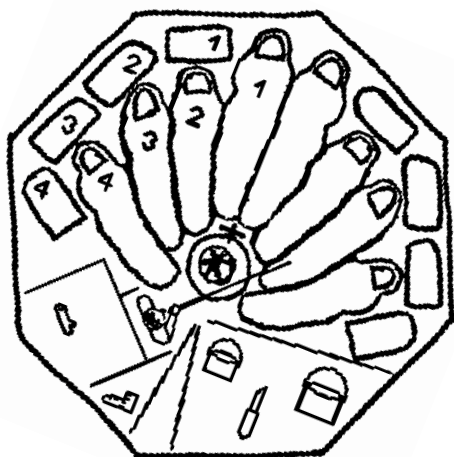


My Title is a Blanket

On ideas as things



Zoe Philine Pingel



First Encounter

Every time – not every single time, but almost – when I walked past the square, I encountered it. Sometimes in an upright position, sometimes on the ground or leaning against the streetlight. I always wanted to take a picture of its random but quite beautiful composition, but I never did. It was not always the same mattress, I realized. Its appearance varied in size, usage and color. When occupied by a body, it became a temporary home. It was a powerful image: the open platform, a stage for everyone to gaze at. And yet a familiar object! A product made for bodies. The square and the mattress became a sanctuary.

At that time I was busy collecting materials to interpret an ancient greek temple for a photo-shoot. I thought about the arrangement and composition of columns and other geometrical forms. The simplicity of the square and the mattress inspired me to work with accessible materials, such as bricks, mirrors, wooden sticks, plastic and fabric. In an homage to an original temple setting, I marked the position of columns with bricks. Golden foils and clear plastic became the wardrobe of the gods. A mirror quickly turned into a pond, reflecting the spotlights around it. In our own Olympia we stood and talked, reflecting on archetypes, imagining how we would create human beings from scratch, maybe out of brown clay. The illusion we created emerged in an unexpected way. Intuitively we cut, folded, draped and composed a space, with elements that arrived by chance. We weren't searching for the appropriate form, we drew immediate consequence of present ideas.

These ideas were transposed from stolen objects, assuming another nature. Ideas as things became our source.¹

The displacement of the mattress revealed new possibilities, providing an endless number of ways to use it, while making the point that there is great beauty in everyday objects. Sometimes it also gave a raw, naked and fragile impression - the mattress thrown into a given scenario.

People looking for a shelter, searching for a place to spend the night, used the mattress to draw a border: this is my place. A frame of safety, where ones own rules count and no others.

The rawness and rage of the situation translates to many mindsets present around the square and city. They are not us – seeking independence. Belonging is portrayed on a surface. The need for protesting and representing identification is not just a current manifestation. I grew up seeing the Catalan flags hanging from balconies. Many surfaces with four red stripes and a white star engraved in one's memory.

I never fully identified with “them” or “us”, despite growing up in that city and very much identifying with its reality. Maybe the idea of a symbol woven into a surface representing a fixed

¹ The term ‘idea’ is a busy one: borrowed by philosophers to give meaning to what is externally existing, revealing itself as a pure thought or suggestion. In the Kantian thought it is a concept of pure reason, not empirically based in experience (definition by Oxford dictionary). I will use this term not with the intention to give it a new definition but rather to think about it as a fluid concept of ways of working. I reflect upon what ideas can be, where we project them and where their true potential lies. This is regarding creative processes, when often designers or artists work towards a “perfect” or “polished” outcome, instead of recognising the potential of the how and the way to get there. This is with the intention to approach my own creative process and define the role of imagination and ideas in my work.

idea was never appealing to me. Instead, I can identify with stolen objects, occupying bricks with ideas, and appropriating the image of the mattress for a certain moment.

What a broad spectrum of associations arises with the mattress as a Gegenstand!

I'd like to introduce the german word *Gegenstand*: 1—an unspecified *thing*, of physicality and form, 2—something that is being treated, synonym of *topic* 3—something, that becomes the *objective* of something else, synonym of *object*. Other synonyms of *Gegenstand* are: article, body, product, part, subject. The word itself consists of two words, typical for the german language, *Gegen* - meaning *against*, and *Stand* - meaning *state*, or *standing position*.

