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REDEFINING THE BOUNDARY: MULTIPLE REALMS OF THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC IN MODERN ARCHITECTURE
NOVA OPREDELITEV LOČNICE MED ZASEBNM IN JAVNIM V SODOBNI ARHITEKTURI

izvleček

Ta prispevek obravnava nekatere ključne fragmente sodobne stvarnosti, znotraj katere je bil obravnavan odnos med zasebnim in javnim. Sprememba fizične meje, stavbne lupine objekta, je bila za ta proces bistvena. V viktorijanski kulturi je bila stavbna lupina nedvoumno opredeljena kot meja, ki ločuje zasebne in javne sfere življenja. Sodobna arhitektura je oblikovala mnogotera področja zasebnega in javnega, pri čemer je ločnici med njima pripisala vrsto novih pomenov in hkrati opazno spremenila njen videz.

abstract

This paper investigates some of the key fragments of modern reality within which the relation between the private and public was negotiated. The transformation of the physical boundary of the house was essential to this process. In Victorian culture, the external boundary of the house was unambiguously identified as one dividing the private and public spheres of life. Modern architecture, however, constructed multiple realms of the private and public, assigning this boundary a variety of new meanings and significantly modifying its physical appearance.

The relationship between the private and public domains of culture represents one of the key issues around which the modern movement in architecture was constructed and, accordingly, one of the central questions of modern architecture throughout the 20th century. Although commonly interpreted in a "simplified", programmatic manner, recent studies tend to present modern architecture in light of multiple and ambivalent experiences of modernity. Following Hilde Heynen"s "mode of thought without denying the dilemmas" and acknowledging "the conflicts and ambiguities that are peculiar to modernity" [1999: 25], this paper investigates some of the key fragments of modern reality within which the relation between the private and public was negotiated.

The transformation of the physical boundary of the house is essential for understanding this process. In Victorian culture, the external boundary of the house was unambiguously identified as one dividing the private and public spheres of life. Modern architecture, however, constructed multiple realms of the private and public, assigning the boundary with a variety of new meanings and modifying significantly its physical appearance. A great appreciation of transparency in the heroic period of modern architecture thus initially neutralized the boundary, promising to present the truth about the world. Early modern architects rejected the 19th-century ideals of the house as a private retreat and, led by belief in a transparent, healthier and better world, rose up against traditional closedness. However, from the very beginning of the movement, the neutralization of the boundary between the private and public was at question: the nature of the gaze turned out to be ambiguous and not as "honest". The private as a world of its own (fragmented and separated from the public with a clearly defined boundary), in parallel, emerged

as an alternative response to modernity. Ultimately, the age of consumer capitalism constructed its own ideals of the private and public, turning both transparency and privacy into status symbols and proposing radical concepts for domestic security in American culture in the period of the Cold War.

Neutralization of the boundary

Innovative construction principles and materials in use at the very beginning of the 20th century were an explicit sign of modernity and a signal of progress, impossible to ignore. Apart from the use of steel and concrete, the ability to manufacture flat glass at affordable prices was particularly pioneering: not only did that enhance the use of glass in general, but it broadened the appreciation of transparency as well. Clear, transparent vision soon became an expression of modernity associated with technical, aesthetic, social and medical issues. And the early modern architects found them all stimulating.

Slika 1: Mies van der Rohe, Farnsworth House (1945-1951).
Figure 1: Mies van der Rohe, Farnsworth House (1945-1951).
Source: [Friedman, 2006: 136].

At first, they were fascinated with the possibility to expose structural elements of the building hidden in earlier times. With enthusiasm, they strove to liberate them, making the building as open and transparent as possible and creating a new spatial experience in which the inside and outside suddenly merged. Admiring the possibilities of flat glass, they praised the glass skin and glass walls, arguing how only they could "reveal the simple structural form of the skeletal frame and ensure its architectonic possibilities" [Mies van der Rohe cited in Frampton, 1995: 175]. But besides the aesthetic potential, the glass skin and glass walls were celebrated for their ability to provide a healthier indoor-living environment as well. Gropius wrote how "the New Architecture throws open its walls like curtains to admit a plenitude of fresh air, daylight and sunshine" [1965: 43], turning itself into a synonym for health and hygiene. Moreover, symbolically, the idea of an open house became equivalent to "our bodily feeling as it is influenced and liberated through sports, gymnastics, and a sensuous way of life: light, transparent, movable" [Giedion cited in Heynen, 1999: 36].

