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# Title

"Prelude to the School to Come. . ." Introduction to the Special Issue

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**Abstract and keywords**

First paragraph: In several interviews, Michel Foucault expressed a dislike of any polemics that insists on making those who disagree into enemies, silencing other possibilities by invoking an authority that undercuts the authority and right to speak of others. A problematisation, for Foucault, is the opposite of a polemic (see Foucault 1985). A problematisation raises questions; it focuses on the problem at hand rather than insisting on a party line. It takes risks, questions rights and disrupts legitimacy. Polemics often leads to an impasse, as polemicists focus on the consolidation of established truth claims or on negating the argument of their opponent. Problematization, however, can open up the potential for a rethinking of the very terms and grounds of argument, knowledge and understanding.

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# Article text

In several interviews, Michel Foucault expressed a dislike of any polemics that insists on making those who disagree into enemies, silencing other possibilities by invoking an authority that undercuts the authority and right to speak of others. A problematization, for Foucault, is the opposite of a polemic (see Foucault 1985). A problematization raises questions; it focuses on the problem at hand rather than insisting on a party line. It takes risks, questions rights and disrupts legitimacy. Polemics often leads to an impasse, as polemicists focus on the consolidation of established truth claims or on negating the argument of their opponent. Problematization, however, can open up the potential for a rethinking of the very terms and grounds of argument, knowledge and understanding. As Foucault says elsewhere:

The freeing of difference requires thought without contradiction, without dialectics, without negation; thought that accepts divergence; affirmative thought whose instrument is disjunction; thought of the multiple - of the nomadic and dispersed multiplicity that is not limited or confined by the constraints of the same; thought that does not conform to a pedagogical model (the fakery of prepared answers) but attacks insoluble problems - that is, a thought which addresses a multiplicity of exceptional points, which is displaced as we distinguish their conditions and which insists upon and subsists in the play of repetitions. (Foucault 1970)

As editors of this special issue we strongly agree with these sentiments and see them as politically and educationally fitting for the issues we are raising, even obliquely, with the papers presented. What follows now is an expression of our agreement to disagree in that we have chosen to firstly split our introduction as co-editors into two parts so that problematisation and play can take place. This is followed by a section of our combined voice as introduction to this special issue project.

**Part I, Nick Peim**

Surely it is impossible, in present conditions, to imagine the world existing without the school as we know it? The school has become so much an embedded feature of the social landscape that its disappearance would have to signal a *total* transformation of the organization of social life from present arrangements. Such a transformation does not appear to me to be on any imaginable horizon. In fact, the school seems to occupy increasingly the role of paradigm institution.

The thoroughly established nature of the school can be seen as an expression of the triumph of biopower and governmentality. It is through the school that norms of development, norms of conduct, the formal organization of knowledge and the relation to the self continue to be affirmed. As a social technology for the production of a certain kind of self-managing citizenry, differentially imbued with valued accomplishment, providing a grounding for the social division of labour, promoting practices of highly regulated self-regulation, the school reigns supreme as a distributed sovereign power.

Any resistances to this power must be seen as tactics that operate within the enclosed space of the pastoral disciplinary formation.

All the more reason, perhaps, to begin to think beyond the school as we know it – not as a project of imminent transformation of the existing apparatus but as an orientation towards a future without curriculum, without age stratification, without sovereign norms of self-management and development as a necessary condition of collective living.

Within the contemporary order of things is the danger that education itself has become the name of a pervasive form of sovereign governmentality. A consequence of this possibility is to consider the role assigned to the ruling principle of education. A politics of being beyond sovereign governmentality may need to renounce the ruling concept of education before it can do anything else. This work of desacralization has hardly begun.

The subject of modernity, one way or another, is the subject of education, subjected and defined in the arena of subjectivication that education both enables to come into being and constructs according to its own pervasive logic and parameters. In another sense, this is also the subject of education in the sense of the "topic" of education: first and foremost education in modernity is a technology of person-formation. It is for this reason that education may come to be regarded less as space for a political contest between freedom and constraint and more as an onto-theological principle that aspires to occupy all the spaces of social life with its ideals of self-fashioning and improvement.