Why is the word itself assuming that objects or products are per se in a standing position? How presumptuous to think that the upright position of an object is the only true form! Opposed to the etymological background of the word *Gegenstand*, something I thought the mattress was, the word *Lager* is very much connected to the mattress. The word *Lager* describes a place of *storage*, *stock*, *inventory* but also *the bed*. *Lager* contains the word *Lage*, which means *condition*, *position* and *layer*, referring to a horizontal, not standing position.

The mattress in use is laying in a horizontal way, made for the body to rest and sleep, something we do half of our lives. I find it peculiar that the human body needs to position itself in a horizontal condition for the sake of existence.

When we lay down on a mattress something very important happens: our perspective changes. Not only ours, but also the others' looking at us.

The change from a vertical to a horizontal position is a transition into the unconscious, our *other* side. Assuming that we are laying on a kind of mattress, during time of unconsciousness, our body becomes part of the setting: mattress, body, blanket. Just in that order.

In-between layers of fabric and stuffing, we transcend into the unconscious. I heard that homeless people rather take off their jacket and use it as a blanket than keeping it on. There is something essential in the covering of our body when we rest (the specific covering!: the flat layer melting onto the shape of our body). This makes me question: is covering indispensable?

The other day I had a conversation about going to bed as a child. When I was young, my bed was my castle. Although the fear of darkness (maybe now the unconsciousness) made me make up *rules*, such as: on the count of three, I have to jump into my bed and be completely covered by my duvet! Or: nothing can stick out of the duvet, not even my hair (this became increasingly difficult due to the lack of fresh air). At times I would also crawl into my bedsheets and pretend I'd be camping somewhere in the wild.

Later on I joined a scouts group with whom I would sleep on tiny mats in a *Kohte* (traditional black tent, with several unusual features, including its design to allow a central fire). In summer we would meet with other scouts in a so called *Lager*. In a *Lager* we would arrange the tents in a circular setting. Building up this setting would take a lot of time and energy. The tents themselves consist of four identical roughly triangular or trapezoidal pieces of heavy canvas, which are connected using a loop-strap system, fastened at the ground with pegs and held together on the top with a cross. Since the *Kohte* is made of separate elements, it

can be distributed among the campers.

I remember carrying a burdensome fabric in my backpack. Once laid down flat on the ground, it was the matter of teamwork to bring them into an upright position. Organizing of the different parts was crucial. We would lay them out as fields, from horizontal to vertical. If badly constructed, the *Kohte* would collapse (one time we woke up to the cold and wet heavy fabric resting on our sleeping bodies, which was a rather unpleasant experience). The tent is meant to be standing! As an ancient model of the living space it has been constant throughout history, always based on the construction of a support system of frames. It is more than just a protective construction, it is a symbol.

In summer 2017 we built a pyramid, the Ephemeral Pyramid². The group consisted of ten young artists, architects and designers who gathered for this event. We cut and painted around 400 wooden sticks and laid them out as fields. From horizontal to vertical. In ancient times, Egyptians would help themselves with wooden structures to build the Pyramids. They would form a series of wooden steps to lift the blocks of stone. One woman, Marta, designed a structure giving an abstract reading to the theory: from a block of stone arises a cube and from there, a line structure. We captured the scenario from different perspectives, including the bird's-eye view (filmed with a drone). Dressed in white working clothes, some of us with hats, we interpreted the pyramid through our bodies. I think the construction became a *Gegenstand*: the pyramid as an *objective* to visualise team-

Weblink to the project: <http://palomawool.tumblr.com/post/166704809933/ephemeral-pyramid-built-in-lagostera-on-july>

work, standing in *physical form* on a field; a *product* of collaborative bodies.

Did it really exist? There was no apparent function or witness, it was deconstructed that same day. If the tent functions as an enclosed space providing shelter, hosting family dramas, military bodies, wandering in nature with scouts, then the pyramid is a Fata Morgana. Something holding mystery, indicating duration. Is the proof of its existence the fact that it had to disappear again? The pyramid was a one day creative company, a conglomerate; a pop up pyramid. My mattress is a *Lager*, and perhaps not a *Gegenstand* at all.

