Chapter three- Ruins as a Liminal Space

Liminal (adjective)- Of or pertaining to the threshold\(^\text{149}\); of, relating to, or being, in an intermediate state, phase, or condition.\(^\text{150}\)

4.1 Introduction

If chapter one explored the dynamics of sacred space and chapter two was an investigation of the temporal aspects of sacred ruins, then chapter three unites these strands of thought in the concept of liminality. Where chapter one reflects on themes of construction, unity, and existential dwelling, chapter three illuminates the ways in which ruins are passed through, lending themselves to playful performances in which themes of transition and motion are key. In a sense, if Hocking’s Ziggurat tries to complete the ruin, chapter three shows an openness to the temporal and spatial ambiguity of these spaces. In fact, this ambiguity is embraced as an essential means of cultural critique. We also see echoes of chapter two, in which Hocking alerts us to the ghosts embedded in the histories of urban space; as we shall go on to discuss, the haunted margins of urban space, as well as being potential sites of historical mourning, also act as positive stimuli for transgressive recombinations of cultural roles, spaces and symbols, making them valuable resources for current inhabitants to stake a claim on their city.

This brings us to the third and final case study I will discuss: Scott Hocking’s Egg and Michigan Central Station, a symbol which I argue represents the ruin as a liminal space. The egg, or cairn, as symbols of transition or journey from one life stage to another, is particularly effective in invoking the limen, or threshold. What is liminality, and why is the notion of a border zone or threshold significant within the context of the ruin? What possibilities does the ‘loose space’ of ruin offer for the critique of existing cultural elements? What does it tell us about the potential of the ruin as a space of transition between decay and regeneration rather than as a economic ‘dead’ zone, a spatial void in stasis? In order to answer these questions, I will first begin by discussing Victor Turner’s concept of liminality in some detail before finally discussing Hocking’s Egg/Cairn sculpture- and why this

\(^{149}\) Found in ‘Liminal Landscapes: Travel, Experience and Spaces In-Between’, edited by Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts, Routledge, 2012, pp 1

latter symbol, a symbol of motion, is particularly interesting in the context of a disused space of transit: the train station.

### 4.2 Turner on Liminality

Victor Turner, an early 20th century anthropologist, is generally credited with revitalising the rather forgotten concept of the liminal. The term, resurrected from the writings of Arnold van Gennep’s 1909 *Rites de Passage*, was originally intended to apply to personal life transitions, including weddings, births, funerals, adolescence and other such shifts in social status- yet Turner argued it could also be applied to spaces, objects and words as well as rites of passage. Van Gennep described three pivotal stages in such rites: separation, transition, and reincorporation (Turner, 1974). During the period of separation, sacred and profane space and time are clearly delimited; a ‘cultural realm’ is constructed in which secular symbols are ‘reversed’ or ‘inverted’, and ‘ritual subjects’ are ‘detached’ from their social roles (Turner, 1974). The middle phase, and the most important for our purposes, is that of transition- the liminal phase, from *limen*, meaning ‘threshold’ or ‘margin’. This is described by Turner as “a period and area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo”. It is “an interval, no matter how brief, of margin or limen, when the past is momentarily negated, suspended or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance”. The concept of ‘threshold’ and ‘transition’, as well as ‘margin’, all, as Turner points out, carry negative connotations; “no longer the past positive condition nor yet the positive articulated future condition” as he puts it. This brings to mind the discussions of William Viney, who writes widely on the topic of waste, narrativity and temporality. Waste (and by extension, ruin) is no longer, and simultaneously not yet. How to narrate this condition, then, positively, and actively? This state of spatial and temporal detachment and transition, I will argue, is highly pertinent in relation to the ruin, and is expressed by what Turner refers to as *sacra*: visual, oral and written expressions of the liminal in all its diverse forms. I will focus primarily on Hocking’s cairn (what Turner would call a *sacra* of ‘exhibition’); and the *sacra* of actions, ‘what is done’- expressed in the act of urban exploration through the liminal space of the ruin. Before we delve deeper into the transitional stage, however, I will outline the third and final stage discussed by

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153 Ibidem, pp 72
Van Gennep and Turner. The final phase is reincorporation, in which the ritual subject returns to a new, stable social position; they are reincorporated into the hierarchy of roles and statuses. Such rites often serve to elevate their subjects. Social transition is often paralleled by movement through space— for example, across a threshold, or down a passage, along a demanding route of pilgrimage. Social and geographical transition thus go hand in hand, at the same time as social roles, symbols, spaces and meanings are blurred, reversed, and recombined. Subjects are ‘humbled’ before they can be permanently elevated; their roles and status must be obliterated before they are restored back into the social hierarchy.

The removal of ritual subjects from the social sphere and the isolation from the protective shield of norms and values brings with it a great freedom. In their ill-defined social detachment, their temporary ‘non status’, initiates are exempt from social obligations. This allows darker, more cosmic, and more profound forces to come to the fore. I quote Turner here at some length:

In liminality, profane social relations may be discontinued, former rights and obligations are suspended, the social order may seem to have been turned upside down. By way of compensation, cosmological systems… may become of central importance for the novices. They are confronted by the elders, in rite, myth, song, instruction in a secret language, and various non-verbal symbolic gestures (such as dancing, painting, clay-molding, wood carving, masking and the like), with symbolic patterns and structures which amount to teachings about the structure of the cosmos and their culture as part and product of it… Liminality is a complex series of episodes in sacred space-time…

Not only do sacred, mythological and cosmic symbols emerge in liminal spaces, but they do so in confused, inverted and ambiguous ways. Familiar cultural elements are rearranged, often in ‘grotesque’ forms; it is only by encountering defamiliarised elements that we can truly experiment with what Brian Sutton-Smith, quoted by Turner, calls ‘anti-structure’: “the latent system of potential alternatives from which novelty will arise when contingencies in the normative system require it”. He goes on to argue that “We might more correctly call this second system the *proto-structural* system because it is the precursor of innovative normative forms. *It is the source of new culture.*”

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154 Ibidem, pp 60

155 Brian Sutton-Smith, Games of Order and Disorder, 1972, quoted in ibidem, pp 60, emphasis mine.
As Turner argues, and indeed, as Tim Edensor has argued directly in relation to ruins, “we have something to learn through being disorderly”; and later, that liminality is “the seedbed of cultural creativity.” As Turner sees it, it is where meaning is generated—precisely in the ambiguous interface where “the bizarre becomes the normal.” Novices, as he calls them, are encouraged to play with and rearrange the heretofore taken for granted symbols and elements of culture. Though ‘negative’ in the sense that the liminal occupies a strange ‘in-between’, it is precisely in such interstitial space that culture itself is regenerated. It is a space of potential, chaos and experimentation. What is learned, explored, questioned and challenged is then reincorporated back into the dominant social structure. Such ‘reincorporation’ of the ruin, for example, can be said to occur when such spaces are reused as sites of industrial heritage. To what extent they can then truly serve to question the use of latent space in a capitalist society is open to debate.

