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CARS AND GLOBAL LATE SOCIALISM

Introduction

In the last decades of the 20th century, the world of capitalist production underwent extensive transformations. It has spread and contracted, it has become ever more differentiated, and it reconfigured spaces of production and distribution, as well as centres of accumulation. Scholarly literature documents the dominant trends of these decades: reterritorialization of the production chains, increasing mobility of capital, precarious employment, vulnerabilities in the realm of social reproduction, and the emergence of new managerial ideologies for a more effective control of labour. These structural transformations, which came to be understood as an entangled transition from the postwar social contract to neoliberal policies, and from Fordism to flexible production,[1] left traces all over the globe.

Not coincidentally, the 1970s have also been identified as the moment when socialism went global, with a special focus on how the countries in the Soviet sphere of influence inserted themselves in the post-Bretton Woods configuration, and on how instead of a world of difference behind an Iron Curtain, state socialism can be reconceptualized as dynamic intersections of material connections and international exchanges in the realm of politics, technology, and culture. Horizontal transfers of expert knowledge and the construction of imagined geographies of solidarity and non-alignment in the context of decolonization have been the preferred topics in these novel efforts of rearticulating what socialism was (and of envisioning "what comes next").[2]

Nevertheless, the most important move of the state socialist regimes in their last two decades of existence was an increasing participation in the world market and in global commodity chains. Since "commodity chains" was first coined as a theoretical and methodological approach in the world-system tradition[3] it has also made a career in development studies, new economic sociology, and institutional economics. As an interdisciplinary tool par excellence, commodity chains analysis was

used to address inter-firm linkages, sectoral competition, industrial upgrading,[4] or the relationship between global structures of accumulation and uneven development. These endeavours have been either focusing on transformations at the labour process at the point of production, or on the flow and movement of commodities from the perspective of added value and diminishing transaction costs. They often left out how in the trail of their geographical expansion, global commodity chains produced new hierarchies of labour and capital, as well as new forms of exploitation and dispossession. The fields of forces in which these relational connections emerge can be global but their unfolding is always multi-scaled, and their materialization is always local. On the ground, the articulation of global commodity chains produce new institutional arrangements, impacts systems of provisioning, reconfigure livelihoods, reshape labour processes, and spark new forms of resistance on the shopfloor and beyond.

While there has been sustained interest into how the Global South has been historically constituted as a reservoir of natural resources and cheap labour in-between the twin logics of empire and capital, the move towards socialist East-Central Europe has received less empirical attention and has definitely remained undertheorised. This essay tackles these issues through an analysis of the incorporation of the Eastern and Central European car industry in global commodity chains in the last decades of the state socialist regimes, and through an overview of the turn towards individual consumption that both triggered and fueled the development of automobilism in these countries. It sketches the historical evolution of the car industry in the region to follow the path-dependent trajectories of progress in an industrial branch that has always been dependent on high levels of technical knowledge, capital investment, and craftsmanship.

As much as this essay contributes to a better understanding of Eastern Europe's participation in a global history of commodities in the 20th century, the socialist car as a commodity cannot be understood outside the symbolic universe in which it was embedded. In other words, it has to be conceptualized as a transition of the countries in the region to automobility. In its most comprehensive form, the notion of "automobility" refers to

> a set of political institutions and practices that seek to organize, accelerate and shape the spatial movements and impacts of automobiles, whilst simultaneously regulating their many consequences. It is also an ideological... or discursive formation, embodying ideals of freedom,

> privacy, movement, progress and autonomy, motifs through which automobility is represented in popular and academic discourses alike, and through which its principal technical artefacts – roads, cars, etc. – are legitimized. Finally, it entails a phenomenology, a set of ways of experiencing the world which serve both to legitimize its dominance and radically unsettle taken-for-granted boundaries separating human from machine, nature from artifice, and so on.[5]

As scholars of state socialism have shown, this transition has been riddled with ambiguities and contradictions, with political executives being caught in-between fears of spreading bourgeois imaginaries of consumption and bottom-up pressures for a new social contract predicated on rising real wages and new possibilities of a good life for the working-class. Thus, the socialist car became the carrier of a more mature stage of East-Central European Fordism, while simultaneously entering global markets shattered by ideologies of flexibilization, fragmentation, and sped-up production chains.

Historically, car industry was the birth place of Fordism as a form of articulating the production/life nexus around the workplace and industrial wages. It was one of the economic sectors most intimately connected with a long tradition of industrial paternalism and with the permanentization of a labour aristocracy, which was highly skilled and well paid. Paradoxically, this made some companies resistant to Fordist influences. In France, the combination between a Taylorist organization of production and labour control through high levels of consumption, specialized knowledge, and moral policing had to compete with local managerial ideologies like Fayolism, a more top-down approach to management that won fervent adherents at Renault and other major French firms in the 1920s. In Germany, the debate about the nature of Fordism and its suitability to German quality carmaking was heated before the Nazis ascent to power.[6] In the long run, these developments had important consequences for the ways in which mobilization and resistance shaped the industry throughout the 20th century.[7] On the one hand, these tensions made automobile production into an important cradle for labour struggle. On the other, car industry was especially prone to working-class fragmentation along ethnic, racial, and gender lines.

Automobile industry was a rather weak presence in the interwar industrial landscape of Eastern and Central Europe. The automobile industry in the region became an important production and consumption

site only in late socialism, and began to flourish mostly in the recent decades. It was, thus, a late comer in a world of exchanges dominated by big players from the core capitalist countries, and increasingly from East Asia. Starting with the 1960s, together with other branches that required high levels of investment, advanced technology, skill, and technical knowledge, automotive industry exercised an extra pressure to make the economy as a whole more profitable. In some cases, this was surprisingly explicit in the positions taken by the socialist leaders. For instance, in 1967, very close in time to a deal with the French automaker Renault, Nicolae Ceaușescu stated that

> Foreign trade has the role to increase the elasticity of production, to stimulate specialization according to the laws of competitive advantage, and to defend the economy from the dangers of a dropping economic performance. Dynamic economies of small dimension – and our economy is very dynamic – finds their path to development through a broader opening towards external markets, by continuously training their labour force, by keeping it cheap, and by using craftsmanship to ennoble every ton of metal, every stere of timber, every ton of cotton, every stere of gas, and every hectare of tillage.[8]

As a new investment focus in the late socialist period, car industry was supposed to follow the well-established path of the Western European and American beginnings in automobilism, which meant simultaneously producing both a core of skilled, well-paid, stable labour force, and an internal market tailored for the needs of the working-class people. Nevertheless, its competitive advantage was not going to be different from other industrial sectors: a constant reliance on peasant-workers and commuters, the possibility to partly externalize workers' social reproduction to the village, and the systematic privileging of industrial output over agriculture in terms of investment. As I argue elsewhere, together with new politics of calculation and decentralization moves, these critical junctures can be read as the particular form taken by "socialist flexibility", which can actually can be traced to practices preceding the 1970s managerial shift in the capitalist core.