Storage systems:

Outside there is a cabin. It is bigger than a cabin is probably imagined. It stores hay, which is compressed in big bundles, stacked on top of each other. Some are wrapped in black plastic. They become abstract figures, lazy bodies, resting in silence. The hay bundles are neither cubes nor balls. Not conforming with their geometrical intention, they wait to be dismantled. Eventually someone is going to come and take pieces of hay out of one bundle. Then the hay falls apart, spreading over the floor and surrounding objects.

The bundles are protected by a roof, which is supported by a wooden frame structure. Without walls it allows display. Next to open fields, the black bundles rise from the ground, in stacks of one to three stories. It's half exhibition half storage system. The wrapped stacks seem so out of place, and yet completely merge with the sense of that location. They are purely functional, but perhaps become more than that, something that occupies somebodies mind.

Bored black bundles become dangerous. Awaiting their use in the shadows of the cabin, they camouflage as fetish objects³.

It belonged to another body:

I don't know my mattress personally. In fact, it belonged to someone close to me before my time. It belonged to another body, very different than mine. Probably witnessing far more than I'd imagine, it absorbed nightmares, sweat, sickness, rest, intimacy, the smell of books and candles, the warmth of a laptop. It kindly offered a place for pyjamas to rest during day-time.

Its thick skin bares stains, which are covered with fitted sheets. A compact heavy sponge, literally and figurative. The sheets are form fitting, nicely caressing its body. Before my time, it was living in another one's home, and before that, I don't know, probably in a mattress storage system. Where hundreds of mattresses are stored in various forms.

Once I bought a mattress which was rolled up, and I was able to carry it under my arm. The foam base later on soaked with air and got heavy and bothering, there was no rolling back. Other mattresses are stored vertically, wrapped in plastic. They become abstract figures, resting in noisy plastic wraps. Conforming with their

I use the word fetish as an expression of irrational devotion and attention to a particular thing. The hay bundles became my object of commitment, grasping my attention and dragging me away. The word fetish has its origin in factitious (Latin), literally meaning 'made by art', from facere = 'to make' (Oxford dictionary). This indicates that the desired object is manmade, but inhabits a 'spirit' (something external to its physical form), and worshipped because of it. The gratification for objects has not to be of sexual form, but has the possibility to become that.

intention, they shift between upright and laying positioning, until they finally make it to one's home. They determine a space, being part of the specific covering:

fitted sheets – garment – human body
 – garment – cover – duvet – cover.

They tell us true stories, they disgust us, we need them.

The tower of bodies: el castell

Imagine a long piece of black cotton. It warps carefully around ones waist, protecting the lumbar region. Worn by men and women of all ages, differing in height and weight. It binds together; it is part of a uniform; it was once worn by farmers on the fields. The bourgeois adapted it as a sign of power, but it found its way back to the catalan farmers, who made it an essential part of their tradition. They call it: *la faixa*. Is it an accessory? Is it a piece of cloth? Or even a garment? Resistant black fabric wrapped around ones body. It is the most important part of the uniform. Not only does it support the lower back, it is also used as a foothold or handhold when climbing up the tower. The length of the fabric ranges from one to twelve meters and usually is shorter for those higher up in the *castell*. In Catalan, *castell* means castle.

– Ground floor: the base of the tower (*pinya* = “bulk”). A group of strong individuals slowly forms a crowd which functions as a stable base for subsequent levels and also as a safety net, in case the tower collapses. It is the most important step in the construction of the tower, the ground floor determines the stability and the cushioning for people falling out of upper floors. If the first phase of the castle is completed, the first floor

can be built.

– First floor: *Folre* = “cover”/“lining”. The climbers of the second level are already in position on the outside of the base, climbing over the shoulders of the bulk into the center and forming a stable circle by holding each other by a firm grip on the arms. The second level of the tower can vary in the amount of people, depending on the type of tower. If the tower consists of only one person per level, it is called a *pilar* (=“pillar”). For two people per level the castle is called *torre* (=“tower”), for three *tres*, for four *quatre* and for five *cinc*.

– Second floor: *Manilles* = “handles”/“handcuffs”. The higher the castle, the younger and lighter the persons per level. For a third level, climbers use the *faixa* of the second level as a support point to climb on their shoulders. The second level grips onto their ankles. Balance and team communication is required. Usually the subsequent levels form very quickly.

