

ARCHIE MOORE

DJON MUNDINE OAM

Djon Mundine OAM is a member of the Bandjalung people of northern New South Wales and is currently Aboriginal Curator Contemporary Art at Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney.

DEPTH OF FIELD

For better or worse how we see things is inflected by a culturally engrained lens. When asked what was at the heart of the *Depth of Field* exhibition, Archie Moore paused for a moment before thoughtfully replying, 'I'd just like people to stand in the other's shoes for a moment'.¹ The works follow on from his previous, achingly honest statements—sketches on paper of a painful break-up; a distorted, naked, Toulouse Lautrec-like self-portrait; and the displaced Aboriginal man (played by Moore) removed from the colonial landscape image of S. T. Gill in the light-box projection *:E* (2006).

In 1788 there were at least 250 distinct Aboriginal languages and societies on the Australian continent. A feature of these languages was the onomatopoeic quality of their names for birds and other animals. Moore has been fascinated with words—their conceptual creation of meaning in the mind, their generation phonetically in the mouth, and their social meaning over time. In 2000 his billboard-sized sign of the word 'BOONG' suggested a reclaiming of what was, and is, a racist derogatory insult. Moore again uses the Australian insult in a work where, when you have pushed your face onto the clear plastic surface across the open front of a box, the words 'BOONG NOSE' are revealed. You become the insult. Usually such bare lonely personal statements are unpleasant and shunned, hardly reviewed, and almost certainly not sold or acquired.

Once upon a time, the term 'artist' denoted a painter, a sculptor, or a print-maker or craft person, and the majority of Aboriginal artists would have fallen into these categories. Archie Moore works with just about every type of material and optical device from video through to meticulously hand-cut and folded books referencing church architecture. Given the brutal history of colonisation in Australia and the blunt racist interactions played out in much of his work, a piece like the award-winning *Deuteronomy* (2008), questioning the 'goodness' of the Christian God is not surprising. The paradox of Aboriginal worship of such an evil and cruel god should be questioned.

An affect created by Archie's works and materials is a cold emotional flatness. Moore works at questioning racist stereotypes and asks: Can they ever be harmlessly humorous? Where is the line crossed?

Each piece in the *Depth of Field* works has instructions provided on how to reveal a hidden text. For one work that appears to be 3D black-and-white blocks, the instruction is to pull the corners of your eyes, and when you do, you can more clearly read the text 'CHING CHONG CHINAMAN'. Another work, when you cross your eyes to see the image, reads 'CROSS EYED SPAZ'. Another has instructions to jump up and down on the spot, which is a pair of feet drawn on the gallery floor in pigeon-toed position. Moving up and down you can read the text that was until now hidden, 'MASSAI MONKEY MAN'.

Moore softens the blow by turning each expression into a light joke. However, while each work is an optical and cultural trick or tease, and interesting as an exercise, it is tinged with sarcasm, bitterness and anger.

I wish that for just one time

You could stand inside my shoes

And just for that one moment

I could be you,

Yes, I wish that for just one time

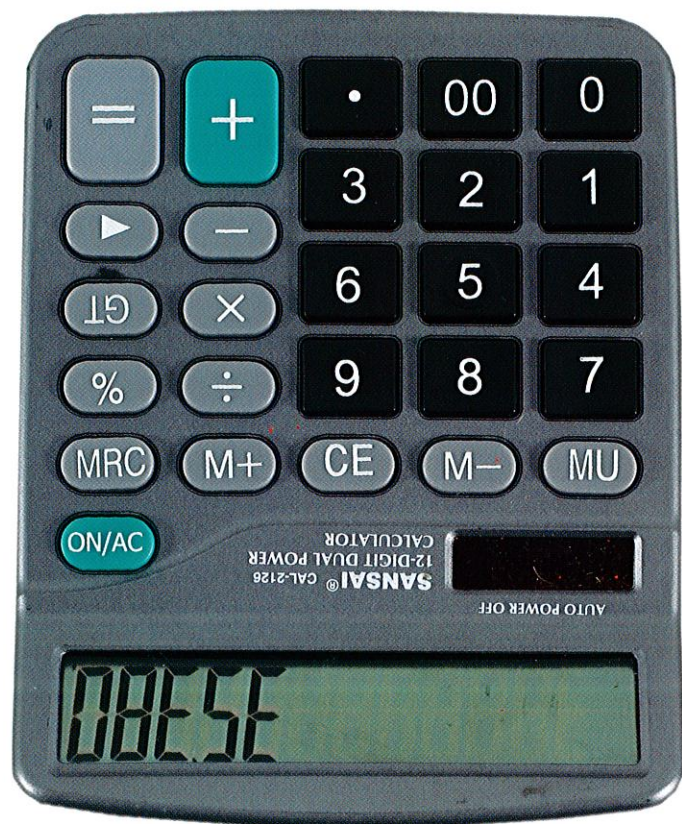
You could stand inside my shoes

You'd know what a drag it is

To see you.