Much of the work that gets done in the name of the academic subject of education, falls in line with the ethic of improvement. According to this dominant view, if education is, at present, imperfect, it is due to a lack – a lack that can be supplemented through improvement. The subject of education, with its explicit espousal of impact as a principle and its continued attachment to the domain of practice, is thoroughly, if not entirely, infused with this spirit. In this sense, education as a subject exists in a unique relation to its world. It is constantly burdened with the imperative to influence and to change above and beyond the desire to merely describe and analyse and give an account of the phenomena that are encompassed by the field that education covers.

Bernstein's account of the distribution of academic subjects and their typology would see education as a collection code, held together through institutional principles more than principles of knowledge and justifying its existence by claiming a special relation to the field of practice. There is a parallel here between the human subject and the academic subject, both subjectivities being defined and held in place through impersonal institutional principles that precede and exceed the being of the subject.

The emergence of life-long learning as a key concept in education policy signifies the inevitable expansion of the social technology of the self-as-project-for-improvement over the whole of life. Why is this inevitable? Due to the role education has assumed as what defines being? As biopower refines itself, retaining its right to maintain the key institutions it has operated through historically, it also colonizes those spaces outside of the formal institutional boundaries. Education invades and occupies the inmost reaches of the self, both psychologically and temporally.

Surprisingly, perhaps, there is no sovereign power behind this dispersed capillary process. There is no controlling centre. Expansion is the expression of a self-managing system of the type defined by chaos and complexity theory. When each unit operates according to specific simple principles and parameters, complex wholes and patterns come into being and begin to organize themselves in their complex inter-relations. The unit of education is the self-regulating self that can be set in motion and relied on to interact with similar units to form complex systems of relations, institutions and relatively well governed patterns of interaction. The contemporary dream is to produce such systems to maximum productivity with maximum flexibility to meet the mobile topography and the shifting priorities of liquid modernity. Here is an ideal symbiosis between self and society. Self-creation – like Jane Fonda's much worked body – is in the hands of the self. But everyone benefits from the improvement. Imperfections – obesity, alcoholism, failure, social exclusion – can be cured only by the engagement of the self in the learning process that will lead always to self-refashioning, ultimately to self-redemption. Failure is its own punishment. Personalization, once a new key word of education, is strongly bonded with life-long learning.

The good news is that self-regulating systems, according to chaos and complexity theory, retain an element of the unpredictable. The future cannot be programmed. The arrival of the unknown is always a possibility. It is possible to anticipate, after Derrida, the fact of a future that is radically different. This is not idle, passive anticipation, however. The politics of deconstruction demands a constant engagement with a "work of mourning" that is messianic in so far as it is mindful not so much of engineering as of preparing the ground for change. What's more biopower promises the

possibility of an end to arbitrary sovereign power: the condition of the self-regulating system has a political potential that is expressed in ideas such as multitude – that stands in opposition to empire and that holds out the promise of a new mode of collective being and action. The ontotheological principle of learning-as-being – always understood as provisional and not definitive – may offer a possibility (especially through a careful reconstruction of the Vygotskian legacy) for renewal. Life-long learning may harbour this principle. It is yet to be articulated …

It is clear that alternatives in education exist and have good credentials: Dalton Plan, Freinet, Steiner, Montessori and many others provide well-established examples of alternative modes of organizing education in institutions. These perspectives have frequently been deployed by educationists to promote alternative practices within schools, even, though increasingly rarely, in state funded schools. Some practices from alternative education may even have become naturalized in schools of all kinds. Current emphasis given to self-motivation and self-direction, for example, has its roots in the incorporation of progressive principles into mainstream education.

The problem of thinking in terms of alternatives is much more intransigent than it may appear. The problem lies in the installation of a technology of the self that is itself an institution – and an institution that belongs specifically and pervasively to an epoch. Self-direction, self-motivation are never ends in themselves: they must be predicated on norms of development, perhaps always also on norms of attainment. It is difficult to see how any kind of development or attainment could be predicated on a purely free basis, given that the self is formed in conditions not of its own free making.

Surely this state of affairs implies a return to fundamental thinking – to fundamental ontology, in fact. One serious alternative that rarely, if ever gets proposed, is to call into question the theological status that is always granted to education itself, as though it is education that needs to be liberated from the specific conditions of its being. The scandalous proposal may be to consider that education, as a fundamental and driving principle, is always already at the service of a 'technological enframing' that can never be the grounds for any kind of freely grounded liberation from itself. The task then is not to reform educational practices but to rethink altogether the present pervasive reliance on education as onto-theological principle.

