Landscape, science, and tourism: the trip to ice cave and the western cosmology on Svalbard Archipelago

"The way to the ice cave starts at the end of the road in a southern part of the town. When standing there, one can see few hundred meters of a flat ground in front of a mountain in shape of a triangle. On its right side, there is a little hill, wide snow-covered glacier valley, and other mountains. On the left, there is rather narrow river valley and steep mountain with a flat top. That is where the way to the ice cave goes. We cross the flat ground and hike steep 200 meters up to the lower part of the mountain slope. Everything is covered in snow, except few cliffs of the mountains that are too steep and narrow for the snow to last there. As many people have been walking up and down, footsteps in a snow create a visible path. It continues gently up on the left mountain slope. (…) When we enter the glacier, wide snow-covered field, on the horizon we see a mountain ridge which connects two mountain tops on the sides. It is as a wall in front of us, another 400-meter elevation to go to the tops we see. The glacier is thus located in the valley in between mountains. When we turn around and look back, we don´t see the town anymore – just the moraine, river valley, and mountains. Approximately in one-third of the glacier, on the east side, close to the mountain slope, there is the ice cave – the goal of the trip." (Fieldnotes, March 2017)

This is a short description of the landscape view during the guided tour to the ice cave on Svalbard. Everything one can see is snow covered, except very few rocks and mountain cliffs. There are no trees on Svalbard and with good visibility, one can see kilometers around. Once the tourist group gets up to the moraine, it is also very quiet. Until the beginning of April, there are no birds and rarely any other animals in this area. Maybe there are just a few people around, walking or skiing the same direction, up the glacier and then to the ice cave or to one of the mountain tops around. The landscape seems to be an empty and silent place of snow-covered tundra and glacier. Some rocks here and there. Rarely a single reindeer passing by.

This sense of empty and silent place is part of the common-sense imagination of Svalbard landscape (or the Arctic in general), full of notions of unspoiled wilderness, empty areas, and pristine nature. When the tourist group passes only a short distance from the town, there is not much resembling the human, the social or the subjective. The sense of emptiness of the landscape has yet another dimension. On Svalbard, unlike in many other places in the Arctic (for example Northern Canada or Siberia), there are (and were) no indigenous minorities and thus no other human cosmologies[1]. With this comes an absence of human stories, discourses, explanations and practices

[1] Without going into deep discussion on differences between and similarities within the concepts of cosmology, ontology and reality, the concept of cosmology is used in this paper in the simple meaning of order of the world which has explanatory answers to the relations and structure of the world and its beings.

which could be competing, complementary, or overlapping with the Euro-American one[2]. In this respect, the landscape can be understood as empty from the "others" and the Euro-American cosmology can be understood as a monopoly. The guide in his storytelling has often no choice, no explanation based on "other" cosmology, even if it was turned into mistaken beliefs[3] (see Law 2016: 47).

Yet, while drawing upon material-semiotics, there are still significant "others" to negotiate with – the non-human ones. As the group is moving, observing surroundings and the guide is telling stories, the landscape revives, and it is filled with human and non-human interactions, relations and embodiments. In this paper, I aim to discuss the engagement with landscape and emerging knowledge on a guided trip to the ice cave. This discussion is part of the process of constructing the ethnographical field in my research. Thus, I focus not only on the process of enacting landscape on Svalbard but at the same time on the process of enacting landscape in the ethnographical knowledge. I aim to outline partial meaning and matter of landscape in the tourist industry and at the same time in the early ethnographical process.

In what follows, I will provide a brief analysis of engagement with the landscape on guided trip on Svalbard. I will show the engagement with landscape on Svalbard characterized by storytelling, interactions and relations of whole amalgam of actors, and sensual experiences. I will focus on the role of the guide and at last show the specific character of non-humans on Svalbard and the character of the practice of engagement with landscape and emerging knowledge. At the end, I will discuss the practice of gathering data for this article and of constructing the field in the ethnographical research. In this perspective, what might seem to be an empty place becomes a place full of (material) practices, enactments, and embodiments.

