

Adrian Stokes: The Architecture of Phantasy and the Phantasy of Architecture

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The building, which provokes by its beauty a positive response, resuscitates an early hunger or greed in the disposition of morsels that are smooth with morsels that are rough, or of wall spaces with the apertures; an impression, I have said, composed as well from other architectural sensations. To repeat: it is as if those apertures had been torn in that body by our revengeful teeth so that we experience as a beautiful form, and indeed as indispensable shelter also, the outcome of sadistic attacks, fierce yet smoothed, healed into a source of health which we would take inside us and preserve there unharmed for the source of our goodness: as if also...the smooth body of the wall-face, or the smooth vacancy within the apertures, were the shining breast, while the mouldings, the projections, the rustications, the tiles, were the head, the feeding nipple of that breast [Stokes, 1951 , p. 243].

Stokes, Klein and Freud

Adrian Stokes was an English art and architecture critic, 1902 to 1972, whose most popular works, The Quattro Cento (1932), Stones of Rimini (1934), and Colour and Form (1937), were written between 1930 and 1937. During this exact time, he was in analysis with Melanie Klein, although the writings of this period do not make distinct reference to her or Stokes's analysis with her. After World War II, with books such as Inside Out (1947), Smooth and Rough (1951), and The Invitation in Art (1965), his writings become more overtly psychoanalytical and less accessible to the lay public and his fellow critics.

It is perhaps important to qualify the description of Stokes as a "critic." He was not writing criticism in the sense of examining and commenting upon contemporary works of art. Rather, he was interested in a more general, a-historical, moral/didactic/reparative view of the aesthetic object, much in the tradition of John Ruskin. Where Ruskin's moralism regarding the work of art and architecture came from religion, Stokes's came from psychoanalysis. But both looked to a building's form and material to tell a story of its makers' ethico/psychic position as well as the potential lessons to be learned by the viewer/inhabitant.

For those investigating the relationship between architecture and psychoanalysis, Stokes is interesting not just as a "translator" of Kleinian principles in architectural terms, but the manner in which he mines her concepts of *phantasy* and *symbolization* to establish a framework to evaluate, indeed proselytize, the virtues of architectural form. This endeavor is singular for architecture, a discipline that has never, beyond generic, vernacular discussions of shelter, hearth, attics,

“home”, had psychoanalysis investigate issues of design and authorial intent; of architecture, that is, and not just building. It is relatively singular in psychoanalysis as well, since, for the most part, psychoanalysis’s aesthetic engagement has always stayed on the level of *content* - Hamlet’s true mental state; Michelangelo’s psychic motives; odalisque’s angst; etc. - but not on *form*. Precisely because architecture is largely a non-representational art, it has repelled a sustained engagement with psychoanalysis.

This is not to say that the writings of Stokes offer comprehensive or correct programs for formal architectural analysis. Rather, they provide evidence of someone who is struggling with and working out his own neuroses on the written page as much as pursuing an objective, stable psychoanalytic analysis of architecture; he exposes his own weird misreading of Klein (and perhaps hers of Freud) as he struggles to establish why architecture matters so much to his own sanity. Nevertheless, the manner in which he enacts his Kleinian “translation” both expands a theory of phantasy and produces a highly evocative form of architectural analysis.

Melanie Klein’s work can be described as a re-working of Freud’s three phases of the id, replacing this paradigm with her structure of two positions, the paranoid-schizoid and the depressive. In the first, the child cannot take in whole objects extended in time and space but only the part objects of immediate sensory experience. These objects are either satisfying (as in the good breast that provides the milk) or frustrating (as in the bad breast that is denied). This position is characterized by the ego splitting into its good and bad parts or by confusion with the object in projective identification. The second position assumes a child who can recognize whole objects, especially the mother, as complete and enduring, as possessor of both the good and the bad breast. This is depressing to the child not only because it learns about the non-purity of what it considered to be “good”, but because it apprehends its own destructive desires in attacking the mother or the breast. This is the onslaught of guilt, but also of a healthy, realistic approach to the exterior world, in which the ego is integrated and exposed to the conflict of the contradictory impulses.