Slika 2: Walter Gropius, Hiša Kandinsky & Klee (Dessau, 1926).
Figure 2: Walter Gropius, Master House for Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee (Dessau, 1926). Source: [http://www.mimoa.eu/projects/Germany/Dessau/Bauhaus%20Masters%B4%20Houses].

Large areas of flat glass were, at last, recognized as an opportunity to establish a closer visual relationship with nature. Celebrating the gaze towards the natural surroundings, modern architects transformed the constraining concept of the traditional window. New windows were designed to open up the view towards the landscape, framing particular images of the nature outside. As Colomina [1996] argued, turning "the threatening world outside into a reassuring picture" [p.7], the gaze directed outward became as significant as the one that reveals the inner world of the house. Framing pictures through windows was a particularly important element of expression in Le Corbusier"s architecture. His horizontal window, the fenêtre en longueur, disturbed the classical expectations of the viewer, transforming the traditional sensation with perspective depth into a plain image of the landscape.

In time, these new visual effects actually increased the "picture", introducing a see-through concept of the house as the ultimate expression of modern transparency. Mies van der Rohe"s Farnsworth House (1945-1951) and Philip Johnson"s Glass House (1945-1949) were designed almost completely open in order to provide the maximum pleasure of living close to nature.

What is more, they represented the final achievement of modern transparency: the technical, aesthetic and social triumph of modernity that fully exposed domestic life to the eyes of the public.

For the heroic architects of the modern period, there was nothing immoral with exposing the private. Quite the opposite, with faith in the transparent, healthier and better society of tomorrow, they hoped to create a world without separate affairs and with all domains "interpenetrating" [Giedion in Heynen, 1999]; as Walter Benjamin put it: "To live in a glass house is a revolutionary virtue par excellence. It is also an intoxication, a moral exhibitionism, that we badly need" [Benjamin, 1999: 209]. These heroic architects strove to reveal construction, revolutionize the aesthetic expression, ensure healthy conditions for life, liberate the interior, establish closer relations with nature, support an "honest" way of living and unambiguously reveal the truth about the world. In doing so, they completely subjected the private life of the family to the public view, neutralizing the boundary between the two realms.

Ambiguity of the gaze

From the very beginning of the modern movement, however, the neutralization of the boundary between the private and public was at question. The nature of the gaze turned out to be ambiguous and not as "honest", and alternative ways of understanding modern transparency gradually appeared. Except for the advancements in a technical, aesthetic, social and medical sense, transparency also got associated with issues like voyeurism, surveillance and control.

Progress in medical imaging technology in the early years of the 20th century can be closely related to this subject. The heroic appreciation of transparency evolved in parallel to the development of medical screening devices; the openness of the modern house, accordingly, coincided with the expansion of the x-ray. "Just as the x-ray exposes the inside of the body to the public eye, the modern house exposes its interior," Colomina remarked [2007: 146]. But, x-ray technology, besides assessing health, could also be understood as a form of surveillance of the body, in which sense the openness of the modern house was to be taken cautiously. The fact that glass envelopes allowed the private life of the house to be scrutinized in the same way as x-ray technology scrutinized the body could also be interpreted as an attempt to create a monitored environment which is quite far from being liberated or truthful.

Actually, it was modern clients who were concerned about this; architects themselves were not. They tended to idealize transparency, but the clients were not as convinced. It must be said, however, that the modern house was not designed for an ordinary client, but an intellectual who could understand and appreciate modern values. "To be a Modernist client was a declaration of faith" [Benton, 2006: 35]; in this sense, it is even more surprising that a certain level of mistrust, even anxiety, appeared among the very members of the Bauhaus. In 1925, when the school moved to Dessau, Walter Gropius designed several semi-detached houses for the Bauhaus masters. The occupants of the houses were at first thrilled with the possibility to experience the modern lifestyle, but eventually, members of their families, even some of the masters themselves, started to feel unpleasant. Kandinsky"s wife Nina later wrote: "Kandinsky and I were not particularly happy in Gropius" building. […] Gropius had, for example, made one large wall of the entrance

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hall of transparent glass so that anyone could look into the house from the street. That bothered Kandinsky who would have preferred his private sphere to be private. Right away he painted the glass wall white on the inside" [Kandinsky, 1976: 218].