On the other side of the deal, Western companies started to search for Eastern and Central European productive sites not only because labour was comparatively cheap, but also because they could externalize the responsibility for controlling labour to the socialist states. Labour

relations could be literally played on somebody else's territory. This became increasingly important as the mass protests of 1968 and the waves of conflict in their aftermath convinced carmakers in France, Italy, or the United Kingdom that regaining the industrial peace of *Les Trente Glorieuses* was illusory at best once workers at Citroën and Renault in the tumultuous Parisian 1968 learned to "be realistic, [and] demand the impossible".[9] This essay will thus unpack the ways in which the socialist car entered the history of Eastern and Central Europe as a commodity, as a technological artefact, and as a symbolic universe that marked the new social contract of late socialism as it encountered the crisis-led reconfigurations of this particular industry in the capitalist core.

The Symbolic Life of the Car in the Socialist Bloc

The life of the car in the socialist bloc was fundamentally connected to a shift to individual consumption, which advanced rapidly since the mid-1960s in the Eastern and Central European countries, and later reluctantly in the Soviet Union. The formation of the "automobile society" in Eastern and Central Europe was retarded compared to the Western world. Kurt Moser takes the beginning of a mass car culture as the moment when the number of cars exceeded the number of motorcycles and bicycles. While in West Germany this change of ratio happened in 1957, in the GDR it took place fifteen years later, in 1972.[10] The shift to automobilism was also part of an urban vision that took citizens' speed and convenience seriously, as a systemic vision of movement. Thus, general plans for Togliatti, Moscow, and supposedly hundreds of other new cities in the Soviet Union, Halle in the GDR, or a significant part of East Berlin (especially the Marzahn district) were drawn with new ideas of mobility in mind.[11]

The turn towards individual consumption has been regarded in the academic literature as a moment when the contradictions and ambiguities standing at the core of the state socialist project took center stage. While an increased capacity of working-class families and individuals to buy a wider range of goods met new fantasies of enjoyment that supported a palpable closeness to an imagined West, socialist leaders were rather cautious to the opening of what they (sometimes rightly) perceived as the Pandora's box of the following decades. In Lewis Siegelbaum's words, "[t]he procedures for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services comprised a significant zone of interaction between

the project and the actuality of socialism, between its ideals defined in terms of an enlightened awareness of the collective interest and the reality of shortages, competing priorities, external pressures, privilege, venality, and desires for imagined comforts, bourgeois or otherwise."[12]

The 1960s, thus, can be regarded as a fundamental crack in what Ágnes Heller, Ferenc Fehér, and György Márkus called a "dictatorship over needs": the historical embodiment of an oppressive social domination, which was the form taken by real socialism in Soviet-type societies,[13] a form essentially marked by economic scarcity and wastefulness, rigidity and lack of dynamism in its cultural frames, as well as a stultifying hold on bureaucratic positions and a permanentization of the resulting social inequalities.[14] For a political regime articulated around allocative power,[15] transforming individual consumption into a locus of unforeseen desires also meant giving way to a new horizon of expectations towards the state's redistributive mechanisms.

Political legitimacy in state socialist regimes was partly rooted in the (chrono)logical sequence that started with rises in productivity and continued with increases in real wages – both directly, through the workers' incomes and the lowering of prices, and indirectly, through a collectivized pool of welfare resources.[16] The common use of resources for social reproduction followed a long-term tradition of industrial paternalism that in various forms had spread since the 19th century, from the Western world to the post-revolutionary Soviet Union.[17] Since the early moments of the Industrial Revolution, in one form or another, histories of labour in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, or the United States have essentially brought together the concern for higher profitability on which the accumulation of industrial capital depended, the consequent need for the hyper-rationalization of the production process, and the social arrangements that made the reproduction, the expansion, and the control of labour possible.

In socialist East-Central Europe, the adoption of the Soviet versions of Taylorism as the managerial ideology of choice for controlling the shop floor, and of Fordism as an ever chased, never achieved ideal of an all-encompassing articulation of social reproduction around the factory, were going to manufacture a historically specific life/ production/ politics nexus.[18] Purportedly, these axes of development brought forward radically transformative subjectification processes, with the hope of producing no more and no less than a new type of human being. The ideal socialist worker was imagined as a revolutionary class-conscious proletarian, self-

aware, responsible, proactive, and ardent, embracing the hardships of today for the certainty of a better collective future. In practice, however, industrial labourers became the embodiments of a core contradiction of the state socialist regimes: the contradiction between simultaneously being labour power, living labour, and subjects of a genuinely emancipatory political project.[19] Issues of an everydayness that proved sticky and resilient for the communist leaders were at the center of their fragile political legitimacy, making shop floor struggles around workers' social reproduction and moral economies into the cornerstone of the "limits of state control".[20] Redistribution and consumption were thus at the core of the emergence of a new historic bloc, in which the instruments for pushing the workers produce more, faster, and better could not be separated from the concrete ways of ensuring their consent. On the ground, this was hardly different from the ways in which labour-capital relation had been historically played out in capitalist formations, except for the capacity of the socialist state to act simultaneously as capital, manager, and legal guardian of social life.[21]