Klein also suggests that the super ego is in evidence much earlier than Freud had assumed. She said that while children can’t relate to whole objects like the father or the mother before the phallic stage and the Oedipus complex, they could nevertheless relate to “part objects” – in particular the mother’s breast - well before this. Klein came to believe that it isn’t merely the internalized father figure that populates the inner life of the super-ego, but an entire world of part objects, both paternal and maternal – breasts, nipples, tongues, penises, and such. (Indeed, the displacement of the father figure as the central, internalized figure of the super ego as well as replacement of the phallus as the dominant object of envy or feared lack made her a figure of feminist appreciation.)

These part objects are powerful, threatening internal figures. Both they and the mechanisms of defense required to control them are violent. For Freud the main mechanism of defense is repression, but for Klein, drawing on Abraham and Ferenczi, there are four principle mechanisms of defense. The first two are projection and introjection, both of which have their origin in the pure pleasure principle. The ego wants to introject into itself everything that is good and project everything that is bad. (Projection, wherein the ego disowns its own impulses and attributes them to the exterior world, is characteristic of paranoia; introjection is based on the earliest oral impulse to eat the object.) The third mechanism is identification, which in one direction takes the object as its model, defending itself against the object’s loss, and in the

other direction takes the subject as model, resulting in narcissism. The fourth is the splitting of the ego, which involves the bifurcation of the ego into the normal part, which attends to reality, and the other libidinal part that detaches itself from reality and plays its phantasy out. Splitting is associated with fetishism.

Phantasy is the principle means by which these mechanisms of defense (and the drives that require them) operate; it represents the sexual instincts in terms of the appropriate object (the biting mouth, the warm breast, etc.). Symbolism is the principle means by which these phantasies attach themselves to reality, the everyday objects of the world that surround us. Phantasy was a peripheral concept in Freud's cosmology but underlay many of his assumptions regarding the ego's ability to synthesize the pleasure principle and the reality principle. He writes, "With the introduction of the reality principle one species of thought-activity was split-off; it was kept free from reality-testing and remained subordinated to the pleasure principle alone. This activity is phantasying" (Freud, 1911, p. 220). He continues, "It will rightly be objected that an organization which was a slave to the pleasure principle and neglected the reality of the external world could not maintain itself alive for the shortest time, so that it could not have come into existence at all. The employment of a fiction like this, however, is justified when one considers that the infant... does almost realize a psychical system of this kind." In Freud's view, instinct can only be perceived by its mental representation, and unconscious phantasy is this mental expression. Freud's position vis-à-vis introjection, in which he describes how the ego absorbs into itself sources of pleasure - "I should like to take this into myself and keep that out" (Freud, 1925, p. 237) - is, the Kleinians believed, a description of unconscious phantasy. It explains the link between the id impulse and the ego mechanism.

For Klein, phantasy-forming as a function of the ego assumes a greater role than it did for Freud. Phantasy is not an escape from reality, but, rather, the particular way that the child "sees" and interprets reality and copes with being in the world. Introjection and projection become the principle way that she describes the child's "object relations", at first introjecting all that it loves and preserves and projecting out all that it loathes, but later also introjecting things that it fears (to contain them) and projecting part-objects that it loves (to protect them from its own destructive forces). Klein describes, thereby, a whole inner world of part-objects that take up position in the child's psyche and are taken to be, and are seen to match up with, the outer world. It is an inner world that is robust, active, changeable, aggressive, and structurally deeply spatial.

Klein's ego epistemology is not only dense, it is highly visual; image and the pictorial presentation of phantasy are foregrounded as the child's means of thinking. In this, she follows a certain lead of Freud's. Despite accusations that he was "anti-visual"¹, he indicates, in The Interpretation of Dreams (as well as his reconstruction of the first wish of the child as a mental image) that thinking is done in images. Freud (1900, p. 237), regarding even secondary process thinking, said, "thought is after all nothing but the substitute for a hallucinatory wish."

¹ I am indebted to Nancy Olson for elaborating on the debate about Freud's sensitivity to visual imagery in a paper, "Pictures Into Words: Visual Models and Data in Psychoanalysis," given at the "Architecture and Psychoanalysis" symposium at Yale School of Architecture in October, 2003.