Slika 3: Adolf Loos, Villa Moller (1928).
Figure 3: Adolf Loos, Villa Moller(1928). View of the street façade. Source: [Sarnitz, 2003: 66].

The occupants of the Masters" houses were apparently not ready to be revealed, but even twenty-five years later, a personification of the modern client, Edith Farnsworth, expressed discomfort about living in a glass box. What bothered her most was the fact that, instead of feeling free and enjoying nature, she felt uneasy and tense. Constantly exposed to views from the outside, she lived her life as if acting on stage; and, dissatisfied with the transparent home, she kept complaining: "The truth is that in this house with its four walls of glass I feel like a prowling animal, always on the alert. I am always restless. Even in the evening. I feel like a sentinel on guard day and night. I can rarely stretch out and relax" [Farnsworth cited in Barry, 1953: 270].
Opposed to her, Mies was delighted with his design; fascinated with the experience of all the colours of nature "continually changing throughout" [Mies van der Rohe cited in Blaser, 1994: 234], he was convinced that his design had never been properly understood. Likewise, Philip Johnson lived in his Glass House for more than 50 years, never abandoning his ideas. Enjoying life in the natural surroundings, gaze from the outside was never an issue for him.

Private as a world of its own
Modernity, nevertheless, also gave rise to an architecture that was not entirely consistent with the modern movement in a canonical sense; it was an architecture that emerged as a consequent response to modern reality, but as a reflection of the "world falling apart" [Heynen, 1992: 88]. Yielded as its alternative expression, it implied a strong and unambiguous positioning of the boundary between the private and public realms. The interior, private world of the house thus completely turned its back to the outside. It was separated from the public with a clearly defined boundary and treated as a world of its own. Adolf Loos" architectural ideas from the 1920"s were the ones that brought forth this position.

Persistent endeavours to strengthen the boundary between the inside and outside, as well as the one between the private and public, are actually considered one of the principal characteristics of Loos" work. Loos found it challenging to play with these differences and, redefining the boundary between them, to introduce new spatial relations. His attempts to separate the intimate, private world of the house from the public world outside resulted in innovative architectural expression that significantly renewed the pre-established understanding of the boundaries themselves. Unlike the heroic architects of the modern movement, he did not advocate a complete rupture with the tradition; conversely, he understood modernity as a "rupturing" continuation of the tradition - and was aware of the incompatibility that appeared between modernity and dwelling [Heynen, 1999].
The belief that family life should remain an intimate part of the interior and façades be converted into its neutral, public representation came as a consequence of this way of thinking. Distinguishing between the private and public appearance of the modern person, Loos analogously made a distinction between the private and public appearance of the house. The facades of his houses, particularly the street ones, are hence neutral and tend to give as little information as possible about its inhabitants. With small windows, simply plastered, "discrete" and set free of ornaments, they hardly tell anything: "[…] the house should be discrete on the outside, and show its great wealth within" [Loos cited in Bock, R., 2007: 74].

Slika 3: *Adolf Loos, Villa Moller (1928). Pogled na sprejemnico.*
Figure 4: Adolf Loos, Villa Moller (1928). View of the hall.
Source: [Sarnitz, 2003: 68].

Loos" interiors are, conversely, fragmented into a variety of intimate zones which together construct a world of their own. Although designed simultaneously with the facades, they actually follow the logic of the Raumplan, a three-dimensional design method that Loos developed. As he himself used to suggest, it is an architecture conceived by spaces [Loos, 1930]; the interiors are composed of a sequence of interconnected rooms (defined independently and differing in terms of their character, material and proportions). Paradoxically, however, besides intimacy and comfort, the interior world of Loos" houses can also be associated with systems of surveillance and control. It was Beatriz Colomina [1996] who noticed the exceptional logic of internal visibility that characterizes these spaces. Considering the inhabitants of Loos" houses as "both

actors in and spectators of the family scene" [1996: 244], she found that there is a "theatre box" incorporated within most of his houses. The character of the elevated sitting area in Villa Moller (1928) can, for instance, be considered as such, since the views from this position stretch almost throughout the entire living area; consequently, any resident entering this zone is inevitably spotted by the person sitting here.

