the ways people *do things with material culture*: such an engagement is a social affordance that defines that person in the social space.

This interplay between the perceivable world and social practices partly makes up the pragmatic meaning of culturally located others in the social space, the public side of our identities. This is precisely the home of social identity affordances: a certain way of "being" public, our way of being perceivable—how we look, what we wear, how we speak, what we eat, what we listen to—is part of what makes us who we are socially. This perceivability is not just about others' bodily features. We perceive others in their engagement with the material world. Our specific use and manipulation of flavors, colors, sounds, and smells, in food, speech and clothing are *perceptual practices* (Arango, 2019). Our argument about the objective side of identities is now enlarged: social identities are public also in the perceptual practices that characterize them. Latinidad, then, in its ethnic or cultural aspects is public in this sense, and such a dimension is a landscape of affordances both for Latinxs and for others.

7 | CONCLUSION

Our concern with Latinidad took us to explore internal variations among Latinx folks, which assert the pragmatic reality of Latinidad while exceeding racial and ethnic accounts. Coupled with the twofold view of social identities, the framework of social affordances is plastic enough to capture a diverse and nonetheless really existing space.

Theorizing Latinidad through affordances satisfies several desiderata. It orients the conversation toward the tools of social cognition and social psychology, placing questions of social identities both in the domain of ideologies and of mind and cognition, so that we can

understand social identity-based attitudes and behaviors as issues of mind and knowledge complementary to understanding them in historical, sociological, and anthropological ways.

Issues of identity carry a twofold structure: both subjective and objective, personal and public. As a result, identities affect both the lived experiences of their bearers—for example, perceived self-worth—as well as matters of institutional and social standing—for example, legal status, epistemic solidity or precariousness. Identities are therefore situated within a landscape of possibilities and impossibilities for action: what such subjects do and are done unto.

It is significant that an account of social identity with social affordances—deflationary and plastic enough to capture wide variation—arises in the quest to understand a motley and hybrid identity. Many Latinxs, while knowing they are taken to be such, do not find that a whole lot is said of them, as a matter of self-recognition, when called Latinx. And yet, the existence of this social identity also opens up the possibility of new relationships, discovering commonalities, sharing a past and horizons. Perceptual practices about food or music can be understood as an articulation of the social identity that allows for different uptakes of those practices according to specific audiences and context. In this sense, perceptual practices loosely shared by Latinxs can stand for what Cristina Beltrán has called "practices of identification," scenarios and occasions where affective and sensorial interactions are the basis for constructing solidarity, both social and political (Beltrán, 2010, p. 91). Similar to perceptual practices is the case of the diversity of linguistic practices for Latinxs, an analysis of which in terms of affordances requires more space than we have here.[9] We have only hinted at the many ways identification can occur, though we want to end by insisting that Latinidad understood in this space is a possibility for action—for solidarity, or a certain type of party, or for a certain type of greeting with specific linguistic features—that those who share that identity see as available.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The authors declare no potential conflict of interests.

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ENDNOTES

[1] We are certainly aware of, and sympathetic to, the complaint that the term carries with it connotations of colonialism. The same is true, however, of Hispanic and all of the variations of Latin. Indeed, as Linda Martín Alcoff (citing Walter Mignolo) has pointed out, the very terminology "Latin" was introduced by the French to demarcate French Catholic colonial territories from Anglo-Saxon ones (Alcoff, 2005b, p. 402; Gracia, 2005, p. 411).

[2] While writing this article we learned of the passing of Jorge J. E. Gracia. It is our intention to further this important conversation to which professor Gracia so much contributed.

[3] While in the literature on the metaphysics of race a distinction is sometimes drawn between races and racialized groups, here we remain agnostic on that point (Hochman, 2020). We use "racialization" to refer to the active processes by which members of society are treated as belonging to a certain race as opposed to another, whether or not this treatment depends on "real" features of the persons or on social constructions at play.

[4] There is an extensive body of literature supporting the thesis that we perceive social identities in different ways (Adams & Nelson, 2011; Alcoff, 2006, 2010; Fanon, 2008; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2002; Yancy, 2004; Young, 1980).

[5] Baggs has recently proposed that "all affordances are social" (Baggs, 2021), where social means observability by a third party. We are sympathetic to the observability thesis, but we use social in the more common, liberal sense: (1) that which pertains to interactions between organisms, and (2) when applied to humans, that which

pertains to relations between persons but also with all things that bear a human mark, including material cultural products but also modifications to the natural environment (see also Carvalho, 2020, p. 2; Costall, 1995).

[6] Our work is continuous with a body of research that has recently begun to explore in specific ways how affordances play out in the social world: in person-to-person simple action coordination (Abramova & Slors, 2015); in how we use others' affordances as a way of understanding them (Kiverstein, 2015); in relation to persons as an ethical concept with pragmatic significance (Lo Presti, 2020); the role of sociomaterial affordances in sociocultural practices (Rietveld et al., 2019; van Dijk & Rietveld, 2017); as a way to understand linguistic positionality (Ayala, 2016). The work of Harry Heft (1989) is an important precursor in widening the applicability of affordances in the social world.

[7] Our view implicitly responds to criticisms of affordances claiming that they cannot adequately capture what is meaningful to us as persons (for a general defense of affordances against these criticisms, see Dings, 2020).

[8] Different types of social affordances are already proposed in the literature and other types can be delineated (see Dings, 2020; Lo Presti, 2020; Weichold & Thonhauser, 2020). It is not the aim of this essay, however, to get very specific on the contours of *social identity affordances* in general, and their relationship with other existing and possible classifications.

[9] The diversity of linguistic practices of Latinxs in the United States requires a full-fledged analysis in relation to social identity affordances, which considerations of space prevent us from doing here. The complexity of this issue, in non-affordance ways, has already received careful treatment by several scholars (for a large analysis of the connection between the identity Latinidad and linguistic issues, see Chávez-Moreno, 2021; Rosa, 2019).

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