4.3 Liminal or liminoid?

Turner argues that this understanding of liminality applies only to traditional, cyclical societies rather than industrialised societies, and that this distinction is mandated by the different approaches each takes to the distinctions between ‘leisure’ ‘play’ and ‘work’. The liminal detachment of individuals from a traditional, cyclical society is mandated; it is not a matter of ‘leisure’, but of ‘sacred work’. This work, although experimental, is also circumscribed by strict expectations. Ritual is a social obligation, undertaken to maintain the health of the collective, and although a form of sacred work, also an expression of serious play. In reflecting, manipulating and creating symbolic objects, such play performs the serious work of promoting the ‘cosmic health’ of society. Play, as Turner reminds us, is not only about ‘fun’, but also a form of ‘exercise’, as well as ‘battle’ (Turner, 1974). This echoes Edensor’s argument about the seriousness and importance of play (2005). In industrialised societies, however, communal ritual has all but disappeared. In a capitalist system, individuals utilise their leisure time, strictly separated from work, to indulge in various artistic and creative pursuits. But these are generally understood as trivial, banal. Interesting, meaningful, perhaps, but not something to be taken too seriously. There is no ‘sacred work’ with elements of ‘serious play’, expressed through ritual. There is art, literature, poetry and theatre. These elements can be present; yet they are a matter of individual choice and consumption, rather than a matter of collective experience.

156 Ibidem, pp 60
157 Ibidem
For postindustrial leisure activities, Turner reserves the term *liminoid*. The Liminoid, according to Turner, is industrial society’s version of the liminal; an experimentation with symbols outside of work, a creative undertaking which can “generate and store a plurality of alternative models for living… which are capable of influencing the behaviour of those in mainstream social and political roles… in the direction of radical change.”

In other words, creative endeavours- art, literature, poetry, theatre, film- can all function as critical spaces, to question dominant social norms, structures and values. Art is serious play- and can function as a generative force in service of the collective good. Play is, as Turner quotes Jean Piaget, “a kind of free assimilation, without accommodation to spatial conditions or to the significance of the objects.”

Note that here, play is seen as an intrinsically serious activity. It is the “freedom to enter, even to generate, new symbolic worlds of entertainment… It is… freedom to play- with ideas, with fantasies, with words… Leisure is potentially capable of releasing powers, individual or communal…” Thus, although not mandated by the collective as in traditional sacred societies, although a matter of free, individual choice, ‘leisure’ can still perform the serious work of questioning dominant social structures- and perhaps even changing them. Finally, Turner argues that as communal ritual has been erased, the new sacred domain is that of work, rather than the sacred play of traditional societies. This echoes the discussions of chapter one, in which I used Mark Fisher’s arguments about the faith in capitalism as a parallel to the sacred institutions of our religious past. In a capitalist society, work is sacred and play is often seen as trivial. In the context of genres such as the ruin photograph, it is clearly the liminoid which is of greatest interest and importance. These are the products of leisure in a non-sacred, optional context.

Yet, Hocking’s photographs share many aspects of Turner’s sacred liminal. They reflect on and construct cosmic themes and symbols, and seem to be less the product of trivial introspection than community-facing ‘work’. They delimit a sacred space, an ‘in-between’ in which dominant social structures are challenged and subverted. Thus, although they are technically products of liminoid leisure, they do not wholly fit the liminoid status as Turner describes it. While it is necessary and useful to remember Turner’s distinction between these terms, it is also important to realise that Hocking’s work blurs these boundaries; and that Turner does, in fact acknowledge that both the limi-

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158 Ibidem, pp 65
159 Jean Piaget, Play, Dream and Imitation, 1962, quoted in ibidem, pp 66
inal and the liminoid “coexist in a sort of cultural pluralism.” For Hocking’s work is predominantly concerned with “social-structural rhythms or with crises in social processes”; it seems to be prompted by a break in the order of things; in the spatial, cosmic and socio-economic order of the city, and to be a matter of ‘serious play’ rather than banal leisure. Likewise, If Turner argues that liminal phenomena are reintegrated back in to the centre, while the liminoid remains a product of the margins, fragmented and experimental, then what are we to make of the genre of contemporary ruin photography in general? Work by artists such as Hocking would seem to encompass both elements: a product of the margins which is soon reincorporated back to the centre of capitalist commodification. A similar point pertains to Turner’s distinction between the liminal as a confrontation of “collective representations… symbols having a common intellectual and emotional meaning for all members of a given group” versus the liminoid, which he argues is “more idiosyncratic or quirky… generated by specific named individuals and in particular groups.”