Storytelling on the trip to the ice cave

The trip to the ice cave starts with picking up travelers in their hotel and driving up to town, where the road ends. The guide delivers equipment necessary for the trip (helmets with headlamps used in the ice cave, spikes, and sometimes snowshoes, or hiking poles), points out the route, time frame,

[2] Svalbard was populated by Europeans in late 16th century. Since then, scientists, adventurers, hunters, and trappers might have had tensions, competitions or collaboration with and towards themselves and with and towards non-humans. For now, I bracket the question of socio-historical development of Euro-American cosmology and focus on what is happening now, in 21st century.

[3] The stories and explanations of the guide are thus mainly based on scientific facts and nature-culture distinction. The mountains are rock formations, resources of coal: not gods, not fossil beasts (de la Cadena 2010). Glaciers are ice floes with organic particles: not sensitive beings (Cruickshank 2012), etc.

and briefs about safety routines. Then the group starts walking. The guide finds the path, point out specific features of the landscape or give and facilitates the behavior of tourists during the trip. Tourists come with their preunderstanding, expectations, questions, interests, values, but also the physical shape or fears. Non-humans move, change their character, reveal, cover, break, destroy or melt. This amalgam of various actors and their agency creates the trip itself, the experience, the engagement.

In this sense, the landscape it partly stable and already made, but perhaps only temporarily and spatially, and as such it needs to be more or less constantly enacted in order to "*sustain a strong perspectival and singular version of out-thereness*" (Law 2004: 53, emphasis original). As Ingold notes, landscape is rather qualitative and heterogeneous, processual and interactional (Ingold 1993). Landscape is neither a static object, nor an imagination, but "the world constituted *in relation* to the organism or person whose environment it is" (Ingold 1992: 44, emphasis mine).

One of the characteristic part of the trip I focus on here is the storytelling of the guide. On every trip, the guide stops at certain spots, point out specific features of the landscape and connect them with a story. Or the tourists ask questions, notice something of their interest and then the guide answers the questions with stories.

> *Below us, there was narrow and deep river valley. I pointed out a "dead ice" on the other side of a river valley and explained the concept: "The river comes from the glacier and above it, there are hills – big piles of rocks that are a mixture of moraine and erosion from the mountain above. It is mostly covered by snow, but you see in its lower part there is big, at least 4 m2 naked icy stone. Or it looks like stone, but it is actually big piece of glacier ice." Amelia (a tourist) was focusing her sight on the place I was pointing at. I knew it is hard to recognize it from the distance we had, so I continued: "It´s very dirty now, so it doesn´t seem to be ice from distance. That is because it is so close to the mountain and there is much gravel around. Anyway, when the glacier is retrieving, it leaves sometimes these huge pieces behind and then they are covered by erosion and wind transported gravel and rocks. We will see the glacier little later and then you can remember this place and see how far down the glacier was, maybe around thousand years ago" – "How long ago?" – "It´s around one thousand years, approximately, from what I know. – "So you don´t know how long ago?" – "I don´t know the exact number if that´s what you are asking. If it was even measured." (Fieldnotes, March 2017)*

This is a story about what seems to be a rock. Without a guide, probably nobody would even notice it. It needs to be pointed at. It is explained that no matter that it *seems* to be a rock, it *actually is* a piece of glacier ice. Often, the guide also uses the glaciological term to name this piece of ice *(dead ice)* and explains, it is called so because this particular piece is not part of the active, moving and flowing, glacier anymore.

The *reference to scientific facts* is characteristic of guide´s storytelling. Based on these references, the stories are explanatory, and the language of the storytelling is intertwined with geological or glaciological terminology (or in other cases taxonomy, etology, references to the Euro-American history of Svalbard´s exploration or other forms of scientific classifications). The guide is then popularizing and simplifying the scientific expertise in a way that it is understandable for a wider audience (see also Law, 2004: 126-7). At the end, it is *story*telling. As one of my bosses said in an informal interview *"…it is not only about telling facts. You have to try to make it interesting, and also little bit funny, some of the stories"* (fieldnotes, March 2017). Although partially modifying, the storytelling still provides meaningful connections, order, and continuity in the world.