**Part II, Helen E. Lees**

Nick Peim's introductory contribution to this special issue is one with which I have much intellectual sympathy and is one I admire and respect. It offers a cogent and challenging perspective. Perhaps the aim is to have:

"a good... response to hegemony... a response in the form of a pure and simple challenge to the saturation of the system, the implementation (once again, beyond political considerations) of a principle of reversion, of reversibility against the hegemonic principle." (Baudrillard, 2010, p. 55). Whilst such a strategy of what could be called "philosophy against the odds" is valuable, it is not however a view of educational "action" that I can or will ever hold as an educationist. I cannot recommend it without some reservations as educationally a contribution. I fear Nick would rather like that statement. The issue I take with it is two-fold. On the one hand "thinking and being" (see part I) is not enough as action if it stands alone without suggestions for ways forward. Practical action is necessarily also part of the matter. Whilst that might not be part of the discussion explicitly, it needs to be implicitly available within the discussion in my view. I think Nick's stance of astonishment at the educational Goliath lacks this active principle. On the other side there is a conflation of the school with education and vice versa which I consider requires clarification in light of what we bring to the fore: namely educational alternatives to the school as governmentality.

Nick's idea is that we need to question education for its pervasive governmental power: marvel at the machinery and all it implies in its becoming. He seems to me to stop there; wondering at what

it has become with an astonished pointed finger. Is he refusing to offer transcendent models or pathways forward to a better place? He is certainly heroically against improvement because he staunchly believes that the school to come… is without figuration. But does this mean that ways forward are *dis*figured?

My contention is that being against improvement – it has become ontologically sickening as an educational meme – is brilliant. The trouble is that such brilliance stops also change. It is *just* thought without educational practices and changes that come from thought. The status quo then suffers from the possibility that it languishes, lacking leadership and imaginative solutions to be experienced in real life. But actioned change of an experienced kind in education, before people die and we mourn them or we ourselves are those who die first; whilst ideas and people are still alive, is most needed.

I appreciate that "Today transforming the world is not enough. It will happen no matter what." (Baudrillard, 2010, p. 79). This is true according to a certain enlightened consciousness whose voice suggests we need not interfere and, indeed, such a stance has much to offer (Bongers, 2008). But, it is also true that "What we urgently need today is to interpret this transformation – so that the world does not do it without us, and ends up being a world without us." (Baudrillard, 2010, p. 79). A work of interpretation needs a flawed human ego; a stuck-to-the earth person, thinking and believing in change of which they themselves can and are a practical actioned part. Energy sharing. To my mind robbing education of these active egos and their drives for the sake of a thought-full "principle of reversion" (see above, Baudrillard, 2010, p.55) is to stall it and to therefore drain it of energy and contributions. Yet, of course, those who seek to be in the world, belonging to it and a part of its development must take care in their forward motion – especially when it comes to something as astonishingly powerful as education in action.

As we say together below in part III, we must hope that any educational movement takes "great care." Perhaps that then is closer to Nick's core meaning: that we must step gently and quietly. If so this sums up everything that is needed in a way forward. It is not the hands-off, give-up mentality I must, as an educationalist with a vocation for the existential care of children and the world, dismiss. But it is subtle and that is possibly something we need to attend to as a new educational approach.

If Nick is, however, advocating a hands-off approach of thought and being alone and no action for improvement, he will find nothing and be empty handed. Solutions to seemingly intractable problems embodied in an idea of the school and education as ontological and epistemological frame for Being, are for the seeking and they are to be *found* and acted upon. This is not a plain act of "transformation" but an accompanied act, a voluntary, motivated, willed, ontological imperative for interpretation. Finding is *owning* the world. Acting is being of the world. For most of us this is an important part of our lived journey. Whilst anything can, frankly, be found, made up, offered meaning, imposed, what changes from mere transformation into interpretation whereby we exist without a world transforming without us, is found in choosing. Through deliberative choosing a lack of imposition that improvement infers emerges and it is not a hands-off approach. All the papers featured in this special issue suggest work and involvement in something communal, even if that work is denial or refusal.