Again, it is hard to characterise Hocking’s work so neatly in the liminoid alone. For while his work is undoubtedly idiosyncratic, the creative output of an individual, it utilises universal symbols of cosmic and mythical significance: cairns, eggs, pyramids, totems, huts, the sun. His is a perfect example of Turner’s liminal ‘reversal’ and ‘inversion’ of a sacred collective representation. His individual take on these powerful collective symbols is their positioning within the space of ruin- another symbol in itself of powerful, collectively shared, and often negative, connotations. Work such as Hocking’s “does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent,” to quote Homi Bhaba; “it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The ‘past-present’ becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living.” Bhaba’s argument, which was widely influential in the field of postcolonial studies, claimed that nations and cultures should be understood as ‘interstitial’ ‘hybrid’ constructions, in which essentialist readings of nationhood are displaced by ‘interrogatory’ discourses of difference and marginality. A focus on the fault lines helps to break hegemonic narratives which only serve to naturalise differences between the cultural identities of colonised and coloniser, black and white, man and woman etc (Bhaba, 1994). This appeal to the incorporation of difference in and

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161 Ibidem, pp 86
162 Ibidem, pp 85
163 Ibidem, pp 85
164 Homi Bhaba, 2009, The Location of Culture, quoted in Mahesh Sharma, The Liminality of Contemporary Culture, Bodhi, An Interdisciplinary Journal of Culture, Vol 6, No.1, pp 115
through the margins is strikingly reminiscent of the ruin, in which the meaning of marginal space is not understood in static, pre-given terms, but is subject to a process of continual negotiation through performance. We may also recall Turner’s notion of ‘sacred poverty’ here, in which the invisibility, ambiguity and lowly status of the ruin is seen as a vital lifeline and generating force in the present. For this is what the liminal does; it does not mandate permanent separation and therefore isolation, but facilitates a ‘loose space’ of transcendent otherness in which to reflect, play with and incorporate difference. It works as a revisionary mechanism, and thus acts as an ethical call to action rather than as an excuse for mere spectatorship. How is loose, liminal space generated in the ruin, and who by? Furthermore, what ‘call to action’ does this re-appropriation of space provoke?

4.4 Loose space and transgression

The active reshaping of space is characteristic of what Franck and Stevens (2007) refer to as ‘loose space’. Loose space occurs when individuals explore and utilise the possibilities of space, ignoring control and emphasising freedom of choice. Loose spaces are the inversion of regulated, designated urban spaces with a particular function; they are ambiguous and indeterminate, much like the liminal itself. Because these spaces are unhinged from any specific use and cannot easily be used to code social status, they become playgrounds of exploration. It remains open to question as to just how useful, or indeed original, such a concept actually is; particularly when viewed against existing perspectives such as Lefebvre’s social production of space and de Certeau’s ‘practiced place’ which seem to serve the purpose more than adequately. Lefebvre, for example, wrote about the re-appropriation of spaces through social practice back in 1974, citing the Halles Centrales in Paris, which was transformed from a food market to a ‘centre of play’ and a ‘semi-permanent festival’ through disuse. Yet Loose space restates these ideas eloquently in a contemporary context and can therefore be of use, particularly as the authors explicitly link their ideas to the concept of the liminal.

Loose space for Franck and Stevens is first and foremost about seizing the opportunities of spatial ambiguity. Loose space- and its inversion, ‘tight’ or regulated space- is constantly shifting, always in the process of being negotiated. It is appropriated, utilised, and then reincorporated back into the fold of ‘productive’ urban space. As the authors put it,

Loose space is characterised by an absence or abeyance of the determinacy which is common in place types with assigned and limited functions… The indeterminacy of loose space, along with free access, opens the space to other possibilities… to activities not anticipated, to activities that
have no other place, to activities that benefit from a relative lack of control and economic constraints. Freedom is a prerequisite of loose space for people to be able to pursue possibilities of their choice. Freedom is also a consequence of loose space as people’s actions generate more possibilities, possibilities of a political, commercial, or experimental nature.\textsuperscript{165}

Loose spaces, like liminal spaces, are about freedom from constraint, the embracing of ambiguity, and the potential to play with and critique social norms. This emphasis on ambiguity and indeterminacy bring to mind Dylan Trigg’s description of marginal spaces, in which he argues that “…a margin is created on the border of space in which particular space is categorised. In the city-site, what falls into the margin is the indeterminate realm of the organic and the discarded.”\textsuperscript{166} This indeterminacy, Trigg argues, is often associated with darkness, danger, and wilderness- which makes it “a threat to the domain of reason.”\textsuperscript{167} Again, such language closely parallels that of Turner’s liminal spaces, in which ambiguous space is often associated with shamanism, death, and the monstrous confusion of categories. The liminal is the dissolute, the decaying, the invisible. These unsettling symbols, emphasising the detachment of such spaces and those who move through them from the rational, centred, ordered space of society, are precisely what enable reflection on concepts of the ‘possible’, ‘desirable’, ‘acceptable’, ‘strange’, and ‘transgressive’ (Franck and Stevens, 2007). We cannot question these categories when safely ensconced on the right side of the border. We must cross over, away from the protective stratifications of normative space before we can generate anything new. The “special form of despair…that has everything to do with displacement from one’s usual habitat”\textsuperscript{168} that Edward Casey refers to is a necessary condition of discovery in liminal spaces.

Hence, transgression and even danger are frequently part of appropriating loose space. The concept of transgression is closely related to that of liminality. To transgress has a spatial as well as ethical etymology; to transgress, from the Latin \textit{transgrendi}, means to pass through a boundary, to cross

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{165} Karen A. Franck & Quentin Stevens, Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life, Routledge, 2007, pp 17
\item \textsuperscript{167} Ibidem, pp 129
\item \textsuperscript{168} Edward Casey, quoted in ibidem, pp 129
\end{itemize}
over (Westphal, 2007) as well as to violate a moral norm. Thus liminality is always an issue of motion. For while liminal objects and spaces recombine cultural elements in playful and critical ways, in order to subvert the dominant social order, this questioning and recombining always takes place in the context of transition, of moving away from the centre. Liminality is a passing from one point to another. It is the in-between, an intermediate state of flux. It is both spatial and temporal, connoting process rather than state. And this, again, is why I find it to be a concept so beautifully fitted to the ruin; for the ruin is a perfect encapsulation of the transition between the life of a space and its death, between culture and the reclamation of nature, between the porous boundaries of normative city space and its margins, between, in Hocking’s works, the sacred and the profane, between past and future and stasis versus motion. Ruins are mutable spaces; their elements are jumbled and coarse. It is the ability to bear witness to transition which Garrett argues is lacking in polished sites of national ‘heritage’; as he puts it, “something is missing when we cannot anticipate transience… We cannot see ourselves written into the futures of these places because we are not allowed to inscribe ourselves there.”