The guide possesses some knowledge based on scientific facts and thus is somewhat an expert to the tourists (also depending on the tourists´ own background, experience, knowledge or expertise). At the same time, she does not know all the details and does not always have exact answers. But as the dialogue in the previous fieldnote showed, these unanswered questions are rather ascribed to either the guide´s lack of knowledge or the (yet) scientifically unsolved matter. Many guides work critically with what they hear or read or hear; they connect one information with another, try to find more sources of information, etc. But in principle, they do not question the (practices of) scientific knowledge or facts. The storytelling manifests the independence and finality of nature in the same form as that of the glaciologists. As in Law's analysis of the guides' story of Uluru, "it is reality which explains why one would believe this or say that about the origins and form of Uluru" – or glacier, in this case (Law, 2004: 127).

In a shared Euro-American cosmology characterized by Cartesian nature – culture dualism, the glacier in this story moves independently on us. It is not sentient, willful being who responds to humans (Cruikshank 2012), but ice formation investigated by scientists. The storytelling is still not only a matter of talking; a discursive practice. Equally, or even more, important is the presence of non-humans, their movement, features or character. Firstly, the guided group has to get to the place where the glacier ice is (possible to see). The guide chooses the path according to the snow conditions, avalanche (or in summer landslide) danger, or form of the mountain slope. Only then the group gets to the point where it is possible to see the piece of glacier ice and the guide can tell a story about it.

The story and the discourse are then, in practice, arising directly from these relations and interactions: from the presence of mountains, ice, stones, from the movement of both humans and non-humans, and from black boxed history about the glaciers. The process of knowing on a guided tour also takes form of at least two sensual experiences: first, the boundaries and possibilities which

arises from walking in the terrain (that is the physical shape of the mountain together with the activity of walking) and second, the visibility of the particular features of the landscape. The pointing out of certain features of the landscape and connecting the visually accessible object to a story is a characteristic part of the guide's storytelling. Storytelling depends partly on the presence of the non-humans (glacier ice) and human vision – people's ability to see parts of the landscape, and as this example shows, also recognize its character.

Parts of the character recognition depends on the guide's expertise, but also on the different temporalities (Ingold 2000) of humans' and non-humans' movement. This particular glacier is moving very slowly (in terms of nanometers per day) and people are not able to see or experience the movement itself[4]. Different temporalities are an opportunity for the practice of translation and purification (Latour 2003) – the movement of the glacier is described as if it was going in one linear movement, independent from people. In the previously described situation, nobody mentioned climate change (which could partially disrupt the nature-culture division) or the various stages of growing, melting or stabilization of the glacier mass[5]. Still, it is the movement and character of the glacier, i.e. the practice of the world, which plays an integral part in the storytelling.

On this humble example it is possible to see that the storytelling is not only discursive – it is not just the guide talking about history, reproducing the existing knowledge and mediating the agency of non-humans, but it arises from the engagement with landscape, including relation to and interaction with non-humans and existing knowledge (as part of Euro-American cosmology). As such, it is possible to consider it as socio-material practice reproducing the existing knowledge and cosmology based on nature-culture dualism.

With her knowledge of the landscape and its features, and also with the simplified explanation of its non-human character and its history and behavior through time and space, the guide then works as a mediator between humans and non-humans and their agency. She is in a way a spokeswoman of the Modern Constitution (Latour 2003), drawing upon and reproducing nature and culture as two rather disconnected poles. The role of a mediator becomes stronger when the non-humans are more active and when the storytelling is disrupted, which is a question discussed in the following section.

[4] Some other glaciers are moving faster and then it is, sometimes, possible to hear cracking sounds indicating the movement. But that does not happen with the glacier on this particular trip.

[5] Certainly, someone could think about the climate change; and in some other cases the guide mentions it. But often, as in this case, it remains unspoken. It seems so far, that the tourist industry focuses on what could be called "positive approach" to climate change: the brochures and tourist company rather present themselves as sustainable tourism and Svalbard as sustainable destination. The narratives related to the climate change are yet to be analysed.

The guide as the mediator

When the surrounding is covered in a whiteout and is not visually accessible, the engagement with landscape takes slightly different form. The stories about the origins are not strong enough by themselves – to a vast degree they lose power when the non-human (the mountain or the glacier ice) is not visible to humans. As Hirsch notes, the relationship to people's surroundings in Euro-American cosmology after Descartes condemned the emphasis on imagery and metaphor in order to find a secure basis of knowledge, untainted by all outside ("social"?) influences (Hirsch 2003: 16). The rationalistic program of Cartesian tradition "involved eliminating from our (...) language (...) all figurative and metaphorical conceptions, all expressions that could be understood only by reference to images" (Hampshire in Hirsch 2003: 16). This is probably one of the reasons, why it is hard for the guide to talk about things which are out of sight as the following fieldnote shows. How does the engagement with the landscape look like without explanatory storytelling?