The kinds of educational imperatives or reversals involved in the work of this special issue then are practical acts of choosing through finding, which own but do not possess. Either directly or indirectly, they each value and respect autonomy-in-democracy as the air that the "school to come…" can breathe and the philosophy involved is open to flexible futures. We can predict a need for such thought in the face of enframing; imagine figuration of such an imperative as forward thinking. All the actioned (improvement) change *implemented coercively* evaporates in the air of the school to come... But change of bettering can still occur if it is flexible to the future and can emerge with the moment (Bongers, 2008). We can predict and configure, imagine a future where active bettering is part of talking together. This is not Nick's improvement devil

because its well-spring is different: another source and on another axis of implementation – one deliberative, ever open and careful, not foreclosing, enframing and deaf to discussion.

Right now it is quite possible that such possibilities and materials for change are mostly – even to the extent of almost hegemonically – to be found outside of "mainstream" schooling. Ne'er the twain shall meet? (see Lees, 2011). But it doesn't have to be like that. A bridging of incommensurability between mainstream "education" and educational alternatives and their visions is possible through careful work (ibid). Indeed, it looks as if the future will not allow things to continue as incommensurable, with technology as the main force for acceptances and boundary blurring. Education does not need to be seen as a "fundamental and driving principle" for "technological enframing" (see part I) *because it is* education, but education more widely conceptualised and configured. That includes these outliers of the alternatives this special issue figures, envisages and offers.

It can be freeing and loosening because it is education if, and only if, I suggest, it comes *from* the outside given the situation that Nick so eloquently points to of a hegemony. In this sense I both agree with Nick and disagree because I believe in education from the outside as having power to problematise in powerful ways because it can interpret and overcome "education as a fundamental and driving principle" (ibid.). Education from the outside of this hegemony – the forgotten sources of power to so speak – these can improve what education is. But, not because of a new power. Let's forget that certainly because indeed, power is overrated (Baudrillard, 2010). Instead, because of a power that forsakes and forgoes power and its agony, which is the un-powered but action-ready educationally deliberative and democratic. Thinking, being and acting come together. With such equations possible we do not need to ditch education as a principle. We simply change our point of view. But we do so *in time* – practically, not spectrally - and I mean that in both senses of the phrase.

To ignore this for the sake of any Derridean "spectral" approach is, for me, to be irresponsible to children growing up right now and to come... and to people who work with them and who parent them. "School" when it en-frames and does not question itself; when it fails to understand its contextualisation within *education*, (which is a vast and open territory of possibilities including not-school) is not just a problem for school. It is a problem for any who come into contact with school. That's a lot of people. Contexualising school within politics, blind and blinding governmentality, policy, economics, psychology, philosophy, history and any other disciplinary framework that might fit or seek to fit, is to abuse education as a possibility *that might not fit* these frameworks. That involves a lot of people who will never have anything to do with school. Currently and to come... Thus, a practical-theoretical and educational process of thought is required to destabilise the school we have known (the education we have known) in order that the school to come... can be something other. This otherness does not need to be a whispered haunting of what we do not have. It can be something we ask for and use. Vote for. Demand. Action.

So is a combination of Nick's perspective on the problem of "the school we have..." (as I currently read it as spectral interpretation) and one which seeks fervently for places and spaces where change *can* and *does* happen on account of flawed, active, energetic egos, acting, in time, a better combination? It is, I suggest, a necessarily more solid approach that suits education for children currently and to come, in schools as we know them, because it applies itself to the reality that communities face as their own in terms of the school. Essentially it is a combination that includes in its DNA the chance for change affected upon those schools such that they become other and reconfigured beyond, as Nick rightly puts it "the ruling concept of education." This is not impossible. Again, interpretation as an involved action demands another point of view. That point of view *can be taken.*

But I would like to create a strong demarcation here that is not needed to be seen as a subtle distinction. I think Nick's subtle presentation borne of careful readings and reading of the issues

lacks brutish strength and perhaps we need some in one key area. Conflation of *education* with mainstream (technologically enframing) schooling, from a perspective of the genuine possibilities for non-enframing and freedom that the "outside" of education seems to offer, is unhelpful. Education as Nick *still* describes it (he uses that word) is not education itself (see every paper of this special issue, including his own!). It is the school and all that the school does. The organ of the enframing is the school which is of course what Nick does describe. He shouldn't use the word "education" which is a much more beautiful word than he allows. We should *all* be more careful than we currently are with use of this word. It is being abused. Whilst Nick is saying it is abusive, I think he is also saying it is abused, even if he does so tacitly because he loves what it is that he hates it has become.