Likewise, he pointed out that the ego was the perceptual organ in both the direction of the inner world and the outer world. But Klein goes farther than Freud. In analyzing how the ego functions perceptually to direct the figures populating the id/superego inner world and their application onto and absorption of the external world, Klein, unlike Freud, depicts an ego that is almost entirely described by its image management. Her conceptual shift from Freud's "stages" of development to her "positions" is significant not only because it is a spatial as opposed to temporal paradigm, but because it assumes a place taken up vis-à-vis the world, or, I might say, its visual unfolding. She also goes farther in depicting a particularly rich visual content. The floating, swarming bodily-parts that are the objects of the child's lust are thick, aggressive, swarming, assertive. Vision in this case is the opposite of transparent; it is bulky and layered. Moreover, because the child has no real sense of itself as an integrated ego, the vagaries of these phantasies don't just project from the child, they are the child. Thus, both what the child perceives of the outer world and experiences of itself in the inner world are fully fleshed, in/on the layer of sight.

Stokes and Psycho-Aesthetics

The appeal of Klein's topology for someone like Stokes - interested in space, image and architecture - is obvious. But he, in turn, enacted a further distortion on Kleinian/Freudian theory, taking it and its reference to childhood defense mechanisms into a more general, hermeneutic realm. Stokes, first of all, was as interested in the outside world available for phantasy consumption as much as in the inner world that demanded substitution. He also had a psychic history of trying to get out of himself (fear of his own homosexuality) and seeing himself mirrored/objectified in and on the external world. He describes his personal awakening when he arrived in Italy for the first time through the Mont Cenis tunnel and saw the world for the first time clearly, as distinctly itself and other than him, and thereby the proper manifold for self-discovery/projection. This tendency is evident in Stokes's article of 1945, "Concerning Art and Metapsychology," in which he argues that Freud's pleasure principle should be expanded to include greater emphasis on the role the external world plays in our fantasies. As he stated, "It is perhaps astonishing that no general concept derived from the omnipresence of the external world as such, other than the reality principle, figures in psycho-analytic metapsychology" (p. 178). As he describes in Venice: An Aspect of Art (1945b), being in the world was nothing other than working out the subject - object dichotomy:

The new-born baby soon becomes aware that neither his mother nor the surrounding world is an extension of himself. Henceforth, to his dying day, there remains the huge division between himself and objects, people or things. Throughout life, we seek to rival the externality of things. The world as we perceive it, our animal habitat, is the language of every passing mood or contemplative state. Indeed, without this canvas on which to apply ourselves, by which we project and transmute as well as satisfy more direct biological needs, we cannot conceive the flow of the mind any more than the activity of the body. The body is obviously meaningless without a further external world: but so, too, is the mind. Mental as well as physical life is a

laying out of strength within, in rivalry, as it were, with the laid-out instantaneous world of space [p. 137].

If one goes back to Freud, we see that he thought phantasy played a role in the making of art, but as an avoidance, as opposed to enhancement, of reality. As he describes in his "Formulations on Two Principles in Mental Functioning,"

An artist is originally a man who turns away from reality because he cannot come to terms with the demand for the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction which it at first demands, and who allows his erotic and ambiguous wishes full play in the life of phantasy. He finds the way back to reality, however, from this world of phantasy by making use of special gifts to mould his phantasies into truths of a new kind, ... [1911, p. 224].

Stokes's view of art, as must be obvious by now, was radically different, in direct proportion to the reformulation he, via Klein, made of phantasy. Instead of seeing reality as that which is denied in art, he suggested, again in his "Concerning Art and Metapsychology", that, "As a mirror of man's overall physical situation, art ... contains a further and even more general connection with reality," one which "allows sufficient weight to the perennial challenge of the wide, open world of the senses," in which "physical substitution (is) viewed as the means of the wider organization." His faith in substitution and the pattern of exchange that results in this enactment - his faith in art's form and not merely the artist's psyche, his faith in the art as an ideal and not as an escape - is spelled out clearly in this long but evocative passage called "Argument" from his personal notebooks:

The mind, I believe, is constantly busy with the correlation of its patterns, and had I to name the content of the indubitable yeast for life which, although it varies, so seldom is altogether lost, I should say that, in terms of animal satisfaction, of accomplishment of idealism or whatever, this ever-growing store and ever-enlarging complication of patterns were the essence. For the greater part of the day for most lives - though not the night - the range is severely restricted....