The ability to inscribe, to witness, reflect on, and actively rearrange the elements of space, are all features of the ruin, and describe the process that occurs in any liminal space: the active reshaping of its elements. This is heritage as process and experience rather than static artefact; as Laura Jane Smith argues, “The idea of heritage is an act of communication and meaning-making”. Meaning is assigned to places and objects through practice, not given to us by predetermined value judgements. Bradley Garrett echoes Smith when he argues that we often let ourselves be told what places have meaning and why, rather than ask ourselves the question based on our own experiences. We need to learn, in Garrett’s words, to "take the unguided tour". It is exactly this ability, the ability to narrate places through our own agency, our own experience, which is curtailed in the managed heritage site- and a consequence, I would argue, of the ruin’s ‘reincorporation’ as industrial heritage. If heritage dictates our reading of lost places (or precludes the possibility of ‘lost’ places at all) then “the logic of the liminal… calls for a learned reconciliation with our malignant sites”, as Lee Rozelle so beautifully puts it. This is the power of the liminoid practices described in this chapter; they allow us to redefine places on our own terms.

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169 Bradley L. Garrett, Explore Everything: Place Hacking the City, Verso, 2014, pp 53
171 Bradley L. Garrett, Urban Exploration as Heritage Placemaking, in Reanimating Industrial Spaces: Conducting Memory Work in Post-Industrial Societies, Edited by Hilary Orange, Routledge pp 81
4.5 Urban Exploration and the Communitas of Ruin

There is one example of liminoid practice more than any other which embraces the transience of liminal space in order to question social norms, and that, I would argue, is the practice of Urban Exploration. The shrugging off of social status, hierarchy and roles enables individuals in loose or liminal spaces to access what Turner calls *communitas*, or a sense of genuine, spontaneous unity. If society is characterised by normative constraints, then communitas is a condition of “free and innovative relationships between individuals,” a “direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities…. a mutual understanding on the existential level.” Turner’s ‘normative’ communitas, is a “perduing social system,”; a “subculture or group which attempts to foster and maintain relationships of spontaneous communitas” and one typically characterised by freedom and liberation. Communitas of all kinds is always defined in relation to the dominant social structure; it is a way of critiquing that structure from a position of detachment, yet ensconced with others- whether physically, normatively, or both. Such descriptions, I argue, readily call to mind descriptions made by scholars such as Bradley Garrett (2014) who I discussed in chapter two and who has written widely on the practice of urban exploration. Garrett argues that explorers are “enraptured by those moments when the seen and unseen, the possible and impossible, the self and the community, fuse.” It is in the fractured, marginal, loose space of the ruin that communitas is fostered, in which explorers and, by extension, artists such as Hocking express a normative commitment to critiquing and subverting the dominant spatial order. The combination of risk, danger, subversion and darkness mixed with the potential for creative discovery closely match Turner’s descriptions of the liminal/liminoid. It is a challenge to which spaces should be utilised and which are off limits; and it is a plea for the type of communitas Turner describes above. As Garett (2014) later argues,

explorers are recoding people’s normalised relationships to city space… Urban explorers make it clear that the city is not as secure as some may suggest, and that… by undertaking risks to probe

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173 Ibidem
174 Ibidem, pp 79
175 Ibidem, pp 80
176 Ibidem, pp 15
those boundaries, one can create opportunities for creativity, discovery and friendship, and even uncover the places and histories that those in power would prefer remain hidden.\footnote{Ibidem}

Explorers and artists who work within abandoned spaces challenge the idea of what is possible versus what is permitted, undermining the spatial order of control, surveillance and distraction through recreational spending and entertainment in pursuit of the spontaneous communitas described by Turner. Hocking’s practice of working in abandoned spaces closely echoes such a critique of the spatial order, and questions in particular the negative evaluation of ruined space and our tendency to write off the ruin as a dead zone. While explorers subvert these elements of culture through the very act of their entry into abandoned spaces, Hocking literally recombines, rearranges and subverts the elements of ruin in his sculptures crafted from debris. This third and final case study will therefore discuss Hocking’s contribution to the critical re-use of the ruin by recourse to the ultimate symbol of liminality and one of his most arresting pieces: the cairn, or \textit{Egg and Michigan Central Station}. In this section, I discuss the sacred meaning of the cairn, and its significance within a space of former transit: the railway station. I argue that Hocking’s use of this particular symbol in this particular space functions to transform the ‘non-place’ of the transit terminal to a sacred, liminal space of creative potential.

\subsection*{4.6 Liminality and the cairn: a symbol of the in-between}

Hocking’s \textit{Egg} sculpture fits neatly into Turner’s classification of ‘exhibition sacra’, or “evocatory instruments or sacred articles, such as relics… masks, images, figurines and effigies”.\footnote{Victor W. Turner, Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in \textit{Rites de Passage}, reprinted from Turner, The Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society, 1964, Symposium on New Approaches to the Study of Religion, pp 51} Such sacred objects are formally simple, yet substantially complex. They are used to teach initiates in matters of theology and the cosmos (Turner, 1964). Often through the formal attributes and playful rearrangement of ‘the monstrous’ the ‘disproportionate’ and the ‘mysterious’, the strangeness of sacred objects and images challenge us “to distinguish clearly between the different factors of reality… Monsters startle neophytes into thinking about objects, persons, relationships, and factors of their environment they have hitherto taken for granted.”\footnote{Victor W. Turner, Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in \textit{Rites de Passage}, reprinted from Turner, The Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society, 1964, Symposium on New Approaches to the Study of Religion, pp 52-53} Familiar elements of culture are reduced
and recombined in strange ways, making the liminal a “realm of primitive hypothesis”. The expression of sacra, Turner goes on to claim, “presented with a numinous simplicity, stamp into the neophytes the basic assumptions of their culture.” They do so by abstracting and re-presenting various elements of it, in monstrous, absurd, and unsettling ways.

Although Hocking’s breathtaking sculptures could hardly be termed as ‘monstrous’, they are a recombination of the cultural element- rubble- which is itself thought so unsettling. They re-present rubble with a ‘numinous simplicity’, allowing their spectators- the ‘neophytes’ who move through the ruin- to reconsider ‘the basic elements of their culture’. They provoke us to question our assumptions of the liminal, transitory and dark space of ruin, by emphasising such processes of transition and decay as beautiful, necessary and transcendent. They embrace the inherent liminality of the space itself, and cause us to look at rubble and the organic processes which accompany it with fresh eyes.