There is an error to all of this which means that enframing does not come from "education in modernity [a]s a technology of person-formation." (part I). It comes from the school that has become the technology of education. The horror that Nick feels in the face of education in general is, it seems to me, being confused with the true horror that is the school as coercive, authoritarian institution and which forms and spawns the mentality and situation of hegemony against which Nick has turned his back. The hegemonic difficulty comes always from the school, tainting all else. Education has come to be known as the school and the school as education in the same way that Judith Butler identifies that:

…certain kinds of practices which are designed to handle certain kinds of problems produce, over time, a settled domain of ontology as their consequence, and this ontological domain, in turn, constrains our understanding of what is possible. (Butler 2005, p. 309)

In fact, the school as a place of education is not necessarily the problem although, of course, it currently is. It could be something else; something radically other. It – *itself* – can learn from the "outside" of education – the forgotten, ignored, alternative viewpoints – and leave behind its memes of governmentality. I believe that is possible for education (as the school) and that education as elsewhere (life-long) will be affected; set free and be an agent of freedom. I have faith in education and Nick no longer does. I do not "call into question the theological status" (see part I) of education because I do not believe we can escape it any more than we can escape ourselves (Lees, 2011). The task is not to escape education (broadly conceived) but to be more careful and caring about what it is and what it does.

This special issue is situated for me not in the twilight zone of a principled strike against all that education has unfortunately become and become known as and which we refuse here to repeat. It is, I think, to be seen in a *light* that illuminates the dance of the possible that is the school to come... by seriously and even violently playing with "repetitions," through problematizing with play and by diverging (see Foucault 1970, quote above, at start). Wouldn't it be nice to play and make mistakes even, as a counter-meme to the terror and horror of improving always and of wanting success? Becoming unlearnt (Chokr, 2009)? Not doing, not being? Definitely being other, whatever that means? Lost? Lovely and lost. Decidedly not deciding or moving forward? Being an educational terrorist because we are the natural good that grows in the face of the hegemony? (Baudrillard, 2010). And then perhaps Nick and I meet here and agree. But I do want to stress that where the good grows is where people act together and thought and being alone is not enough unless it serves those people's (educationally otherwise) actions.

These papers do not, I think, refuse to see and experience an outcome that includes a reconfigured school. Because, really, what we are doing here is to question what the school is at the most fundamental level of conception, so we need the school.

The work offered in this special issue is then situated where we can welcome signs of new approaches and grasp them for testing. Nick and others will not like the use of that last word. I do appreciate this. We are all sick of testing for education, it might be hoped. But I'm not talking about testing *and* testing *and* testing but of testing and trying and maybe throwing things away fearlessly and boldly, but without emotion or incommensurability factors that prejudge. These

things to test are from the outside of education and can be part of the school to come... but the laying of foundations is a work of ideas and the acceptance of new ideas for education *that is the school*. This is active ideas work. A school we have never before known. That can only happen if we believe in these ideas because we are testing them, researching them, discussing them to the point where they can show their value beyond doubt. Involving ourselves in education need not be a trap and an enclosure. The problem so far for the outside of education is that it has never properly and fulsomely been invited into the "inside" of the school as education *on its own terms* which is also a problem for the inside, clearly, given the impoverishment this exclusion perpetuates. It is time that the ideas outside of education should be brought into the "project" Nick detests. So astonishing are they that I believe they will dissolve the project; render it harmless; engender its honest and original fruitfulness.

And this is the dance of the school to come... It is hard work.

In this special issue we have asked leading thinkers in otherwise fields of action and scholarship to contribute their knowledge of how things (including thinking educationally) can be done differently and how education as *a force* can thereby or thus be done and thought differently. Thought is seen here as the most important part of educational practice. These papers show *ways forward* with thought. Some additionally also show pathways for educational understanding that have already worked in real life with real people. A doing differently. They represent thinking that is full of indications of change when played out and thinking that offers ways towards change if deeply engaged with. They do not offer to improve the school. They do not offer to engage with the school. But friendship between "others," of an educational kind, and for the sake of education broadly conceived and indeed *as* broadly conceived, might have a magnetism. For children's sake perhaps we can hope so.