A transition now to consider the nature of art as the impulse to create patterns, is easy. Indeed, there is no need to point out the analogy. Art typifies the mental flow in which much is expressed within a simple datum of the senses.

It is then precisely this structuralist model of the mind that points to Stokes's particular fascination with architecture: it mirrors the structure of the mind at the same time that it calls us to phantasy/substitution. In Three Essays on the Painting of Our Time (1961), he writes, "We will agree that the work of art is a construction. Inasmuch as man both physically and psychologically is a structure carefully amassed, a coalescence and a pattern, a balance imposed upon opposite drives, building is likely to be not only the most common but the most general symbol of our living and breathing" (p. 149). At times, this analogy takes on an anthropomorphic cast, but the deeper analysis investigates architecture's unique capacity to demonstrate - not through its shape or iconography but rather through its material, textures and apertures - its own dialectic nature of inside out transference.

We partake of an inexhaustible feeding mother (a fine building announces), though we have bitten, torn, dirtied and pinched her, though we thought we have lost her utterly, to have destroyed her utterly in fantasy and act. We are grateful to stone buildings for their stubborn material, hacked and hewed but put together carefully, restored in better shape than those pieces that the infant imagined he had chewed or scattered, for which he searched. Much crude rock stands rearranged; now in the form of apertures, of suffusion at the sides of the apertures, the bites, the tears, the pinches are miraculously identified with the recipient passages of the body, with the sense organs, with features; as well with the good mother which we would eat more mercifully for preservation and safety within, and for our own....Colours, textures, smooth and rough planes, apertures, symbolize reciprocity, a thriving in a thorough partnership. The landscape's center is fashioned by plain houses in a cobbled street, by the dichotomy of wall-face and opening. Dichotomy is the unavoidable means of architectural effect. It has, of course, many embodiments, a sense of growth and a sense of thrust, for instance, heaviness and lightness, sheerness and recession or projection, rectangularity and rotundity, lit surface and shadowed surfaces, a thematic contrast between two principal textures, that is to say, between smooth and rough. I take this last to symbolize all, because it best marks the "bite" of architectural pleasure upon the memory: the dichotomy that permeates our final impression [1951, p. 241-2].

A whole cosmology of sense apparati and formal paradigms support and prefigure this position. His archetype in all of the arts was work whose spatial essence was presented flatly and immediately for the eye, whether it be the stone of a sculpture or a building façade, or the pigment and color of a painting. His hope for objects was that they would demonstrate and make us experience their otherness; only in its otherness would we both lose ourselves and, ironically, find ourselves. And vision was the sense par excellence for negotiating/providing this otherness. Only the eye allowed an immediate (whole, unsplit, unsequential) grasp of the object, and only in this grasping of and onto the object could the subject find the mirror, the essence of his/her inner world, his/her psyche. He also appreciated vision as a physical phenomenon. The body, he noted, was literally present in the physical housing of the eye in the torso. All of the ocular muscles, mucous and nerve-endings were experienced in the act of seeing and prevented sight from merely "floating" around ambivalently. But ironically, or, again, dialectically, vision, as he liked to point out, is the one sense whose *effects* are not experienced as belonging to our bodies.

Likewise, the supposed flatness of vision was pivotal. Using but transforming the British empirical tradition of Berkley and Locke, in which vision's assumed two-dimensionality made it inferior to and dependent on touch, Stokes, like Ruskin, valorized the flatness as both an aspect of its immediacy and an essential condition for its ability to symbolize. Moreover, vision comes to us instantaneously. As such, it is not mediated by our (internal) intellect, but comes to us purely. "I would isolate and stress this far more pregnant quality of mass, its appeal to the quickness of the eye, its power to captivate in the one second or less. Exploring sense of touch, I admit, introduces a succession, and therefore entails an element of time though it be turned into an impression by the quickness of the eye" (1932, p.134-5). At the same time, however, the full gamut of physical sensations was lodged in the eye. Despite Stokes's insistence

that the visual was superior to the tactile, the body was nevertheless wholly present in vision; vision absorbed the other senses into itself. This is his fascination with textures. As he writes in Smooth and Rough, “In employing smooth and rough as generic terms of architectural dichotomy, I am better able to preserve both the oral and the tactile notions that underlie the visual” (p. 243).