Gaze in Loos" houses is primarily directed towards the interior; views toward the outside are almost completely irrelevant. The private is constructed as a world of its own, having its internal logic and not particularly interested in the world outside. It is separated from the public with a boundary whose inner and outer appearance significantly differs but does not negate the world of the public. The boundary is there simply to highlight the difference.

The ideals of consumerism

In the years following the Second World War, modern architecture was widely accepted in the United States, however, under circumstances significantly different from the European. The expansion of consumer capitalism in this period constructed (and subsequently advertised) a post-war image of the ideal American home, assigning the heroic symbols of modern architecture a considerably different meaning. The white American middle-class family, comprising parents with two children, living in a transparent single-family house surrounded by greenery, detached, and positioned on its clearly defined plot, was advertised as the American image of an ideal life. However, as Rapoport [1969] remarked, the housing ideals implied by this image were not functional, but rather aesthetic. The American dream home was not the result of a real need, but a symbol of property, glamour and fashion – the perfect image consumers sought to buy.

The relations between the private and public spheres of life were, accordingly, negotiated following the paradigms of post-war consumer society. With a significant role in the construction of the ideal, privacy and transparency were conceived as status symbols. The physical isolation of the house was advertised as a need to provide acoustic privacy (distancing the family from its neighbours). On the other hand, large glass openings promised to provide a closer relationship with the natural surroundings.

The insistence on the acoustic and the disregard for the visual prerequisites of privacy ironically produced an ideal implying both "detachment" and "exposure" of family life.

In general, it can be said that, among the variety of heroic symbols that European modern architects proclaimed, the ones that promised a healthy and liberated way of living were particularly appreciated in America. Nevertheless, instead of following the rational aesthetic principles of heroic architecture, they rapidly transformed into an everyday consumer"s objects of desire. As Nigel Whiteley [2003] remarked, the Case Study House program (1945-1966) greatly contributed to this domestication and demonumentalization of international modernism. As an experimental program, it was launched by the Arts & Architecture magazine with the aim to create innovative and inexpensive model homes, which would help improve the housing standards in post-war America. The majority of these houses, however, turned out to be quite luxurious. Built in secluded places with a great vista, fostering stronger visual relations with nature and in line with Miesian aesthetics, they became symbols of a new,

Slika 5: Richard Neutra, Case Study House #22, Bailey House (1947-1948).
Figure 5: Richard Neutra, Case Study House #22, Bailey House (1947-1948).
Source: [Smith, 2009: 44].

desired lifestyle. A strong commitment to transparency was not an issue in these houses; the power of the gaze opening up towards the landscape resolved all the dilemmas.
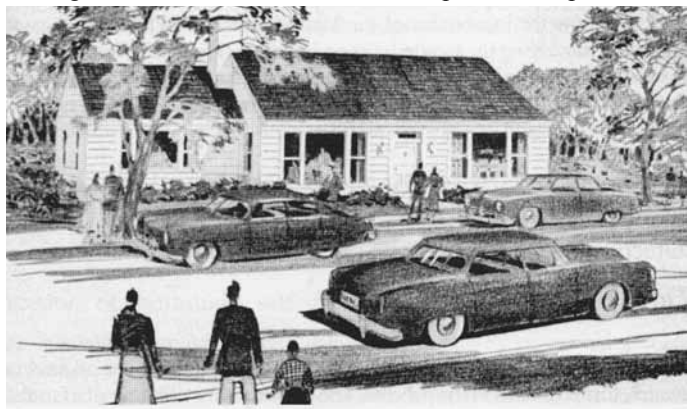
Case Study Houses were published in a variety of magazines and newspapers, and they greatly contributed to the mass popularization of the ideal of the modern American home. Wealthy clients were able to afford this dream. For middle-class families, in the majority of cases, it stayed out of reach. But it largely affected the creation of the post-war suburban stereotype, accessible to all. American suburban settlements, like Lewittown, were constructed rapidly and provided affordable housing for thousands of families who moved into the suburbs expressing faith in the new environment. Private single-family houses represented the heart of these settlements. Manufactured quickly, efficiently and not costing much, in time they became symbols of commercialization of the domestic life. Their widely publicized images gave out an attractive impression of quiet and comfortable life in the natural surroundings. But, what the average consumer was particularly fascinated with was the idea of the picture window which, ultimately, turned out to be one of its biggest disappointments.