> *Walking started to be a little bit slower and heavier once we got up to the moraine – the wind was blowing into our faces and the temperature was colder than in town. According to the weather forecast I saw in the morning it was about minus 9 degrees and with the wind chill, it might have felt as minus 15. Also, the visibility was bad since the wind was picking up the dry snow – we did not see much more than few meters around us. I stopped before the path was starting to be steep on the slope, where I usually point out the "dead ice" in the river valley below and explain a little bit about the movement of glaciers. But we did not see it, and without it, there was no point saying that. Once I started talking, just to introduce the conditions on the path, the wind was taking my words and it was hard for me to talk and for the people to hear me. After that all the stops were quite short, just to take a breath, to try communicating basic safety issues (All good? No one cold? No one uncomfortable? All want to continue?). Every one of the group seemed in good mood, despite the weather. (…) All wanted to continue – they just asked if it is safe and if there is no avalanche danger. I assured them that it is safe and since we are entering glacier there is no danger in any respect – all the mountain slopes are far away from us. (Fieldnotes, April 2017)*

Even though the temporal invisibility influenced the storytelling, it did not change much about the habituated "out-thereness" which remained as a strong feature of the engagement with the landscape. It is hard to say what caused these tourist´s concerns, but most likely it was the snow, wind and being in the mountains that were for them signs of possible avalanche danger. Either way, as they could not have enough indices to recognize the danger, this situation emphasized the expertise of a guide who knows the path, who is familiar with the surroundings (topography, path etc.) and the conditions it brings. The guide "translates" the presence and agency of the non-humans

to signs and indices and analyses them in order to predict or prevent the avalanche. Again, there is measurement and deductive method used to predict the world "out-there". The guide has similar mediation role as in the example in the previous section: she explains and mediates the agency of humans and non-humans by finding a path and preventing danger. The engagement with the landscape was characterized by these explanatory stories and by a visual or bodily form of knowing. The non-humans played an important role in their appearance or character and the emerging knowledge arosed through interaction and guide´s partial expertise.

However, when the surroundings are temporarily invisible, and the wind, snow, and frost are wildly blowing around, it weakenes the guide's explanations, eliminates storytelling and emphasizes the expertise in the translation and mediation of the agencies. Here, the engagement with the landscape is even more strongly influenced by non-humans: wind, snow, frost, and mountains. Again, those elements would not be dangerous themselves. They are dangerous, at least for people, in mutual interaction and combination with each other and in interaction with people walking. When non-humans are powerful and active as such, the guide´s mediation between humans and non-humans and her partial expertise is becoming even more important. This engagement is a situation, which is for the tourists rather unknown, hard (or impossible) to evaluate, but still, it is possible to recognize the agency of non-humans and feel them as strong. As such, for the tourists the situation brings uncertainty and they rely on their guide and her ability to "translate" the movement and presence of non-humans, and according to that organize the rest of the journey.

What remains is the core feature of shared cosmology including rational thinking and division of the world: landscape "out-there" as measurable, by expert knowledge made predictable and possible to control. There were two types of possible danger (as understood by the guide and maybe the tourists). One was being buried in what in common (or expert) language is called "*naturally* caused avalanches" – that is an avalanche triggered by the own weight under certain combination of factors. The second option was to cause what is called *human factor*: walking into terrain and be translated into "weight" as into one of the factors which can (in combination with others) trigger an avalanche. In other words: moving in the world "out-there" with all its features that need expertise to measure, consider and evaluate particular agency and signs and induct or predict the (un)safety. The guide as a mediator still connects parts of the landscape with (simplified) existing knowledge, although less explicitly towards the tourists.

The meditation of non-human's agency is important especially in those conditions, where many of the non-humans have strong characteristics that are very different from what is familiar to people. As Harraway (2003) notes, natures are only partially connected to humans – they have their own

non-human specificities, partially alien and irreducible. Still, even though the “others” (glacier, ice, mountains, snow, and wind) cannot be fully known (predictable), they are real and consequential. Landscape is thus not just an exploited object or an object to explore – it has an agency; it is constantly “in progress”; and also: it can strike back [Ingold 1993; Latour 2000]. All together in the interaction creates the landscape we engage with.