Certain formal preferences result from Stokes’s notion of vision and objective identification and contribute to an aesthetics of surface. Paintings should never be about their composition or their perspectival depiction of deep space; rather, they should register their layering. That is, the important relationships aren’t those that operate across the lateral surface of the painting, but those that imply a layered relationship from front (the eye of the viewer) to back (an implicit space in/on/behind the canvas). Color should be “surface” color, not “film” color, where the former is understood to be “out there”, located on the object and not, like film color, experienced as floating a-spatially in our mind’s eye. In sculpture, “carving” was better than “modeling”, where the former, carving, understood that the material fights back (in layers and depth) and challenges the ego while the latter, modelling, allows the ego to just willfully mush things around. To a certain extent, this was a very literal understanding of carving in stone, and not just any stone, but limestone, the material that Stokes felt, in its water-based make-up, embodied symbolization or “identity-in difference.” Thus his love of the sculptor Agostino di Duccio, whose bas-reliefs ensured that not the figure, but the stone through the medium of the figure, is the content of the work. But in another sense, carving was a more general admiration of the tough, durable “otherness” of an object, whether words, landscapes or buildings; an otherness that allowed perception to be registered not in the body or psyche, but again on the object itself.

As has been suggested, Stokes, with this set of aesthetic/psychoanalytic “rules”, arrives at architecture as the most robust of arts because it promotes the most complex and compelling of phantasies. There is a certain irony in this fact; given that flatness and immediacy are essential attributes for phantasy and architecture is primarily spatial and experienced sequentially. Indeed, Stokes dismissed modernism’s interest in both space and plasticity. Space, a concept that had only been identified as a formal category in architectural history at the end of the 19th century and was the calling card of modernism, was not just ignored by Stokes, but seen, like film color, to be that mushy, indeterminate thing in which the psyche could get lost and warped. Likewise, plasticity (the pliability of form and shape), best exemplified by the works of Le Corbusier such as the chapel at Ronchamp, was seen by Stokes as problematic. It, like modeling in sculpture, allowed the artist to avoid the concreteness of the material world and apply his/her will arbitrarily on it with no resistance, with no lessons learned from the physical world. (This is what made Stokes such an ambiguous figure in architectural history and criticism at the time: he was seen as deeply conservative with regard to architecture, even as his psychoanalytic framework made him scarily radical.) For Stokes, in architecture as well as sculpture, the textures are paramount and the juxtaposition of rough and smooth, especially around the apertures of a façade, are of major significance. Again, the registration of the exchange of inside and outside was of paramount importance because it was the analogue of our own psychic exchanges of introjection and projection; and as analogue, it objectified subjectivity at the same time that it allowed us to experience it visually, sensually. (Later he seemingly saw that this good/bad polarity was itself “unhealthy” (split) and advocated that a psychoanalytically successful work of art would allow one to experience both

sides of the equation; but he didn't give up on an aesthetic that praises the all-over over clear figure-ground distinctions and the hierarchically composed.) As Stokes wrote:

The building, which provokes by its beauty a positive response, resuscitates an early hunger or greed in the disposition of morsels that are smooth with morsels that are rough, or of wall spaces with the apertures; an impression, I have said, composed as well from other architectural sensations. To repeat: it is as if those apertures had been torn in that body by our revengeful teeth so that we experience as a beautiful form, and indeed as indispensable shelter also, the outcome of sadistic attacks, fierce yet smoothed, healed into a source of health which we would take inside us and preserve there unharmed for the source of our goodness: as if also...the smooth body of the wall-face, or the smooth vacancy within the apertures, were the shining breast, while the mouldings, the projections, the rustications, the tiles, were the head, the feeding nipple of that breast [1951, p. 243].