From a glamorous window with a magnificent view (in secluded luxurious villas), the picture window was transformed into an ordinary object for mass-consumption (in the suburbia), failing even to fulfil its major promise of providing a view towards the natural surroundings. "[…] Because of careless siting, windows were placed where there were no views, and views were created into what had once been privacies" [Isenstadt in Miller Lane, ed. 2007: 304]. In the majority of cases, in the end, picture windows were facing the street. Inhabitants of the suburbs exposed their private lives to the public, not getting anything in return. In reality, their houses became synonyms for the exhibition of domesticity. They had to change their living habits in order to present the perfect family life and decorate their interiors in a way to exhibit their status symbols, ultimately acknowledging that the idea of the picture window had let them down.

Privacy, domesticity and war

Another approach to interpretation of images of the perfect domestic life, all-pervading in the 1950"s and 1960"s, is

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provided by Beatriz Colomina in her study "Domesticity and War" [2007]. Placing those images into the context of the Cold War, Colomina made an argument that they were essentially constructed in order to cancel out the anxiety produced by the invisible threats of the war itself. According to her, they were supposed to provide a sense (or at least an illusion) of national security, creating perfect environments which would give out the impression that everything was under control. The boundary of the house is thus to be considered as an important element of this concept; nevertheless, it was an element which, playing its role, ignored the distinction between the private and public.

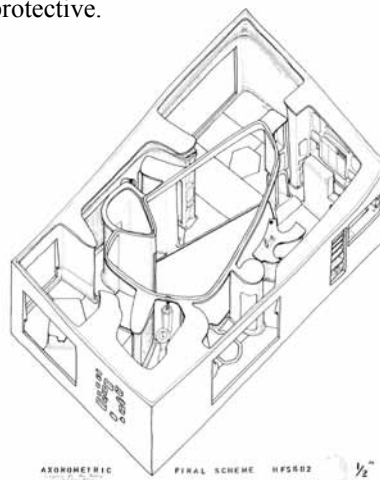*Slika 6: House Beautiful, January 1950.*
Figure 6: "Is there a picture in your picture window?" House Beautiful, January 1950. Source: [Miller Lane, B. ed. 2007: 309].

On the other hand, Colomina remarked that the presentation of the perfect domestic life also served as a mask for the Cold War"s darker side: underground bunkers, placed beneath the front lawns. As recommended by the government, almost every family was provided with its own concrete shelter, carefully disguised under a perfectly cut lawn. "It is as if the ideal American post-war suburb were a network of buried surrogate houses, bunkers beneath the lawns acting as the counterpart to the fragile pavilions above, row upon row of hidden concrete fortifications topped by transparent boxes [2007: 140]." In time, fear for security dramatically increased, demanding an even higher level of control over the living environment to be established.

The project for the Underground House originated in 1964, as the most radical proposal for domestic security. It was designed by Jay Swayze (a former military instructor), who came to an idea to construct a house underground, creating a perfect shelter in the case of nuclear fallout. What he proposed was, actually, a "domesticated bunker"; a hybrid conceived by merging the typical suburban house with a military shelter. The Underground House was thus supposed to provide the maximum comfort of domestic life, combined with maximum safety. Moreover, it promised to provide the inhabitants with (almost) all the features the above-ground private houses had. False windows were, for example, positioned in every room, in the places they would normally stand, and with views of landscape that could be changed at will (Swayze even considered this an advantage, stressing out the fact that windows in traditional houses could not produce this experience). Similarly, several other "outside" elements, like the patio, got incorporated inside the house. In a way, the house "internalized" the outside features; as Colomina remarked, it "had finally become the whole world" [2007: 292]. "A few feet underground can give man an island unto himself;

a place where he controls his own world – a world of total ease and comfort, of security, safety and, above all, privacy" [Underground Home: New York World"s 1964-1965 Fair in Colomina, 2007: 281]. As described in the publicity brochure for this project, the advantages of life underground were almost idealized. Privacy, as one of its widely admired features, was brought into a close relationship with security and safety. Moreover, these issues eventually became compatible almost to a point of one implying the other.