Depending on the levels of the tower, a so called *agulla* (=“needle”) is needed, which is a inner tower of one person per level, stabilising the castle from within.

– Upper floors: *Dosos* (=“the twos”) and *Enxenata* (=“rider”). The last two levels consist of two kids, sustaining and surmounted by the *enxenata*, which is the third and last person of the tower. The child then has to raise it’s arm for the tower to be completed.

Big part of the traditional event is the dismantlement of the tower. In a quick manner the upper levels descent on the backs of the lower levels and are carried to the outsides of the supporting bulk of people.

The event described above is perceived, when witnessed live, as an emblematic dance of bodies.

The flow of the construction and deconstruction of the tower is filled with emotions, suspense and excitement. I consider it very human; in this action of rising collective bodies. I remember them every year on that one square, where they prepared the event: children running around excited legs, torsos being wrapped in thick cotton. Barefoot, they organized themselves to form a solid crowd. Somehow they found logic and order in the chaos surrounding them. Without saying much they positioned themselves, making eye contact. Whether you intend it or not, if you see such formation of people, you are close to their tense bodies, to the symbolic aura, to an apprehension of collapse. There is nothing required other than their presence and *la faixa*, the only garment needed.

A tower is never a tower:

I wonder when was the moment someone decided to climb on the others' shoulders. Was it to play? To celebrate? To show body- strength or have a wider view? Is the desire to make a human tower something we inhabit? Do we long for that image or do we actually physically need that tower: the idea of a tower versus the physicality of an actual tower. In a section of Plato's dialogues, "the republic", the philosopher questions the relation between a physical table made by a carpenter and the idea or definition of a table in the carpenter's mind⁴. With every table the carpenter makes, he tries to come as close as possible to the idea of a table. His attempts will of course fall short, since every table is never the same. Plato establishes this ideal in one's head and goes as far as to say

that the “creator of the cosmos” lived the same relationship as the carpenter to his table. This “creator” created according to an idea or plan, thus everything is just a copy of his/her ideal. This is due to the given materia, which limits our ideal and compresses it into a shape.

In other words, there are two fields: the one of ideas, including the ideal of everything, and the one of materia, meaning the one of all the imperfect copies of those ideas.

What is of importance of Plato’s writing here is the introduction of two worlds with two realms. He refers to the one of the ideas and forms as the primary one and the physical world as secondary, he allows these to exist next to each other and assigns them individual levels of reality.

One world changes (materia) while the other remains stable, permanent and reliable (ideal) ⁵.

5

This statement is questionable against the background of our current virtual presence in an online world. Is my Instagram profile a formable material or an idea of such? Can my continuously changing news feed shape my ‘real’ person and vice versa? This ‘third’ world, as Plato hadn’t knew back then, puts a new level on the concept of “the idea and the thing”. I take my phone to bed. My online presence gets to rest in my sheets and watches over my sleeping body. A vertical chain of news in my feed, a left and right swipe, endless scrolling downwards to updated images. Quite promising, this continuum of movements that interlace the material phone and my physical hand to a virtual ‘studio space’. A space where I am my own creator, so I’d like to think. And even with knowledge about leaks and hackers, I comfortably continue to swipe and scroll and tap and double-tap. My point is, that my virtual activity, where I exist physically and virtually at the same time, might need to be added to Plato’s story about only two worlds. This might be important in relation to my role as an artist, where I can no longer think that ideas are permanent and that materia is imperfect. My virtual me is as real as my physical me (real as in something present at a particular moment in time). This intersection might be the ‘third’ world, with its own realm.

The philosopher eventually mentions that the observation of physical objects (specially geometrical ones) might even inspire the immaterial. The perception of an object reaches our personal memory and perhaps contains a memory on its own. Plato refers to it as the “study object” and declares that the greatest research method is its observation.

El castell, the human tower, is something purely made to observe (if not participating, a perspective I cannot represent). In my opinion, this makes it very human. The possible conflict between ideal and materia vanishes in the presence of bodies, and only bodies. A tower of bodies! Of minds connected for a certain moment, of black cotton stripes holding these bodies together. Every *castell* is unique, dismantled and of no permanence. *La faixa* therefore exists as something more than a garment: a gesture.