Although hardly mentioned in the literature on the rise of automobility in Eastern and Central Europe, the raising expectations for individual consumption and for household improvement were also linked to the state's fears that they could lead to demands for higher wages, which would have disturbed the logical unfolding of a societal project founded on quite rigid mechanisms of capital accumulation. Nevertheless, the possibility to buy a car also represented a rare opportunity to have access to the population's savings, a powerful counteracting factor in the decision to start and then develop both the automotive industry and the car trade in the region. Since the early moments of the communist takeover, people's savings represented one of the assets that had systematically escaped the state's reach, pushing the economic executives leading the implementation of central economic planning to make relentless efforts to attract citizens' money into circulation. Starting with the postwar inflationary spirals, the fight to keep wages low enough not to compromise socialist accumulation but high enough not to enrage the workers, the serial drops of prices in basic and luxury consumer goods, and the struggle against hoarding and excess liquidities at the household level were articulated into a fragile whole. Programs aimed to help workers build their own houses represented early solutions for this issue. The possibility to buy a car opened a new space for attracting the population's savings in the 1960s. In a very short time, it proved very effective, as tens of thousands of citizens rushed

to pay an advance for their new car. In just a few years, the demand overwhelmingly surpassed supply, creating a specific type of waiting: queuing for a car, most of the times for ten years or longer, fighting to get points for one's work ethics or political loyalty, while at the same time struggling in the diffuse economy of favours in which the cars were caught. In 1989, at the fall of the socialist regimes, tens of thousands of people were still waiting for their automobiles.

Behind the Iron Curtain, the "socialist" car produced elaborated imaginaries of individual flexibility, freedom of movement, improved status, and industrious masculinity. As the previous section showed, these imaginaries were not so dissimilar to their earlier counterparts in the capitalist world. Nevertheless, they were met with reluctance, if not open resistance by the political executives of the time. There is an apparent contradiction between the private ownership of a car and socialist redistributive and collective-use driven rationality. Even after Stalin's death, Khruschev imagined improved mobility as a complex, large-scale, possibly all-encompassing car sharing system, in addition to public means of transportation, state-owned taxi companies, and car rental services. However, in most socialist countries, until the early 1970s, entire nations fell under the automobile's spell, where industrial workers, clerks, state officials, teachers, and doctors spent their life-time savings and years of queuing for their Ladas, Yugos, Dacias, or Trabants.

The socialist automobile was predicated on a heightened form of *Eigen-Sinn*, broadly understood in dialogues on automobility as spirit of initiative, self-education in the technical realm, and creativity.[22] Scholars of the region have been drawing on Alf Lüdtke's proposal that real socialism functioned as a *durchherrschte Gesellschaft*, a concept meant to point the complex, partial, and ambiguous ways in which the state managed to penetrate all layers of the economic realm, patterns of sociability, ways of being in the world together with modes of representing them, or subjective experiences and perceptions of everydayness.[23] As a mode of domination, *durchherrschte Gesellschaft* implied not a totalitarian, top-down working of power, but a complicated profusion of practices and understandings that sustained power's structures and mechanisms at all levels. The link between the always-in-repair car and this imaginary of a servicing nation becomes immediately transparent. As Eli Rubin states,

> For a collectivist system, it is amazing the extent to which factories (and stores, public services, etc.) stayed at least marginally functional in the GDR only because ordinary workers engaged in daily acts of near heroism to find creative solutions to breakdowns, faulty products, missing deliveries, poorly designed plans, etc. Workers often found ways to jury-rig machines, vehicles, or other technologies that did not work. Thus it was through extreme individual effort and highly idiosyncratic solutions (often unrepeatable and unpatented, unlike the Trabiplast) that the supposedly rational, systematic, planned, collective East German economy functioned at all. This attitude was not limited to workers in factories; many workers described by Alf Lüdtke and others as living according to a code of *Eigen-Sinn* were the owners of Trabis.

Like always, the late socialist *Eigen-Sinn* was classed and gendered. Against an equalitarian discourse, the car culture in Eastern and Central Europe was still hierarchical. Even in the 1950s, the Soviet Union's production of cars was designed for specific categories of consumers. The Zaporozhets, for disabled persons; the Moskvich, for the workers; the Volgas, a middle-class car preferred by the nomenklatura; the Chaika limousine for high governmental executives and Party leaders; and the ZIL, the show-off car for international events.[24]

As a marker of masculinity, the socialist car embodied a quality that was simultaneously highly individual and deeply social: the fact that it was designed with its repair in mind, that servicing it, modifying it, improving it, and beautifying it became acts of craftsmanship, polytechnic knowledge, and emotional attachment. Attending to one's car was an intimate gesture, which involved an affective relation, close and long-term witnessing, and deeply sensorial participation. Men listened to the engines, sniffed for gasoline leakages, intensely polished the doors, and closely watched for vibrations that did not belong to one's *own* car. As carriers of men's mastery over engine stoppages, mechanical malfunctions, or deflated tires, cars forged and deepened male sociability around fixing and tinkering, many times accompanied by impressive quantities of beer or home-produced spirits. The socialist car thus functioned as a presence, which formed molecular communities of technical knowledge and practice in every garage.

As Kurt Moser discusses in his analysis of *Autobasteln*,[25] state socialist societies had a powerful orientation towards amateur craftsmanship, bricolage, home engineering, and fixing. This 'do-it-yourself' ethos was generalized and became an integral, quasi-institutionalized dimension

of planned economies. In this context, the idea that technologies are co-constructed by their users acquired a rich life.[26] Users' activity had to function as a substitute for industrial innovation in a branch that was rather secondary within the logic of the socialist economies. The socialist car, thus, became a different kind of social artifact, with a usage that transcended driving and the possibility of movement; differently constructed, with the users' co-production of technology in mind; a vehicle for the spread of technical knowledge on the one hand, and the strengthening of the bonds between working-class men on the other.[27] Comprehensive toolboxes (Lada) and manuals that functioned as beginner courses in automotive engineering (Trabant P601 manual) inscribed this vision to ensure it was going to be carved in the users' correct understanding of what their cars were and what they could (and couldn't) do. "Garage work" was going to prove its historical resilience in the 1990s, when workers across the postsocialist and post-Soviet space continued to use it as a "particularistic space of working-class masculinity and sociality", as well as an entry point into the mushrooming informal economy of the period.[28] The next section will turn now to discuss how in order to achieve a symbolic life, the socialist car had to emerge as a commodity in global production chains, which meant participating in expanding markets, engaging in technology transfers, and the formation of new social imaginaries.