There is yet one more set of influences which is part of the enactment of landscape – the process of ethnography itself. For ethnography should be not only a process of making facts but of the revealing context of the research practice (Stöckelová, Ghosh 2013).

The practice of “constructing” the field

In this paper, the data gathering was conducted during spring 2017 as part of my dissertation research on Svalbard wilderness. I was gathering information and data during informal talks with my colleagues, guides, and bosses; I was preparing trips with them and discussing the form of the trips, equipment, logistics or weather conditions. We discussed the possible expectations or experiences of tourists, either with the employees of the company or with the tourists themselves. I also paid attention to those things and events outside the tourist industry – the changing infrastructure of the town, discussions, and happenings in coal mining industry, etc. Most importantly, I took part in the guided trips to the ice cave, mountain tops or other types of trips.

After this initial data gathering, I started to organize my fieldnotes and to focus on the process of narrowing down the research field and topic. As Vered Amit notes “the ethnographic field cannot simply exist, awaiting discovery. It has to be laboriously constructed, prised apart from all the other possibilities for contextualization to which its constituent relationships and connections could also be referred. This process of construction is inescapably shaped by the conceptual, professional, financial and relational opportunities and resources accessible to the ethnographer” (Amit, 2000: 6). At the same time, Sanchéz and Estalella stress that in this understanding it might seem that the field is only “an object of careful design that gathers together those who would be part of the project” (Sanchéz and Estalella 2018: 5). To avoid that I describe in more detail how does the process of constructing look like in my research and what exactly are the factors shaping the field in its current stage. How are the meetings of what I research generated and who, at the end, participates in the field?

During above described observations, I was a guide (an employee of a guiding company) and a researcher at once. Those two roles overlapped, and as I was focused also on the guide as an important actor, the participant observation took partly a form of auto-ethnography (Chang,

Ngunjiri, Hernandez 2013). This double-role is only partial and temporary since for the future stages of the research I plan to conduct the participant observation of other guides as well; and it is also a consequence of my personal biography, relational and financial opportunities. My position of the employee in the guiding company was established in the previous years as I first went to Svalbard to enroll one-year study program in (Arctic) nature guiding[6]. During this year, I have learned and practiced guiding in the Arctic (or more specifically on Svalbard), went through two months practice in one of the tour companies and later was employed as a nature guide. It was only after this when I got the idea of conducting research on Svalbard and with the background and already established position of a guide it was impossible to turn into being a mere observer. People around saw me more as a guide than a researcher. In a process of establishing the position of researcher, and the field of research, I thus firstly opportunistically[7] used my previous private and professional networks as sources of research ideas and data. The "participation" in my observation became a participation in and reproduction of the very thing I am currently studying (Marrero-Guillamón in Sánchez and Estalella, 2018: 2). Last but not least, this position allowed me to finance my research practice.

This position shapes not only the broad research topic of my thesis but also the partial topics and perspectives within. There is a whole range of social ties and material practices which led me to focus my research on enactment of wilderness within tourism. At the end, my fieldnotes are full of information within tourism and comparably quite little about other things and it is this materiality (fieldbook, notes, writings, paper…) which influence the process of establishing research field. As Konopásek notes, an analysis is not only a mental process of reading and thinking but also a material practice including writings, computers or programs (Konopásek 2005). At the end, it is a socio-material context which brings into focus one thing and silences the others.

During the organization of the field notes, I started writing down what seemed to be both locally and academically interesting. Within my fieldnotes, I found a lot of observations referring to what could be broadly understood and later conceptualized as "landscape". The character of landscape is often interconnected with the enactment of wilderness (Tin, Summerson 2016; Schweitzer, Povoroznyuk, Schiesser 2017; and others). At the same time, it can be understood as a process, relation (Hirsh 1995; Ingold 1993; Law 2004; 2004b). As such, the analysis of landscape and

[6] In academic year 2014/2015 I successfully completed a university course Arctic Nature Guide run by the Arctic University of Norway and University Centre of Svalbard. The broad idea of conducting research on the transformation from place that has been strongly characterized by coal mining to a place that is becoming well known and popular tourist destination was born in experience I went through on Svalbard and discussions with my friends and colleagues from academia. As Bourdieu notes, experiences we go through co-create our perspectives, taste, choices in research topics, forms of emerging knowledge and design of the ethnographical research in general (Bourdieu 1984).