180 Ibidem, pp 53
181 Ibidem
The particular sculpture I will discuss here is Hocking’s *Egg and Michigan Central Station (subti-\textit{tled AKA Andy Goldsworthy Did Not Invent the Fucking Cairn}).*\textsuperscript{182} Described as both an egg and a cairn, which share the same ovoid form, the sculpture was crafted from thousands of marble fragments which once lined the walls of Detroit’s central station. Eggs, which represent creation, potential, and primordial matter, share many symbolic similarities with the cairn. Although it is on the latter I will mainly concentrate, the themes of creation and potential are of obvious importance within the context of ruined space. I find the cairn particularly interesting, however, because it has been used for many thousands of years to denote both sacred spaces and spaces of travel or transit.

In the context of the disused train station, this is especially fitting. Cairns are acknowledged to have been used at least since Prehistoric times, stretching across a geographical area as widespread as Great Britain, Scandinavia, North Africa, Asia and the Americas.\textsuperscript{183} Used to describe a man-made stack or heap of stones, cairns are placed as navigational aids, landmarks, shrines and memorials. As each traveler passes a cairn, they place a stone on the top of the heap, thereby assuring safe passage through difficult landscapes. Cairns thus signify a type of offering in order to ward off dark forces, as well as a way of denoting sacred spaces and thresholds between the sacred and profane worlds.\textsuperscript{184}

\textsuperscript{182} Refers to British artist Andy Goldsworthy, who creates site-specific sculptures using natural elements including rain, ice, stones and trees. He is best known for his cairn sculptures, though cairns themselves have been around for many thousands of years. The subtitle appears to be a good-natured dig at the acclaim Goldsworthy’s cairns have received, reminding us that Goldsworthy is simply borrowing an ancient structure and claiming it as an ‘original’.

\textsuperscript{183} New World Encyclopedia, see \url{http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Cairn}

\textsuperscript{184} For more on cairns, see Gary R. Varner, *Menhirs, Dolmen and Circles of Stone: The Folklore and Magic of Sacred Stone*, Algora, 2004
4.7 The cairn and the ‘hermetic’ space of ruin

In Ancient Greece, cairns were a physical symbol of Hermes, the god of travel, messenger to the gods, and guide in and out of the underworld— which is why the early name for ‘cairn’ was ‘herm’, (the Greek for ‘he of the stone heap’- Brown, 2012). Cairns, or stone heaps, were thus used as markers of transit, journey, and passage; they were boundary stones, demarcating points of difference and the threshold between this world and the next. It is thus fitting that Hocking’s cairn is located in the paradigmatic space of transition: the train station.

Hermes is a fascinating figure by all accounts; he is not only the god of travel, but of commerce, thieves, and highwaymen (Stein, 1999). Hermes is a trickster, a magician—what Stein (1999) refers to as “a shamanic presence”. Crucially, he “stands at the edge, an edge-person, located essentially in liminality.” Hermes is a boundary figure—making him quite fitting for the ruin. If Hestia, his opposite, stands for home, the hearth, the centre, Hermes is outward-facing, exterior and de-centred (Beistagui, 2003). He is the god “of boundaries and boundaries crossed, boundaries between villages, boundaries between people, boundaries between understanding and misunderstanding, boundaries between life and death, and boundaries between consciousness and unconsciousness.”

Hermes acts as our guide through such transitional zones; we recognise him by way of the stone heaps that mark unfamiliar spaces. The boundary, of course, provokes anxiety; it is the chaos outside, the unknown realm beyond. Like the ancient Greek eschatia, It is the uncivilised periphery, a formless, primordial stew. Yet, it is precisely its chaotic, primordial condition that makes liminal space such fertile ground for creation. As Casey reminds us, “Chaos is a primordial place within which things can happen.” Chaos is “a sense of emerging order”. Chaos calls for the separation, demarcation, and distinction of place— a task achieved by Hocking’s sculptures, I would argue.

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186 Ibidem


188 All territory beyond Greek city walls, representing the uncivilised, inhumane, barbarous (Endsjo, 2000)

189 Edward Casey, The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History, University of California Press, pp 9

190 Ibidem
If Hocking’s ruin is thus a chaotic space in which to demarcate and distinguish place, then what are we to make of the fact that its setting is the paradigmatic Augean ‘non-place’- the train station? Non-place, famously defined by Marc Augé in opposition to ‘anthropological place’, is the embodiment of ‘super modernity’, devoid of relational, historical features and unconcerned with identity (Augé, 1995). Non-place is not ‘symbolised’ by times past; history is relegated to specially designated areas in order to allow the smooth exchange of commerce to occur. It does not interweave past and present, it compartmentalises them. It is “a whole institutional and normative mass which cannot be localised” (pp 67). These are generic spaces, with a common code of texts, images, signs and products, providing a reassuring sameness, a bland familiarity and a generic setting that precludes meaningful interaction. Non places are there for the purpose of passing through. They generalise, abstract, and universalise.
Spaces of light and darkness

Train stations are for Augé paramount examples of this kind of space: temporary, transitory, anonymous and commercial, a place, as Fraser and Spalding describe it, of “conflicted identity, a certain ‘suspended condition’ placed somewhere between here and there, between a place of departure and destination, epitomising the fragmentary, liquid, ever-changing character of both liquid and super modernity”. Train stations thus display some key characteristics of liminal space in the sense that they emphasise transition, ephemerality and fragmentation- but in the bland, generic sense of the non-place, the non-local, the non-historical, the abstract space devoid of identity.