While Plato’s objection towards artist and designers was their betrayal and distortion of theoretically immaterial forms (ideas) shaped into material, Flusser, in his chapter “About the word Design” in *The shape of things*, states that “the design behind all culture has to be deceptive (artful?) enough to turn mere mammals conditioned by nature into free artists”⁶. Flusser understands design in a different way seeing it as a fit subject for etymological analysis. Therefore he goes back to the roots of words such as *design*, *art*, *technology* and *machine*, showing their connection and finally declaring that design is the basis of all culture: deceiving nature by means of technology and creating

the artificial (to be a human being is a design against nature). Next he introduces the danger of the question of Design replacing that of the Idea, leading to devaluation of design objects:

“the great ideas behind them are treated with the same contempt as the material and work behind them”⁷. While his essay reflects on the deceptive side of the word Design, he mentions that one could also focus on *sign* in the word: “a sign of the times, a sign of things to come, a sign of membership”⁸, which leads to a more positive conclusion that: everything depends on de – sign.

And then, all of a sudden, they invaded my laptop. As I kept scrolling, they kept on appearing on my Facebook news feed. They were everywhere: box spring mattresses from 175 to 355 Euro, used and new, sofas and cushions, beds and covers. Memes about used mattresses on eBay. They were all over my webpages. They spread over the display onto the streets. As my roommate opened the door I saw it rolled up and hold together by a rope. And later on another one, folded unnaturally, squeezed in between two trash containers. Soaked in rainwater, no longer usable, stuck forever in a state of uncertainty. Nervously I bike on the streets of Amsterdam, foreseeing their dooms day.

About pneuma; my bed in motion

My mattress is pneumatic. The *p* is silent, the word almost sounds like nomadic. A pneumatic thing is operated or filled with air. Originally from the greek *pneumatikos*, from *pneuma* ‘wind’, from *pnein* ‘breathe’. So first, there was a breath. Then material,

which soaked up the air. Filled and stored, compressed and bloated, blown up and puffy. Something soft, something strong, something containing something. On a higher level it is the vital, soul or the creative force. In greek it literally means 'that which is breathed or blown'. I imagine something pneumatic as something that contains a memory. An invisible force, witnessing absolutely everything, maybe selecting what to remember. If it gets the chance, this force is stored in materia. Such as my mattress, but also my lungs. My lungs contain my pneuma. They also collapsed at times in my life. Those times brought me back to my mattress, my blankets, my pillows, my duvet, my puffer coat, welcoming me back to their soft bodies. It is the material that sustains consciousness in a body. It animates, sets in motion, becomes and creates duration.

My bed as a state of vulnerability could be an open platform. I open up, right here, whilst rushing through my archive of stored scenarios and rituals surrounding the bed. The bed never comes alone: usage is his partner in crime. Inspired by the stories they tell me, I rediscover my bed and use it as a reference. I speculate on meaning revolving the bed — I desire new angles in perceiving objects.

I questioned people who would do their bed in the morning, and now I am becoming one of them. I still don't know if I like a cold smooth satin surface more than a warm, lightly raw touch of flannel or Egyptian cotton (think about that moment when you turn your pillow and rest your face on the cold side). I am still figuring out if all white bed sheets make me happier than bold coloured like the ones of my mother. She

is very convinced about the influence of colours on the body and dreams. I still enjoy the hairs which my cat left on my covers. I still suffer when a loved one left my bed, it makes me sleep on one side for many nights, until I find my way back to the middle. I still don't know why he gets so obsessed with removing all the crumbs from the mattress before going to bed (he has a specific way of doing so: first, dramatically removing the duvet cover, then he kneels on the end of the mattress and with both of his hands, he makes symmetrical movements on the surface; as if he was swimming). I still remember the times I shared my bed, when we moved out of that apartment, and when she got pregnant. I still remember how I visited her and slept on that thin and uncomfortable mattress she kept in the basement. It was folded two times and stored in a thick plastic. It had this retro looking pattern, reminding me of a nineties wind jacket. I still wonder where my bed takes me when I rest. My bed is: slumber, relaxation, rest, artistic muse, an aesthetic thing, dramatic folds and pleads, a place of traumatic and sublime experiences, my personal space.

My experience of working in bed

In winter 2016 I fell sick.

The frustration and worry accumulated into one big question: How will I work now?