[7] For opportunism and research see for example Riemer 1977.

engagement with landscape is used as a point of departure from with to explore the Euro-American cosmology and (re)production of it basic dichotomization of this dichotomy - the world of objective, the universal and stable reality on one side and the subjective on the other. Although in this understanding the concept of landscape has its analytical advantage exactly for it enables to include above described characteristic of the reality; to be sensitive to heterogeneities, processes, relations, and forms; and to focus on both humans and non-humans.

Guided trips are then occasions which are not only characteristic for current development on Svalbard but also occasions in which it is possible to observe at once and in practice, 1) the agency of both humans and non-humans, 2) the engagement with landscape, and the form it takes and 3) the knowledge emerging within this engagement. Tourists come to Svalbard to see the place, to experience it, to engage with it. The experience and engagement are facilitated by a local guide, and storytelling and knowledge are one of the cores of a guided trip. Tourism and guided trips also as events where the engagement with the landscape is intensive, as the guided group moves in the terrain, different direct and indirect interactions arise between humans, mountains, snow, wind, frost, rocks, animals, etc. These interactions can be quite intensive as many tourists experience cold, terrain, animals, or activities in nature that are characteristic for the Arctic environment (and thus not familiar with their everyday life). Certainly, it provides only a partial picture of the engagement with landscape, but at the same time it is an important form of engagement – not only for the above stated reasons but also because the engagement with the landscape (guided trips in the mountains, valleys or fjords) create the base of tourism on Svalbard.

The landscape then is becoming a "laboratory" – it is not taken for granted, it is an outcome of methodological, theoretical and socio-material practices and relations. It allows many different actants to joint the anthropological problematization (Sanchéz, Estalella 2018: 2). In this paper, and in the process of constructing the research field, it allowed to show how is the landscape done in the ethnography of guided trips on Svalbard.

Engagement with landscape and emerging knowledge

The mutual interactions and relations are one of the core characteristics of the engagement with landscape, and the emerging knowledge on 1) guided trip, 2) in ethnography of guided trips and 3) as a base of Euro-American cosmology which is reproduced on those trips.

The engagement with the landscape on guided trips is characterized by storytelling (connection of landscape features, scientific facts, and imagination into an explanatory story), emphasizing and

bringing alive certain features of the landscape (especially those which are visible or physically accessible to humans) and necessarily marginalizing others. I argued that storytelling on the guided trips on Svalbard is not only discursive but also material practice – they depend on both humans and non-humans, their interactions and relations, as well as on shared Euro-American cosmology.

Theoretical concepts and chosen methods play a significant role as drawers of attention to what is seen (and what is silenced) and as such. Not only discoursively but also materially they co-create the practice of research and data gathering in the construction of the field. It is important to ask what do the theoretical concepts and chosen methods and techniques do or do not allow.

By drawing upon material-semiotics as an ethnographer and by working in the tourist industry as a guide, both roles bring quite an open focus on non-humans. Although slightly different, these approaches are open to the world of non-humans and their agency. It is then not only the combination of method and theory which shapes my attention, research questions and topics. The position and participation in the tourist industry which is at the same time a subject of my research is also generating the form and topic of my research and its participants. At the same time, as the guide is marginalizing something in her storytelling, so am I (so far) in my ethnography. I do pay (more) attention to those moments, non-humans, interactions, relations which are in the focus of the guide. On the other hand, I tend to marginalize the agency of tourists. Future observations of guided trips with another guide (and myself as an observer) can also balance these unintentional flashes of emotions growing from the double role I took.

In this stage and form, I do not provide much of new perspectives on engagement with landscape, but I explore the meaning and matter of landscape not only in the tourist industry but also for me as an ethnographer. What seems to be a silent and empty place, becomes landscape full of humans, non-humans, relations, and interactions. It becomes a process, a living thing. The chosen theoretical perspective, method and the practice of participation, together with the previous education in what I am now studying, those are important factors in the context and history of constructing and enacting in my ethnographical research process and invention (or for now rather reproduction) of forms of thinking about things – not fixed, but relational; not empty, but living.

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