Hocking’s cairn, emplaced with the ruined train station, I argue, emphasises the same elements of transience and fragmentation in ways that transform it from non-place into ‘anthropological’ place. His work presents an image of the ruined train station as imbued with meaningful relations and where the past has an arresting and important role to play. Yet he refuses nostalgia. Instead, he questions notions of the local and the universal by crafting his sculptures from local materials to express universal symbols. He is not interacting with times past so much as invoking the past significance of cosmic symbols in the present, in a setting where a particular, historical past is submerged in a mythical past of sacred forms, beliefs, institutions and rites. His cairn is absolutely local and yet eschews the fetish of the local so common in ruin photography. His ‘place’ is a sacred place- yet this universal, abstracted realm could not be invoked without recourse to, and exploitation of, the local, the particular, the historic product of this particular ruin. His is a place of ambiguity and contradiction, a perfect expression of the liminal itself. We might say then that the process of ruination bestows the quality of ‘anthropological place’ on the ‘non-place’ of the train station, by endowing it with a history and an identity; that where it might have facilitated a certain type of transit beforehand, now enables and celebrates meaningful transition, a true state of liminality with all that this term implies.

Hocking’s transient ruin is full of meaning; its chaotic fragmentation is, to paraphrase Turner, not outside of structure; it is a proto-structure from which all culture is generated. Places proliferate out of chaos, out of the void. Casey argues that the void is a “scene of emergence… Indeed, if chaos can be regarded as predeterminate place, the void is best construed as the scene of emergent place.

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191 Benjamin Fraser & Steven D. Spalding, Trains, Culture and Mobility: Riding the Rails, Lexington Books, 2011, pp 176
Cosmogonically considered, the void is on its way to becoming ever more place-definite. It is the scene of world creation and thus the basis of an increasingly coherent, densely textured place-world. The void becomes place. This chaotic, uncanny border zone invites creation, exploration and questioning, as Garrett, Edensor and others have so eloquently argued. Stein (1999) puts this beautifully when he remarks that

Archetypally, we can see in the image of Hermes a mythical statement of the psyche’s innate tendency to give definition to perceptual and mental horizons, to mark edges, to define spaces… Hermes… [marks] the limit of consciousness. Beyond the boundary lies the unknown, the uncanny, the dangerous, the unconscious. When markers are created and limits set, however, curiosity [is] also excited and new spaces for exploration and discovery invite the bold and courageous traveler.

Mushroom growing out of rubble

Might modern day urban explorers be the “bold and courageous travellers” Stein talks of? Arguably. Hocking’s ‘herm’ or cairn, it seems to me, invites just such boundary exploration of the “zone

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192 Edward Casey, The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History, University of California Press, pp 20
where neither...being nor non-being dominate”. His cairn honours the liminal space of the ruin, the dark, chaotic unknown, yet acts to assure those who cross the boundary of safe, or at least un-threatening, passage. It invites those who explore it- or view it as a frozen image- to free themselves from the negative connotations of ruined space, challenges us to deconstruct our fixed definitions and beliefs. It approaches the ruin as fertile chaos, rather than cultural void, beginning the task of a re-creation of space. It acknowledges the uncanny disorder- but invites us in anyway, offers up the tantalising possibility of escaping ordered space in order to question its norms, values and constraints. It rejects the rigidity of nature or culture, sacred or profane, public or private. Ambiguity is embraced, revered, even. In the liminal space of the ruin, “Every element may be found severed from its usual context, juxtaposed by its usually mutually exclusive opposite, and assembled into new, totally nonsensical combinations.” This is precisely the function of liminal space described by Turner above. It is a space of cultural critique, as liberating as it is darkly unsettling. The ruin, it seems, is a paradigmatic example of ‘hermetic’ or liminal space, categorically rejecting fixed notions of reality. If, as Vincent Descombes argues, the frontier causes a ‘rhetorical disturbance’, in which we do not feel at home because we do not understand, then Hocking’s cairn eases the hermeneutical burden of ruined space. It renders the space legible. If the Ancient Greek periphery signifies death, the contemporary ruin in Hocking’s work is very much its opposite. In appealing to the symbolism not only of the herm, or cairn, but also the egg, Hocking clearly affirms the life of the ruin and views it as a space of potential. It may occupy the status of a cultural and economic ‘underworld’ at present, but the ruin is simply in a period of gestation, between past certainties and future possibilities, on its way to becoming place. In the transitional period, its affordances as ‘loose’ space are enjoyed and utilised to create something both unsettling and beautiful.

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194 Dag Oistein Endsjø, To Lock up Eleusis: A Question of Liminal Space, Numen, Vol. 47, No. 4, 2000, pp 244
195 Dag Oistein Endsjø, To Lock up Eleusis: A Question of Liminal Space, Numen, Vol. 47, No. 4, 2000, pp 234
196 Argument found in Marc Augé, Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity, Verso, 1995
Conclusion

Having explored three of Hocking’s works in intimate detail, we can now return to the overarching question of this thesis: how does the artist reconfigure the ruin as a sacred space? I have argued that this is done in three distinct yet interrelated ways: by unifying the fragmented space of the ruin, by retracing its history as a sacred site, and by drawing attention to its liminality, using it as a space to critique socio-cultural norms. Hocking is an inheritor of postmodern uncertainties, simultaneously seduced by and skeptical towards the mirage of the centre. Both Benjamin’s emphasis on transience, fragmentation and contingency on the one hand and the romanticist veneration of an eternal, unified, classical ideal on the other are both present in Hocking’s photographs, resulting in a strange and unsettling tension. His work is a study in opposites, grappling with the antagonistic forces of remembering and forgetting, monument and waste, unity and fragmentation, the natural and the culturally constructed and the romantic and the postindustrial- all of which are expressed through a rhetoric of the sacred. His is an oeuvre that forces us to question the surface appearances both of language- what is ‘real’? ‘monument’? ’ruin’?- and space- is this a mundane factory or sacred earthwork we are looking at? In many ways, his photographs are studies in optical and linguistic illusions; what we think we see and comprehend on the surface falls far short of the transcendent reality encrypted within; a reality which, on further inspection, turns out to be as transient as the capitalist ‘real’ it replaces. Rather than a wholesale rejection of the disintegration of progress or an unquestioning allegiance to the sacred whole, he moves between the two, simultaneously, each (im)possibility haunting the other.