We have collected together these papers to begin an education-wide modern conversation about true dissent, profound difference and radical otherness that inhabits another paradigm from the institutional one. The authors may not see it like that themselves and their papers are their own complete contributions. I see their assembly together as a sign of hope that change is possible in and for educational studies in really truly new ways.

Of course the way forward they offer is not determinate but it shows signs of being full of leadership. This work is education changed and if that is "in theory" that is because theory acts.

**Part III, Helen E. Lees and Nick Peim**

In the introduction to the April 2008 (Vol 27, Numbers 2-3) special issue of Studies in Philosophy and Education, Pádraig Hogan suggested that there is no "new grand theory of educational practice on the horizon." (p. 78). Four years later it may be possible to disagree, in part at least: not to suggest so much that there is a singular grand theory on the horizon, but rather to suggest that materials for rethinking the field of education are available and waiting to be shaped into a position, possibly even into a position that becomes a movement. The nature of such a movement, however, will need to be expressed with great care for reasons that we hope this special issue highlights.

This special issue has been compiled, by invitation, from papers written by scholars who do believe that a possibility of rethinking education is on the horizon. The possibility in question is not singular, though, not "grand" in that sense; in fact, it is directly counter to any totalizing theory or projection of or for education. It is being created, from the ashes of postmodernism, into serial, "deconstructive" theory without centre that promises to renew understandings of even the most cherished assumptions of the education project.

It is the collective belief of the papers in this issue that the force that is schooling requires and produces a counter-force. Theories may provide just this counter-movement not in order to build a new "school" to replace the well-established structure of the modern school but to imagine a more cloudy architecture that has no specific design, does not prescribe and seeks to occupy and

organize space differently.

What would an education look like that is founded not so much in timetable and curriculum, as in both recognition of otherness and hospitality, a school that eschews the strange but every day practices of age stratification and other machineries of identity? A school that eschews the technologies of population-management and determinist self-development, that characterize the modern school so familiar to our landscape?

A theoretical project designed to imagine such a spectral school requires a rethinking of the ontology of childhood in its relation with adulthood. Is it possible, via theory, to envisage this relation based in principles of hospitality and cosmopolitanism, oriented towards a vision of democratic participation? Bullying, sexism, violence, racism, discrimination, hatred, anger, stress, mental ill health, school refusal, truancy: all remain powerful features of the daily violence enacted by and through the currently entrenched school system. All the efforts of the school improvement movement, given their grounding in technological enframing, can only exacerbate such problems. Can serial theory provide a form of rethinking that can address these pathologies?

The papers in this special issue consider that a combination is now due of philosophy and the rethinking of educational practice that philosophy might generate towards democratic thinking in regard to contemporary educational modes. This collection seeks to redirect educational theory and research from within the improvement paradigm towards a rethinking of fundamental premises, and therefore, of rethinking actual possibilities. Perhaps philosophy may provide the ontological and epistemological bases of new forms of self-understanding for – and possibly against – the project (no longer a programme?) of education. We consider that in offering, perhaps for the first time, a determined combination of philosophy and alternative perspectives on educational practice, that we are creating new territory, new possibilities and a new horizon for education. What has been marginal may be quietly coming out of the shadows.

Included in this special issue are papers drawing on theory to reconsider some fundamental aspects of the present order:

- the ubiquity of schooling and education within a logic of improvement and managerial form of governmentality that increasingly impinges on being;
- home education as offering an actual, practicable example of education otherwise that eschews programming and that is open to an untimetabled engagement with knowledge arising from fundamental relationships;
- redefining the institutional politics of schooling to embrace aspirations to dialogic, emancipatory encounter through the social technology of “The Meeting”;
- the scandalous possibility that the present order in the philosophy of education is anti-philosophical and is dedicated to rethinking education as a repetition of the same that is variously exclusionary

These papers gathered here together are enjoined to consider education in terms of both thinking and being otherwise.

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