I started to list materials and tools available around me which allowed me to work from my bed. I had found a white duvet blanket a week earlier in a box on the street. I had taken it home and thought to maybe work with it, but hadn't made my mind up on what for. So I took the blanket and made several symmetrical cuts in the center. I hand-sew the openings so the fillings

wouldn't fall out. The stitching took me a lot of time, but I was assured by the calming fact that I had all the time I needed. That is how I spent around two weeks working from bed.

The experience was very important. I often have to think about the setting that I was positioned in back then: my room and my bed, my body underneath two blankets – one covering me, one that was my project, my work and occupation. It also covered me. It was soft, warm, and allowed my body to heal. I was nice to the material, and the material was nice to me. With only a few cuts and stitches I created a work about privacy, home, shelter in an outfit and an outfit as a shelter. I think this work and experience was essential in the way I perceive material and the way I want to work in the future. Taking something existing and bringing it 'home': questioning its thingness and bringing it back to a new context.

Ending, outlook, last thoughts and a possible conclusion

What started as an observation of a mattress on that particular square, continues on persisting in my daily life. I have the desire to look at whatever object and compare it to the mattress, creating a fantasy platform to unfold my observations. The actual study of things and their positioning is making me aware of their context. And then - to place them in my mind, matching and measuring them, imagining another context and time.

I envy my childhood, when I was able to jump on my bed and turn it into a ship that would save me from dangerous waters.

This image emerged in an intuitive way of acting, giving a material thing another meaning, making it into something else. It is more the projection than the actual material thing that is of importance in this specific moment. It constructs the object, it has the power to transform it. I'd like to refer to it as "ideas as things".

Exploring the relationship of the human and material things, *ideas as things* describes the way we charge an object with an idea, that later on can be changed and re-charged. What seems more than a mere surface, is partially a leakage and can be filled with an idea or content. Like a void behind the clean surface of a product, a pneumatic world of ideas. Picture the moment a table would become a roof. That time we sang into our hair brush to a song of our favourite boyband. When we covered our eyes with a scarf and disappeared. Considering this relationship between the context of a thing and its thingness, the way an idea can become a thing and vice versa inspires new ways of creating, focussing on the "how" rather than the "what".

When I started to write this essay I wanted to find my true and free form of writing, different than past attempts. I (re-)discovered encounters, re-researched in my memories and compared them to words. I dug in the history of those words and was led to newer thoughts about these and to even older memories. I found (out) simple objects can channel my true fascination with the relation of words and ideas, materials, concepts and things.

In retrospect I see *parallels*: 1. me and my personal encounter with a 'thing' (+imagination), 2. the social component in these things, such as the pyramid, the human tower, the construction of the tent, etc.

I can see *movement*: the act of laying down, emerging towers, elevating tents, and cybernetic mattresses, for example. It might be about the bed and the rising pyramid of bodies at the same time. Connected through textiles which tell their stories, showing in daily rituals when one thinks no one is watching. These observations intersect in, above, underneath and on that surface and reveal the way I think and work. Studying ways of cutting into paper, inventing terms such as 'immediate textiles'. I also see *constitution*: the quality and condition of the mattress and the square, the exact way a tower is constructed, the proximity to my body as a scale. And then there is *duration*: the bodiless mattress thrown out on the street, the collapse of a tent, the dismantlement of a pyramid.

I present my writing to you as a collection of thoughts, gathering on a platform that I consider a surface – now, not staying on that surface but going close to it, looking for its proximities and depths. An intimate archive of unofficial phenomena, the way I view and physically experience things, categorizing, measuring and matching them. I display these written thoughts for those who find beauty and inspiration in daily life. Taking an object of discussion, holding it up to their face, turning it, hiding and showing it, tasting and dreaming of it. Looking for what it is made of and what it could become.

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Kein Raum sagt so viel über dich aus wie dein Schlafzimmer:
https://ze.tt/kein-raum-sagt-so-viel-ueber-dich-aus-wie-dein-schlafzimmer/?utm_campaign=ref&utm_content=zett_zon_parkett_teaser_x&utm_medium=fix&utm_source=zon_zettaudev_int&wt_zmc=fix.int.zettaudev.zon.ref.zett.zon_parkett.teaser.x

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My mother,
she believes in colors. Her bed is always colorful.
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