The Expansion of Global Car Chains in Eastern and Central Europe

Whether just beginning or expanding an interwar tradition, car production in the Eastern and Central European countries was subjected to global and national dynamics, which were path-dependent and deeply embedded in the geographies of uneven and combined development that marked the history of the region.[29] Consequently, as the countries in the region faced the most significant globalization wave of the 20th century, political action marked a transition to a new vision of what state socialism meant, of what central planning was supposed to achieve, and of how economic and financial practices had to be transformed in order to face the shifting demands of the world market. Economic collaborations followed three axes of exchange: within the socialist bloc; with the capitalist core countries; and with the developing world, many times irrespective of the postcolonial states' ideological leaning.

Thus, in some countries, the turn to individual consumption to which the move towards automobility was an integral part of since the mid-1960s (late 1950s in some cases), belonged to a broader project of implementing more market-friendly socialist policies. The *Neues Ökonomisches System der Planung und Leitung* in Walter Ulbricht's GDR, or the New Economic Mechanism in Kadar's Hungary (colloquially referred to as 'goulash communism'), brought together a new social contract based on workers' raising living standards, with an increased global integration of socialist countries' production and trade. In the late socialist decades, even countries traditionally regarded as "closed" and "resistant to change" like Romania or Bulgaria felt the double pressure of appeasing their citizens beyond the satisfaction of their basic needs, combined with the necessity of globalizing their economies.

A dance between novel competitive requirements, financial pressures, new forms of peripheralization and dreams of escaping it forever through technological upgrading dominated late socialism. As socialism went global, the states in the region became increasingly caught in the world market logic, marked at the time by postcolonial conflicts and long repressed societal fractures, the professionalization and marketization of development, as well as the serial economic crises of the 1970s. Along with these dimensions of globalization, complex negotiations for state sovereignty were fought in the region, with the constituents of the socialist bloc struggling to get a voice "in setting up the new frameworks through which globalization [wa]s furthered".[30]

The car was uniquely positioned in this configuration. On the one hand, it was institutionally tied to the technocratic turn experienced by the socialist states, and to the ethos that made technological advancement key to economic independence, and ultimately, to nation-building. On the other hand, alongside housing, the car stood at the core of a new social contract between the state and the working-class, a social contract for which fantasies of individual betterment and good life were cardinal, and which brought together elements of classical Fordism with the emerging reality of an affluent socialist worker.

Table 1. Private car density in Eastern Bloc countries (cars per 1,000 people)

Country	**1970**	**1975**	**1980**	**1985**	**1989**
Bulgaria	19.2	22.7	55.6	114.9	137.0
Czechoslovakia	55.6	101.0	149.2	172.4	200.0
GDR	66.7	111.1	151.5	200.0	232.6
Hungary	18.5	55.6	83.3	135.1	163.9
Poland	15.9	31.3	66.7	100.0	126.6
Romania	6.4	6.5	10.8	n.a.	n.a
USSR	6.8	18.5	31.3	41.7	43.4
Yugoslavia	35.7	71.4	108.6	125.0	135.1

Source: Motor Vehicle Manufacturers Association of the United States, Motor Vehicle Facts and Figures (Detroit: MVMA, 1990), which calculates the data in terms of cars per person. (Reproduced from Siegelbaum, *The Socialist Car*, p. 8)

We can see that the most industrialized countries of the socialist bloc, like Czechoslovakia and the GDR, started the last socialist decades with a significantly higher density of private cars than countries like Hungary, Poland, or Bulgaria. Romania and the Soviet Union had the lowest private car density in the socialist bloc in 1970, and it remained lower than in the other centrally planned economies until 1989. The landscape of car production and ownership in the region was thus non-homogenous and path-dependent, deeply rooted in dissimilar histories of technical prowess, innovation, and capital investment.

Czechoslovakia had both the oldest and the most successful history in manufacturing automobiles. The production of cars in Czechoslovakia started at the end of the 19th century with the first motor car in Central Europe, the Präsident, inspired by a Benz automobile. Its manufacturer, Tatra, is the third oldest car producer in the world, and its history has unfolded uninterruptedly since the 1890s. Austrian, Czech, and German engineering contributed to the growth of the company in the first half of the 20th century, when Tatra specialized in luxury cars, with revolutionary designs, technically advanced engines, and innovations in the field of automobile streamlining.[31] Škoda, the most successful Czechoslovak automobile manufacturer, was founded in Mladá Boleslav in 1895 as

a bicycle company. Its founders, Václav Laurin and Václav Klement, quickly moved from bicycles to motorcycles, and in just ten years they were producing their first car.[32] In the 1920s, the flourishing car-producing workshop led by Laurin and Klement became part of Škoda Works, one of the largest industrial complexes in Europe and the former most important arms producer of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the 19th century. In the 1930s, the factory acquired its first assembly line and already had more than 3,000 workers, ensuring a steady productive flow both for the domestic market and for export. Its highly reliable models made it an important supplier for the German army during the Second World War.

It was not easy for the new post-Second World War economic executives to follow into the steps of Masaryk Republic's rich tradition of technical innovation and creativity in automobile industry. As Valentina Fava shows, their efforts were concentrated around the project of mass-manufacturing a "people's car", which in the immediate postwar reconstruction years involved conjoint Czechoslovak and American expertise.[33] Like elsewhere in the socialist bloc, the implementation of central planning required specific patterns of investment in infrastructure, heavy and extractive industry, and proletarianization, leaving automobile production at the margins of the economic logic of the state. The end of the First Five-Year Plan saw the rebirth of the Czechoslovak automobile, partly because the state was in search for a good symbol of industrial efficiency, partly because Soviet imports of cars proved not satisfactory, and partly because a trend towards specialization within the COMECON. Soviet methods of organizing production with an explicit American influence met the Czechoslovak interwar expertise and managerial practices to support the development of the two well-known brands – Tatra and Škoda – the latter becoming not only the main car producer in the country, but also a symbol of the resilience of technical expertise in Czechoslovakia.