Pre- Conclusion by Way of Example

Regardless of what one thinks about the aesthetic formula that Stokes's psychoanalytic framework gives him, the reader of his texts can't help but feel that his phantasies-cum-descriptions of architecture bare witness to someone who indeed finds not just pleasure but psychic sustenance from architecture. And one should offer examples of its results. Just as Heinrich Wölfflin's five principles of art style, while formulaic and reductive, allow us to see much more in the buildings he analyzes than we might otherwise perceive, Stokes's own reveries - their own form of psychoanalytic transference - opens up a world of unexpected associations for the reader. So here are examples from his Venice: An Aspect of Art, in which he is analyzing photographs of Venice, all that he has available as he writes from Carbis Bay, England, where he was a market gardener during the war. The fact that he is looking at photographs isn't incidental, they preview and aid the flattening of the architectural object that his analysis desires anyway; the flattening makes the buildings abstract and symbolic; they are already analogues. In this abstraction, the normal hierarchy of meaning that would make the building itself more important than, say, the laundry or birds that are caught incidentally in the frame is eliminated. This book is made up of a series of photographs, identified by the name of the building, and Stokes's short descriptions of the photos' content. The simplicity of the travelogue approach belies the extravagance of phantasy. So ... Here he describes "A Venetian House of the 17th Century":

Once again, the white squares of the thick stone surrounding the barred lower window, in a manner of clear and white arrest, epitomizes transaction within. The washing above hangs white and listless: but the liston below of the Istrian stone takes an added density as the sum of apparel. We see approximation and differences as in a family. The monolith Istrian jambs to the door give added density to the layer upon layer of thin transverse bricks and even to the worn horizontal planks of canal door. Yet brick and wood seem to partake of the stone from their intercourse. These static things appear teeming things arrested and ordered for the eye. In terms of distinctness, we have the sense of things fused [p. 104-05].

Regarding Palladio's church, Il Redentore:

At sunset the water reflects the sky. That which the water reflected all day it now clasps and incorporates. Fusion is complete: the sky itself now rocks beneath the grandeur of yet whiter stone. This same rock, one feels, sets the more distant churches swaying and swimming, sets their evening bells to roll. The brown prayers of the Redentore are loosed at evening in the unmoored sound: and the church slips in upon the sky-and-water, the white embannered Christ aloft upon the dome [p. 92-3].

And finally, regarding Manzoni-Angaran palace:

It is low tide, as you see from the dark bottom stones of the palace and for the height of the water stair. The marble walls encrusted with disks and divided by the long narrow blackness of the windows, are reflected on the horizontal plane of the water. The tide flows over these reflected divisions slightly blurring them. Since to such Quattro Cento building we attribute a compulsive solidifying of what is successive, our imagination reverses the roles of object and reflection. The palace, then, shows us in marble, spatial form, full of the daylight, the brightness and darkness of the water. As we ride across such water its image stands indestructible upwards to the side, a lightness honeycombed with regular dark eddies, sometimes deep, sometimes no deeper than the oblong panel with a pilaster. The straight threads of water are immobilized or made simultaneous by the light and dark lines of the fluted pilasters on the upper storeys.... Movement and depth of water are converted into stone. There is light and dark: all is precious, all weighty; nothing obtrudes. This architecture solidifies the continuity of water [p. 102].

Conclusion

What is of interest, in the context of this paper, is not only that these phantasies seem so indicative of the part-object world described by Melanie Klein, but that they also suggest a theory of surface that illuminates both phantasy's contribution to architectural appreciation and architecture's contribution to a theory of phantasy. The surface of perception, understood to be the almost physical surface of the eyeball, and the surface of the architectural object, equated with the surface of the photograph, get collapsed on a single conceptual plane, one that is thinned for its instantaneous visual consumption. But this thinness sustains enormous tension as it is challenged by the thickness of the imagined part-objects that are bodily, 3-dimensional, and highly active. Here, architecture is illuminated by a condition that seems antithetical to it; it is appreciated not for the space it encloses and the subsequent sequential experience offered our bodies as we move through space, but for the immediate images of space made available on the façade/image plane itself. It suggests that the space that is most (or at least equally) important is our psychological inner space which architecture (of the façade; of surface

texture) both mimics and ignites. Likewise, phantasy is illuminated by the architectural structure it is given; that is, phantasy as a phenomenon is highly structured, not (or at least not directly) by the architectural content it gazes upon, but by the conceptual structure of flatness, layering, juxtaposition, identity-in-difference - all the things that make the image a (specifically-formed) symbol and not just transparent to the external world. While Stokes demonstrates this primarily when the content of the image is architectural, he wants to suggest that this conceptual structure is the condition for all images of the external world to connect with our inner world. It is this exploration of the architectural structure of phantasy, as well as the phantasmal nature of architecture, that makes Stokes's writing so unique in psychoanalysis.

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