Throughout this thesis, I have shown how ruins in Hocking’s work are given a sense of agency and redeemed as culturally, historically and spiritually powerful spaces. The idea that ruins are seen not just as beautiful, but as powerful, is an important point. For as Gerardus van der Leeuw writes, this power is what impels us to action; the sacred “always confronts man with some absolute task”.\textsuperscript{197} The task which Hocking sets us, I would argue, is that of learning to see. His work is one of protest; it protests the uncritical denigration of ruined space and reveals it, re-presents it, in extraordinary specificity. By teaching us to look more closely, Hocking’s ruins are no longer fetishised symbols known and familiar through relentless overexposure. They refuse a closed, static interpretation and instead become defamiliarised, special, rich, powerful, and significant. They force us to question

\textsuperscript{197} Gerardus van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation, Princeton University Press, 2014, pp 49
the categorisations we assign not just to spaces, but to objects, histories and inevitably to people too.

The sacred therefore turns out to be a useful rhetorical convention for this questioning of boundaries, the dissolution of which facilitates access to a space of extraordinary power. This power is always double-edged; as an object of taboo, the sacred is that which both draws in and repels, disturbs and fascinates. Whilst the ruin has widely been acknowledged as a space of power, however, this power is often engaged with in negative terms, largely framed within the disparaging context of ‘ruin porn’—a “superficial, one-eyed portrayal of urban decay that ignores its social and political consequences… and which even turns it into something seductive.” Widely seen either as an excuse to indulge in hyper-masculine risk-taking activities (on the part of producers) or as a way of passively mediating the terror of decline from a sanitised distance (on the part of viewers), ruin photography has garnered something of a reputation for selfish voyeurism. Anca Pusca (2010) offers a characteristic attack on the genre when she argues that for ruin photographers,

…the emptied out spaces, the hint of the human presence, and yet the overwhelming lack thereof is appealing, intriguing, and endlessly photogenic. The pictures are ghost-like, with plays of shadow and light, shocking and pleasing at the same time. With the workers gone, the spaces have a life of their own that resembles more a fairytale land, virgin territories claimed back by the forces of nature. Although they play on the element of destruction, the latter does not appear as sad but rather as aesthetically appealing… With the local communities often left out of the camera’s eye, the destruction can be enjoyed.

Ruin photography does not depict a ‘fairytale land’ to the people whose lives have been destroyed by industrial decline; it is simply a painful reminder of loss. Dora Apel (2015) argues that the use of nature in these images leads one to the conclusion that decline is itself natural, and not caused by historically specific factors such as racist housing and employment policies. The causes of decline are obscured by the celebration of the emergence of nature, leading to a passive response of detached pity, rather than active outrage at the neglect of disenfranchised communities. According to


Apel, ruin imagery is seen as so exceptional, so fantastical, that it becomes alien, somebody else’s problem; yet simultaneously, it conveys a sense of the natural and the inevitable. Both stances, she argues, obscure capital and human injustice as the real reasons behind decline, removing the need for action. We therefore experience ruin photography such as Hocking’s as pleasantly detached from its context, our horror and pity mingled with fascination. Rather than act, we simply gaze. The question then becomes, does Hocking’s optimism with regard to ruin matter if such images result in a negative outcome for the communities they portray? What really differentiates his photography from that of say, Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre, or Andrew Moore? Do all these artists not feed parasite-like on the misery of others, spectating without taking any real action? And shouldn’t such a stance be condemned, rather than enjoyed?

In many ways, it is difficult not to feel discomfort at protestations from scholars like Pusca. Hocking’s photographs are mostly unpeopled, fixating on ghostly, fairytale like structures, seemingly devoid of any social or economic context. Yet, his sculptures by themselves are evidence of presence, if only that of the artist himself. Hocking’s sculptures, though temporary, are meant to be encountered by the local communities in which they are placed. In his Mound Project and New Mound City, the local homeless community is an integral part of his images; he frames these individuals as successors to the inhabitants of the sacred land on which their tents now stand. His investigations into the sacred history of ruined space give voice to a group who usually remain all but invisible. Furthermore, Hocking’s images of ruins do create a ‘fairytale’ ‘ghostly’ atmosphere, in their evocation of sacred symbolism and architecture, much of which could be described in just such terms; the sacred is of another realm, an ephemeral other space. Thus, humans may be obscured in many of his works, but not forgotten; rather, they are given an alternative space, outside the realms of capitalist activity, in which to reflect and explore. Finally, the sacred goes beyond the concerns of historical specificity; historical context is irrelevant to the cyclical movements of birth, death, decay and regeneration. Decay is indeed ‘natural’, yet decay need not mean decline. Hocking’s take on the genre of ruin photography allows him to escape many of the charges levelled at other ruin photographers, in that his use of the sacred demands an ahistorical, ‘ghostly’ aesthetic, an aesthetic which is crafted in service of the local community rather than in exploitation of it.

Yet even if one is unconvinced by this, why do scholars so willingly embrace and apply the term of ‘ruin porn’ in the first place? Doesn’t the label itself preclude any discussion of possible redeeming features of the genre? Isn’t it simply a way of justifying the wholesale criticism of an entire genre
with little or no explanation? This is the position taken by Petursdottir and Olsen (2014). They argue that while much ruin photography is considered to be superficial, false, selective and ahistorical, criticised as drawing on emotion instead of critical analysis, such critique actually reflects an academic unease with the aesthetic response itself. Instead of viewing delight, pleasure and beauty as a detached, academic response to an object, they argue, we must return the aesthetic to its older meaning, which they define as “a reaction triggered by an element or force inherent to the very reality encountered.” This idea of aesthetics as an immediate, emotional response to the encountering of a reality is extremely interesting when considered in relation to the sacred; for, as was discussed in chapter one, this is the exact process by which a sacred space is designated- as a response to the recognition of reality and meaning in particular spaces. Aesthetics, argue Petursdottir and Olsen, should not be feared, and neither should ruin photography. Images are not only a means of representation, they suggest, but a form of interactive engagement with things (and, we might add, spaces) themselves. Images do not passively document, but provide a measure of “the integrity and otherness of that which is encountered.” Furthermore, these images are evidence of our ‘presence’; the image “remembers the very encounter with things, the encounter with otherness, and… also how this otherness was seen in that moment of overt ‘situatedness.”