It was maybe this hybridity of technical knowledge that made automobile production into an important locus for the technocratic criticism towards the rigidity of the planned system in the 1960s. However, results failed to appear for almost two decades. Although several models were successful enough to be exported in Western Europe and in the United States since the end of the 1950s, by the beginning of the 1980s the Czechoslovak company had lost its technological edge and according to experts' estimation, was lagging behind the most advanced segments of the market by almost twenty years. The redeeming moment for Škoda came with the Favorit 781 model, a supermini car designed by Nuccio

Bertone[34] for the Czechoslovak government, following the latest European trends by including a front transversal engine and front-wheel drive. The Favorit was an export success in the late 1980s, traveling in Russia, Turkey, Latin America, and Western countries, and helped Škoda cross the bridge of the early 1990s.[35]

Another country that ripped the benefits of its interwar industrialization was East Germany. Its two main cars – Wartburg and Trabant – continued the venerable line of German engineering. The Wartburg started to be produced as early as 1898. Although the factory in Eisenach produced automobiles during the entire first half of the 20th century, it had to drop its name when BMW capital started to dictate its fate. The industrial unit was active during the war and taken over by the Red Army in the immediate post-1945 period. The brand was resuscitated with an eye on its origins in 1956 by VEB Automobilwerk Eisenach. In 1958, Wartburgs were already exported to West Germany, and by the 1960s, to other Western countries like Cyprus, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It was also exported in the socialist countries, in some of them being perceived as a symbol of well-being, good taste, and originality of choice.[36] At the end of the 1980s, Wartburg followed the trend of other factories in the region and accepted Volkswagen's offer to open a new assembly line of Golf engines in the GDR, which required a radical redesigning of the Eastern European car.[37]

While Wartburg's history might soon fall into oblivion, nobody in Germany will soon forget the Trabant. Founded in Zwickau, the VEB Sachsenring Automobilwerke started to produce cars in 1904 under the leadership of a German engineer, August Horch. Between the two world conflagrations, the factory was incorporated in a larger company, Auto Union, Audi's predecessor. After reaching Zwickau, the Soviet Army partly dismantled the factory and the state appropriated it. Although production was only slowly restarted, by 1963 the factory in Zwickau was producing its most well-known model – P601, which continued to be sold until the beginning of the 1990s. The image of a Trabi with four adults and some stuffed suitcases leaving for holiday was central for the idea of a good life that one could hope for in the GDR. Its pastel colour palette, its cheapness, unibody chassis, lack of rear seat belts or external gasoline door, unreliability, heavily user-driven maintenance (allowing for an average life expectancy of 28 years), its slowness, noisiness, and (according to some) ugliness, made the Trabi into an integral part of East-German identity. More that two and a half million Germans owned one,

after spending ten to thirteen years on a waiting list to acquire it. Probably many more used to tell endless series of jokes about it.[38]

Poland was another Central European country with a history of car producing, starting in 1893 with Ursus company, continuing with the manufacturing of light military cars and a modest output of passenger cars in the interwar period. Several automobile models were produced during the socialist period: Warszawa, Syrena, Polonez, and most importantly, Polski Fiat. The manufacturing of the iconic Polish car had its roots in the early 1930s, when the government decided to acquire a Fiat license for one of the state-owned factories, and a Polish-Italian company was born. Based on Italian licenses and technological expertise, the PZInż factory produced not only passenger cars but also Fiat trucks, tanks, artillery tractors, and motorcycles and given its state ownership and mixed military and civilian profile, benefited from highly protectionist measures.[39]

Interrupted by the war and by the peripherality of the automobile in the logic of the first decades of central planning, the Polish car emerged in the 1960s as part of a new political imaginary. The state turned to Fiat once again and acquired the license for the 125 model, which started to be produced in 1967. However, the car did not enter easily in workers' everyday lives. Although car ownership was seen as a consequence of rising wages and improved living standards, Fiat Polski was very expensive – 180,000 zloty, which averaged eighty-five months wages. Responding to the generalized desire for personal cars was part of the measures that accompanied the ascent of Edward Gierek to power. Thus, in the 1970s, installment plans were introduced, a second Fiat license was acquired, and a new car factory was built in Bielsko-Biala and Tychy. The new car was sold for only twenty-five months of average wages, a huge improvement to the 1960s. However, access to automobiles was dire: people queued for years, and although the state linked the opening of savings accounts to the possibility to pay an advance for Fiats and for Polonezes, the possibilities of the Polish factories to satisfy consumer demand remained very low.[40]

In Yugoslavia, passenger cars started to be manufactured after the Second World War on the prewar infrastructure of a truck factory in the city of Kragujevac and under a Fiat license. The Yugoslavian Zastavas came to be exported all over the world, albeit in small numbers, and were going to culminate as a domestic brand with the Yugo, a very popular supermini hatchback, which in the West was consistently rated as one of the worst cars in history.[41] Quantitatively, Yugoslavia was the second mass producer of automobiles in the socialist bloc, after the Soviet Union. In

many ways, it led the way in adopting a car culture that fit well with the early emergence of market socialism in the country, as well as with the self-management system, which granted more autonomy to the industrial units, including in financial matters, and allowed them to keep a part of their profit and redistribute it not only for investments, but also for raising workers' wages.[42]

The less industrialized state socialist countries were marked by their lack of tradition in automobilism during the interwar period. Bulgaria's auto industry was one of the least developed in the socialist bloc and deeply dependent on its Soviet connections. Moskvitch cars were assembled in Bulgaria starting with the mid-1960s. For short moments, the Bulgarian factories in Plovdiv and Lovech assembled Western models for Renault and Fiat. Hungary was highly specialized in the production of heavy lorries and buses, its Ikarus brand making it into one of the most successful exporters in the world, but basically had no automobile production facilities during the socialist period.