The spatial logic of privacy, security and perfectly controlled environments can, moreover, be read in the project for the "House of the Future", designed in 1956 by Alison and Peter Smithson for the Daily Mail"s Ideal Home Exhibition in London. Even though it did not emerge in America, this project is unambiguously to be interpreted within the context of the Cold War anxieties. It was constructed above the ground; it was, nevertheless, completely internalized. Colomina interpreted the house as full of defenses, finding almost every detail of the house protective.

Slika 7: Alison in Peter Smithson, House of the Future (1956).
Figure 7: Alison and Peter Smithson, House of the Future (1956).
Source: [http://axo.tumblr.com/post/6366075740/house-of-the-future-1956].

Slika 8: Jay Swayze, The Underground House (1964). Dnevna soba.
Figure 8: Jay Swayze, The Underground House (1964). Living room.
Source: [Colomina, 2007: 292].

The only contact the house had with the outside world was through an electrically operated entrance door. There were no other openings, doors or windows towards the outside (the

openings that appear on the model were not actually part of the idea; they were there only to allow the visitors of the show a peek inside). The outer façade was simple, blank, solid. The house was organized around an internal courtyard, interiorizing even the element of landscape. Moreover, it is to be considered as a part of a wider, urban concept the Smithsons developed. According to the "unbreathed air" concept, each house was (through the courtyard) portioned with its own part of unbreathed air, as the "ultimate measure of privacy in an even more congested world" [2007: 236].

Conclusions

Throughout the twentieth century, modern architecture unquestionably had a significant role in negotiating the relations between the private and public. The transformation of the physical boundary of the house (traditionally responsible for separating the domains) directly reflected the multiple and ambivalent experiences of modernity. Nevertheless, regardless of the circumstances under which they were constructed, the architectural interpretations of this relation can be reduced to the following two: OPENNES (denial of the boundary) and CLOSURE (insistence on the boundary). On the one hand, transparency was highly appreciated, either as an expression of heroic beliefs, ideals of consumerism, or as a mask of the Cold War anxieties. On the other, opacity was central in making a distinction between the two worlds (as with Loos), or in creating safe and controlled environments (in the years of the Cold War). The boundary of a house/between the private and public was thus simultaneously denied and redrawn.

This duality of interpretation may seem exclusive at first sight, as it implies the existence of two diametrically opposed, mutually exclusive poles. Nevertheless, the ambiguities typical of modernity made them exist and act at the same time. What is more, from the very beginning of the century, modern architecture was faced with challenges introduced by the development of communication technologies. The question of the "immaterial" permeability of the boundaries arose as one of the new factors in positioning the relations between the private and public. In spite of all the interiorization of the Underground House, for instance, a television set placed next to the fireplace broke all the barriers, bringing the outside – the world of the public – inside the house and, in a way, blurring the distinction between the two domains. Acknowledging the fact that contemporary architects are being faced with similar dilemmas – of denying, redrawing and blurring the boundaries between the private and public – a redefinition of the relations between the two domains is to be understood as an ongoing, "evolutionary" process; there is no doubt, therefore, that some of the modern phenomena are with us still.

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Iz recenzije

Članek obravnava tematiko tako s področja zgodovine arhitekture kot tudi tudi teorije arhitekturnega oblikovanja. Zanimiva obravnava odnosa med privatno in javno sfero življenja (v obdobju arhitekture moderne in kasneje v 20. stoletju) je tudi danes zelo aktualna. Na eni strani je cenjena transparentnost, odprtost zgrabe in prepletanje notranjega in zunanjega prostora (primeri hiš Walterja Gropiusa, Mies-a van der Rohe, Richarda Neutre), na drugi strani pa tudi zaprtost, ki postavlja meje med privatnim in javnim (n. pr. Adolf Loos, Jay Swayze). Dileme, kako se odločiti glede te dualnosti arhitekture, ostajajo izziv tudi sodobnim arhitektom.

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