Hocking’s images, then, can be viewed in the same way: as evidence of his encounter with the sacred reality of ruin, as evidence of the awe, reverence, and hope with which he encounters these much maligned spaces. When we look at one of Hocking’s photographs, we are witnessing how he sees the otherness of the ruin in a startling and archetypal form. It is therefore necessary to take a more nuanced view of the encounter with ruin, which takes place in multiple media and responds to ruination in myriad ways, illustrating a diversity which is unjustifiably glossed over in the existing research. The narration of ruin is complex, and without paying close attention to its ambiguity, we risk subsuming all representations of it within a simplistic and negative understanding of loss. Loss itself is endowed with its own kind of power, enabling us to generate new narratives of place through a strategy of ‘letting go’. Loss does not address only a lack or an absence. It is, as Rebecca Solnit so eloquently argues, about surrendering control, a process which actually allows us to be present. “To be fully present,” she goes on to write, “is to be capable of being in uncertainty and


201 Ibidem, pp 17

202 Ibidem
mystery. And one does not get lost but loses oneself, with the implication that it is a conscious choice, a chosen surrender, a psychic state achievable through geography. That thing the nature of which is totally unknown to you is usually what you need to find, and finding it is a matter of getting lost.”203 Loss for Solnit is a means of enlarging the world, a geographical and psychic letting go of the clues which we usually rely on to navigate our spatial and temporal existence.

In many ways, this thesis has attempted to take up the call issued by Petursdottir and Olsen, wanting to engage with both the representation and the embodied practices of postindustrial loss in a manner which accords much deeper significance to the former than has so far been the case. I have been struck whilst writing this thesis by just how easily ruin photography and exploration have been written off by mainstream media, politicians and scholars alike, in their refusal to see these images and practices as meaningful engagements with place and space in a state of change. Wishing to take the discourse of ruin photography and practice beyond that of ‘ruin porn’ as somehow intrinsically unethical, voyeuristic and superficial, I have tried to provide an example, through the work of one artist, of an engagement with ruin which can be analysed in terms far more generous, subtle and productive than that of mere ‘pornography’. Yet, although I have taken care to distinguish Hocking’s work as unique in his manipulation of the material traces of memory rather than, as is more common, its mere photographic representation, perhaps we can and should consider all ‘ruin practice’, (including exploration, material reconfiguration and photographic representation) as indicative of a far more complex and powerful response to spatial transition. Describing this kind of thoughtful, attentive memory work and the visual reception it provokes as ‘pornographic’ is, as Olsen et al argue, a way of precluding any discussion of its possible value.

It is also, I suggest, a means of reinforcing the notion of postindustrial ruination as taboo. The taboo, as was outlined in chapter three, is a dangerous yet seductive anomaly which enables societies to manage and control boundaries.204 Katherine Shonfield defines it as a spatially enacted set of “rules in society that guard the unclassifiable, the impure and the hybrid”,205 rules which emerge “from an image of social well-being as synonymous with clearly delineated physical form, a form

which is habitually counterpoised against a sea of potentially threatening and polluting formlessness. 206 In order to contain its dangerous power, the taboo must be dealt with in one of two ways: either by exclusion or sacralisation. Applying these arguments to spatial theory, Ben Camkin has recently described ruin as a form of architectural ‘dirt’, and argues that Kristeva’s notion of the ‘abject’ 207 helps explain not just our repulsion towards, but our ambivalent fascination with derelict spaces. I would like to see these concepts expanded, with practices such as those outlined in this thesis pointing not only to the existence, but the subversion of spatial taboos by acts of sacralisation. How do such practices function not as mere pornographic spectacle but as a means of sacralising that which has been excluded as socially unacceptable? If we return to our definition of the sacred as that which is marked out as special, rich, significant and powerful, then these practices can be seen as rescuing the ruin from its status as a negative taboo, that which is banned, shunned, and forgotten, and restoring it to an object worthy of public attention, memory, reverence and awe. The act of marking out places of collective significance, whether by exploration, art or photography, is essentially a sacred act, the ‘sacred’ not to be confused with a system of religious belief but understood as an affective stance towards particular places and objects.

This affective identification with ruined places can therefore be seen as an intensely ethical act, in which places in transitional states are brought back into the public sphere and repositioned as spaces of ambivalent power, rather than celebratory or shallow spectacles of pornography. Rather than policing responses to ruin and stigmatising the different ways in which loss is performed and negotiated, why not accord such practices legitimacy as valid expressions of bearing witness to places in transition? Transitional states are, interestingly, integral to the taboo, and reflect a deep-seated cultural ambivalence towards the boundary, which is why they must be managed with the appropriate rites of passage. Might such practices deserve to be taken seriously as providing such (counter)rites of passage? Could they be rethought as a means of resolving the conflicts of ambivalence surrounding loss? Does this ambivalence reflect a discomfort towards attaching ourselves rather than withdrawing from objects of loss (Baker, 2001)? Attachment theory does not emphasise anxiety, anger or guilt, but instead recognises that the process of mourning requires an ongoing bond with the lost object, a bond which serves an adaptive function in the face of loss (Silverman et al, 1992) Taboo, after all, is closely bound to the politics of loss and mourning, a politics which can only be facilitat-

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206 Ibidem

207 See Julia Kristeva, 1982
ed by attending properly to what remains (Eng & Kazanjian, 1993). Indeed, it is the avoidance of recollection and images of loss rather than our engagement with them which may be considered pathological (Baker, 2001), a sign of ‘absent mourning’ or outright denial. Theories of attachment in the face of loss may help address the unhelpful pathologisation of ruin practice; whilst a focus on the celebratory aesthetic of ruin is important, it risks obscuring its valuable sacred function: the management of ambivalence, or taboo surrounding spaces of loss. Such ambivalence can only be negotiated by the productive attention to spatial remains, an attention which is practiced in diverse ways by myriad communities of interest. A greater understanding of taboo, ritual, and the management of spatial ambivalence, as well as the politics of mourning such ambivalence provokes, has much to add to the existing literature on ruination. Although these considerations offer a mere introduction to a more generous perspective on ruins, it is a generosity which I hope to see extended by other scholars in the future.
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