Romania was a rather impressive case in the landscape of car production in Eastern Europe. With no history of car production but with good experience in truck and tractor manufacturing, after the mid-1960s, the socialist country managed to become one of the most important regional players in automobile production. Starved for technology, technical knowledge, and capital, which were seen as instrumental on the new path out of backwardness, isolation, and peripheralization, the Romanian socialist government became one of the most active partners for Western companies among the COMECON countries. Forms of cooperation ranged from from patent acquisition to joint ventures, and by 1974, Romania's trade with countries in the socialist bloc was already lagging behind the one with advanced capitalist economies.

The Romanian state decided to start its adventure in car production through an association with Renault, which involved the license for Renault 8 (produced in Romania as Dacia 1100), as well as contracting the French manufacturer to execute a turnkey factory in Mioveni, a car whose subsequent history came to be articulated around the fate of the Romanian automobile, and around the etatized political economy in which Renault continued to be caught for decades. The search for a second partner led to a full partnership between the Romanian government and Citroën. The negotiations started in the 1970s and the final deal included a 36 percent capital participation of the French manufacturer, together with the assembly line, the manufacturing technology, the technical know-

how, and a promise to export forty percent of the annual production on French-dominated markets, especially in former colonies.[43] The Romanian government was going to ensure that Citroën Axel was well received in the socialist bloc, and that a cheap, skilled, and most importantly controlled labour force allowed the production cost to be kept constantly low.

Much of the tardiness of the socialist bloc in adopting a car culture has been blamed on the Soviet Union's unwillingness to invest in a consumer-oriented, highly capital-intensive industrial branch. The Soviet Union had an intense history of collaboration with Western companies in the field of automobilism. A factory built before the war by Citroën was nationalized only in 1921, and car production proper started in the mid-1920s at the AMO plant in Moscow. Other factories, partly or completely built by Western companies, started to operate in Moscow, Yaroslavl', and Gorky. They were focusing on the production of trucks, thus assembling a relatively small number of passenger cars, mainly with imported parts. The automobile plant that was going to make the Moskvitch after the Second World War was founded in Moscow, but again, cars represented an almost insignificant share of its total production.

GAZ was established in 1929 in cooperation with Ford, a collaboration that brought to the Soviet Union not only assembly lines and technologies, but also a managerial ideology that fascinated the communist leaders since the immediate post-revolutionary efforts to restructure Soviet labour relations. In the United States, the novelty of Fordism had been the intentional and *planned* entanglement between the rationalization of the shop floor and a model of social reproduction predicated on cheaper products and higher wages. The price to pay for this benevolent corporate paternalism was an unprecedented level of subjection to the regulation of morals, sexuality, religion, housing, and habits by the company representatives. In Gramscian terms, Fordism intentionally produced a historic bloc around the idea of capitalist rationality and its consequent social order, no less than a "passive revolution", which linked the production of cheaper goods with the production of an ideal worker.[44] The enchantment of the Soviet leaders with the American experiment is not surprising.

The Soviet Union slowly developed its production of passenger cars in the first years after the Second World War. Pobeda was a fully-fledged Soviet car, with an aerodynamic body-shape, and was sold for a prohibitive price. Moskvich, the more popular car, was a version of the Opel Kadett. Car production was highly uneven in the Union, with the only factories

emerging outside Russia in the late 1950s in Ukraine and in Belarus. However, even in the early 1960s, the Soviet leaders still manifested a clear preference for public transport and socialized car rental systems. They proved reluctant to make the transition to mass car production, as it was considered a step too far in the individualization of consumption, one that dangerously mimicked dimensions of the bourgeois capitalist way of life. In addition, it brought fears that in an economy of shortage, Soviet citizens would use their cars for illegal entrepreneurial activities. The fears of the 1960s executives were far from being ungrounded; car owners did end up using them for paid transportation of people and goods, or for accessing scarce food and raw materials. Scarcity of gasoline also offered an opportunity for private profit in a flourishing second-economy involving gas-station attendants, oil refinery employees, and transportation workers.[45]

It took almost a decade to Soviet leaders and Soviet citizens alike to accept the inevitable expansion of car ownership for personal use as an improvement in workers' living standards, and to finally embrace the dramatic expansion of automobility during the Brezhnev era.[46] As such, not unlike the rest of East-Central Europe, the personal car became part of a new social contract, a "Little Deal" between the Soviet state and its citizens, which in addition to job security and lowering of work norms, it also allowed for a rather gray area in which labourers could engage in petty entrepreneurship at the limit of legality, in exchange for political quiescence.

In the 1970s, the Soviet Union ended up embracing the car as an image of workers' good life and prosperity. The symbol of this total embrace was a new Soviet car. Opened in 1970 in cooperation with Fiat, the AvtoVAZ plant in the city of Togliatti (the "Russian Detroit" or "Motor City")[47] came to employ over 110,000 people at its peak, and produced the most beloved Soviet car, Lada (Zhiguli). In 1975 the plant was producing 660,000 cars per year based on the Fiat 124 model. Furthermore, the VAZ plant was going to constitute a form of experimenting both with new channels of transfer for Western technology and expertise, and with new forms of managerial authority. Even since the construction phase, the socialist planners tried to avoid the most common problems arising in complex investment projects: shortage of materials and labour; workforce turnover, indiscipline, and lack of adequate skilling; broken internal and transnational supply chains; as well as the issues arising directly from the adoption of foreign technology to an economic environment dominated by relatively different managerial ideologies and practices. The collaboration

with Fiat required exceptional measures: instead of separating the construction of the industrial plant from its actual functioning, the factory director was also made fully responsible for finishing the construction of the building on time. He was able to directly engage in the design and in the construction process. The technical staff of the future Togliatti plant was employed early, long before production took off, and part of the staff was appointed as representatives in Moscow and in Turin, where the Soviet delegates enjoyed an unprecedented freedom of decision and flexibility in their dealings with Fiat managers. Workers and technicians at VAZ were trained not only in other Soviet car factories but also abroad. Over 1,500 Fiat experts traveled to Togliatti to organize the personnel training, while over 2,500 Soviet technicians specialized in Italy in various fields of the automotive industry. Based on this experience, by 1984, the Soviets produced the first Lada fully designed by the Union's engineers – Lada Samara. By the end of Perestroika, the Togliatti factory had produced twelve millions cars. Like elsewhere in the world where auto workers were massified in large industrial units, Togliatti became an embryonic center of labour activism, which led in May 1980 to a series of mass strikes at the automobile plant.[48]

Concluding Remarks

It is clear that starting with the mid-1960s, all socialist governments left ideological concerns aside and became progressively opened to the idea of engaging in profitable exchanges with core capitalist countries. These collaboration were the engines of car production through licensing agreements; safe import-export contracts; patent acquisition; knowledge and technology transfer; direct foreign investments and loans; the building of turnkey factories based on Western process technology, future technical assistance, and specialization of technical personnel and workers at the mother-company (like in the case of Renault in Romania, or Fiat in Yugoslavia, Poland, and the Soviet Union); and finally, joint ventures, with capital participation of the Western car manufacturer (like the case of Citroën in Romania).

The harmonization of interests between the socialist states and Western companies calls for a rethinking of the 1970s moment in Eastern and Central Europe as a reconfiguration of the accumulation mechanisms that were predicated on the need of transcending the scale and scope of the

postwar productive logics. It was inevitably part of a broader process of restructuring the international division of labour, which was much more fundamentally shaped by the socialist bloc than previously thought. In the aftermath of the post-1968 movements, and in the post-1973 crisis context, price constancy, reliability, and predictibility mattered for companies from France, Germany, Italy, or the United States. Although socialist labour was not necessarily cheap (for instance, when compared to labour in the Global South), wages were controlled by the government and fluctuated little, which allowed the factories to maintain production costs relatively stable. Consequently, the competitive advantage of the Eastern and Central European economies was a comparatively cheap and highly skilled labour force, whose control was completely outside the realm of action and responsibility of the Western partner.

Already a common locus in the literature on the transition to neoliberalism, this restructuring of the international division of labour was an integral dimension of the transition from Fordism to flexible production, and was deeply rooted in the impossibility to secure industrial peace in the capitalist core. Automobile industry has been considered one of the display cases for these processes, especially since it was one of the productive branches where the relationship between labour mobilization and sectoral interests has been historically very strong.[49] The expansion of the automobile production chains in Eastern and Central is a strategic point for understanding the connection between the pressures exercised by industrial conflict in the West and the move towards Eastern and Central Europe, a move that, unlike the relocation of productive sites into the Global South, received little attention.[50] This epistemic move enables an escape from nominalist approaches, which have reified "capitalism" and "socialism" as historical configurations functioning along fundamentally different principles, and link our analytical pursuit to global connections in which logics and mechanisms of capital accumulation marked a *common* geography of production.

NOTES

1 Harvey, D. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007; and Harvey, D. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991.

2 The most important efforts in understanding these processes have been attempted under the project "Socialism Goes Global", led by James Mark at Exeter University.

3 Hopkins, T., Wallerstein, I. "Patterns of development of the modern world-system". *Review* 1 (1977) 111–145.

4 Bair, J. "Global Capitalism and Commodity Chains: Looking Back, Going Forward". *Competition and Change,* 9(2) (2005) 153-180.

5 Böhm, S., Jones, C., Land, C., and Paterson, M. "Introduction: Impossibilities of Automobility." *The Sociological Review* 54 (2006) 3–16.

6 Guillén, M. F. *Models of Management: Work, Authority, and Organization in a Comparative Perspective. Chicago: Chicago University Press*, 1994; Cucu, A. 'Why Hegemony Was Not Born in the Factory: Twentieth-Century Sciences of Labour from a Gramscian Angle', in M. Badino and P. D. Omodeo, eds., *Cultural Hegemony in a Scientific World: Gramscian Concepts for the History of Science*, Vol. 1. Leiden: Brill, Historical Materialism series, 2020.

7 Silver, B. *Forces of Labor:* Workers' Movements and Globalization Since 1870. Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 2003.

8 ANIC, CC Economica, 26/1967, Ceaușescu.

9 Seidman, M. *The Imaginary Revolution. Parisian Students and Workers in 1968*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004.

10 Moser, K. '*Autobasteln*: Modifying, Maintaining, and Repairing Private Cars in the GDR, 1970-1990'. In Siegelbaum, *The Socialist Car*, p. 157-169.

11 Beyer, E. 'Planning for Mobility: Designing City Centers and New Towns in the USSR and the GDR in the 1960s'. In Siegelbaum, *The Socialist Car*, p. 105-123; Rubin, E. "Understanding a Car in the Context of a System: Trabants, Marzahn, and East German Socialism". In Siegelbaum, *The Socialist Car*, 2011, p. 124-140.

12 Siegelbaum, L. H., ed. 2011. "Introduction". In *The Socialist Car: Automobility in the Eastern Bloc*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011, p. 2.

13 Heller, Á., Fehér, F. and Márkus. G. *Dictatorship Over Needs*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983.

14 The concept of "dictatorship over needs" has since become a staple for the Marxist philosophers of the Budapest School grouped around György Lukács. It had its roots in Agnes Heller's analysis of human basic necessities in an earlier book, *The Theory of Need in Marx*. In her book, Heller made a strong argument for the radical social relativity of human needs, asserting

that they were specific to the mode of production and the corresponding arrangement of social relations they belonged to. Heller undermines the Althusserian "epistemological break" between young and later Marx, as she emphasizes the fact that Marx's entire critique of the capitalist mode of production starts from the anthropological assumption of a "rich in needs" humanity, whose vast array of social necessities are impossible to satisfy under the capitalist condition. See *The Theory of Need in Marx*. London: Allison and Busby, 1976. See also Althusser, Louis. *For Marx*. [1965] 2005. London: Verso.

15 Verdery, Katherine. *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.

16 For the best to date account of the ways in which wage policy was integrated into the everyday functioning of early state socialism see Pittaway, Mark, "The Social Limits of State Control: Time, the Industrial Wage Relation, and Social Identity in Stalinist Hungary, 1948–53". *Journal of Historical Sociology* 12(3) (1999, 271–301. For a discussion of wages, the production of the ordinary and the articulation of the "postwar" as critical juncture in Romania, see Grama, Adrian. *Laboring Along. Industrial Workers and the Making of Postwar Romania*. Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2018.

17 For systematic discussions about varieties of industrial paternalism and their connected discursive tropes see Burawoy, Michael. *The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes under Capitalism and Socialism*. London: Verso, 1985; and Reid, D. "Industrial Paternalism: Discourse and Practice in Nineteenth-Century French Mining and Metallurgy". *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27(4) (1985), 579–607.

18 Cucu, Alina. 'Why Hegemony Was Not Born in the Factory".

19 Cucu, Alina. *Planning Labour: Time and the Foundations of Industrial Socialism*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2019. For comprehensive accounts of the politics of productivity in the Soviet Union as the seeds of East-Central European regimes, see Siegelbaum, Lewis H. *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935–1941*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; Siegelbaum, Lewis H., and Ronald G. Suny, eds., *Making Workers Soviet: Power, Class, and Identity*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994.

20 Pittaway, Mark. *The Workers' State: Industrial Labor and the Making of Socialist Hungary, 1944–1958*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012; and *From the Vanguard to the Margins: Workers in Hungary, 1939 to the Present. Selected essays by Mark Pittaway*, ed. by Adam Fabry. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

21 As I argue elsewhere, this simultaneity of power relations in which the socialist state was caught cannot be immediately and simplistically read as total power. On the contrary, the direct involvement in managing and creating social production processes made socialist states rather spectacularly

fragile in their ordinary operation and in their capacity to root their "effects" directly in production. See Cucu, *Planning Labour*. For a better understanding of state power as an expression of their capacity to effect illusory boundaries between the state, society, and economy (or collapse them in an equally illusory manner in socialism), see Mitchell, Timothy. 'Society, Economy, and the State Effect'. In Steinmetz, George, ed. *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999, p. 76-97.

22 Rubin, E. "Understanding a Car".

23 Lüdtke, Alf, ed. 1995. *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

24 Gătejel, Luminița. 'The Common Heritage of the Socialist Car Culture'. In Siegelbaum, *The Socialist Car*, 2011, p. 143-156.

25 Moser, K. "*Autobasteln*".

26 Oudshoorn, N.E.J., and Pinch, T. *How users matter: The co-construction of users and technologies*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003; Franz, K. *Tinkering: Consumers Reinvent the Early Automobile*. Pittsburgh: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.

27 Moser, K., *Autobasteln*.

28 Morris, J. *Everyday Post-Socialism: Working-Class Communities in the Russian Margins*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016.

29 Gerschenkron, A., ed.. *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1962; Chirot, D. (ed.). *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991.

30 Sassen, S. "Theoretical and Empirical Elements in the Study of Globalization". In Rossi, I., ed., *Frontiers of Globalization Research:: Theoretical and Methodological Approaches*, New York: Springer, 2007, p. 287-306.

31 Tatra stopped producing passenger cars in 1999 but is still an important truck manufacturer.

32 https://www.skoda-auto.com/world/heritage.

33 Fava, V. "The Elusive People's Car: Imagined Automobility and Productive Practices along the 'Czechoslovak Road to Socialism' (1945-1968)". In Siegelbaum, *The Socialist Car*, 2011, p. 17-29.

34 Bertone was a spectacular figure in the history of the automobile. He designed cars for all the major Italian automobile companies: Alfa Romeo, Fiat, Lamborghini, and was recognized as a visionary in the field. He most likely designed the Czechoslovak with the same ethos that guided his entire career: "A car is the product of a feeling, or rather, a series of feelings. The most important of these is the sense of wonder and surprise generated by the form of the vehicle. If a car fails to fill me with this sense of wonder at first sight, I am almost certain that it will not be a success." https://www.automotivehalloffame.org/honoree/nuccio-bertone/, accessed July 10, 2019.

35 Alongside Tatra, Daimler, Opel, and Peugeot, Škoda has an uninterrupted history of car production since its inception. After the collapse of the socialist regime in Czechoslovakia, Škoda was privatized in several stages. Since 2000, it became the subsidiary of the Volkswagen Group.

36 Personal communications with Romanian people, having higher education and a rare access to foreign cars (and to a choice of the brand) in the mid-1960s.

37 The company in Eisenach has been owned by Open since 1991.

38 The most popular joke about Trabant was this:
Q. Why do deluxe Trabants have heated rear windows?
A. To keep your hands warm when pushing.

39 Jastrząb, M. "Cars as Favors in People's Poland". In Siegelbaum, L. H. (ed.). *The Socialist Car. Automobility in the Eastern Bloc*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011, p. 30-46.

40 In 1992, the Polish factory was acquired by Fiat and Poland became one of the booming car manufacturers of the region.

41 Vuic, J. The Yugo: The Rise and Fall of the Worst Car in History. New York City: Hill and Wang, 2010.

42 Ardalan, C. "Workers' self-management and planning: The Yugoslav case." *World Development*, 8(9), (1980), p. 623–638; Whitehorn, A. "Yugoslav Workers' Self-Management: A Blueprint for Industrial Democracy?" *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne des Slavistes* Vol. 20, No. 3, (September 1978), p. 421-428.

43 Gătejel, L. "A Socialist-Capitalist Joint Venture: Citroën in Romania during the 1980s", *The Journal of Transport History* 0(0) (2017) 1-18.

44 Gramsci, A. "Americanism and Fordism". In *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1992 [1971]; see also Guillén, M. F. *Models of Management: Work, Authority, and Organization in a Comparative Perspective*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

45 Siegelbaum, L. H. "Cars, Cars, and More Cars: The Faustian Bargain of the Brezhnev Era". In *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia*. New Yorks and Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 83-103.

46 Ibid.

47 The city was named in the honour of the Italian communist Palmiro Togliatti.

48 Ziegler, C. E. "Worker Participation and Worker Discontent in the Soviet Union". *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 98, No. 2 (Summer, 1983), pp. 235-253; Cook, Linda J. *The Soviet Social Contract and Why it Failed: Welfare Policy and Workers' Politics from Brezhnev to Yeltsin*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1993.

49 Silver, B. Forces of Labor: Workers' Movements and Globalization Since 1870. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

50 Fremontier, J. *La Forteresse ouvrière: Renault,* 1971.

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