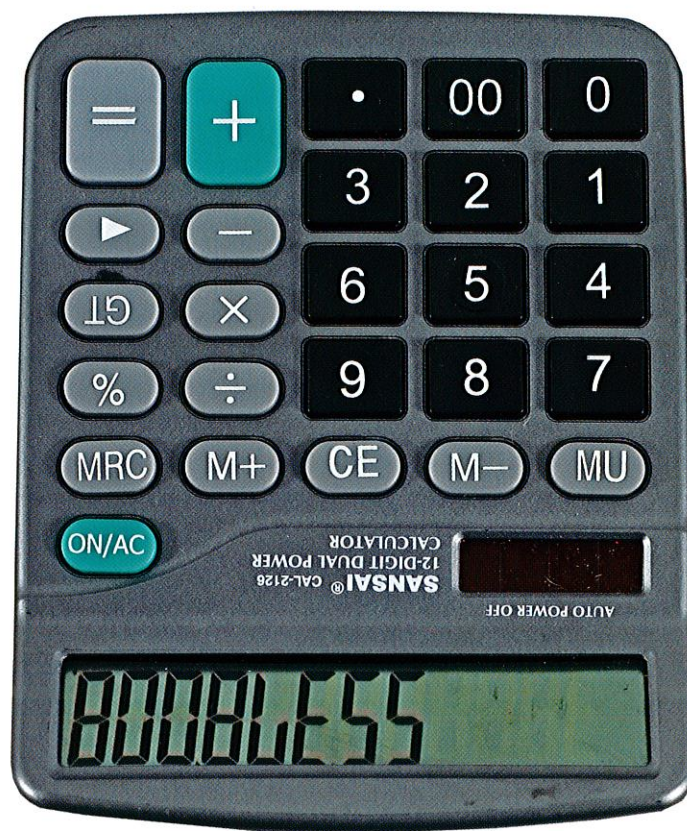
Bob Dylan, 'Positively Fourth Street' (1965)

1. Archie Moore in conversation with Djon Mundine, November 2006.



Instructions: Using the calculator provided, add up the numbers:

- A. $4.614834 \times 12\,000\,000 =$
- B. $48 \times 3 \times 7 \times 52 - 4229.5 - 8518 - 4288.5 =$
- C. $97.7924 - 69 \div 52 =$
- D. $580\,100 \times 100 + 8918 - 10\,000 =$



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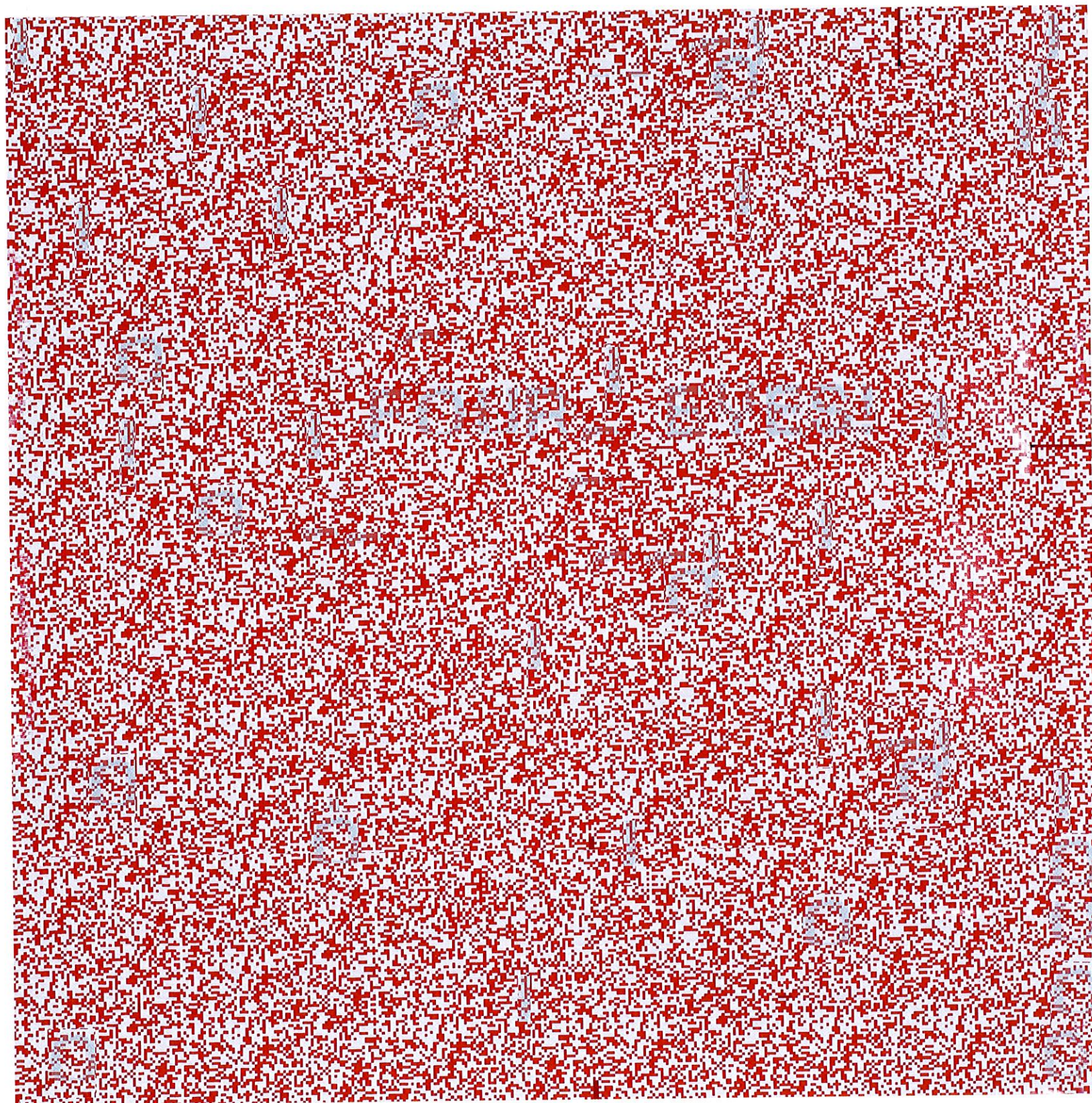
Now You Are A... 2006

digital print

80 x 80 cm

Image courtesy the artist and Fireworks Gallery, Brisbane © the artist

Photograph: Mick Richards



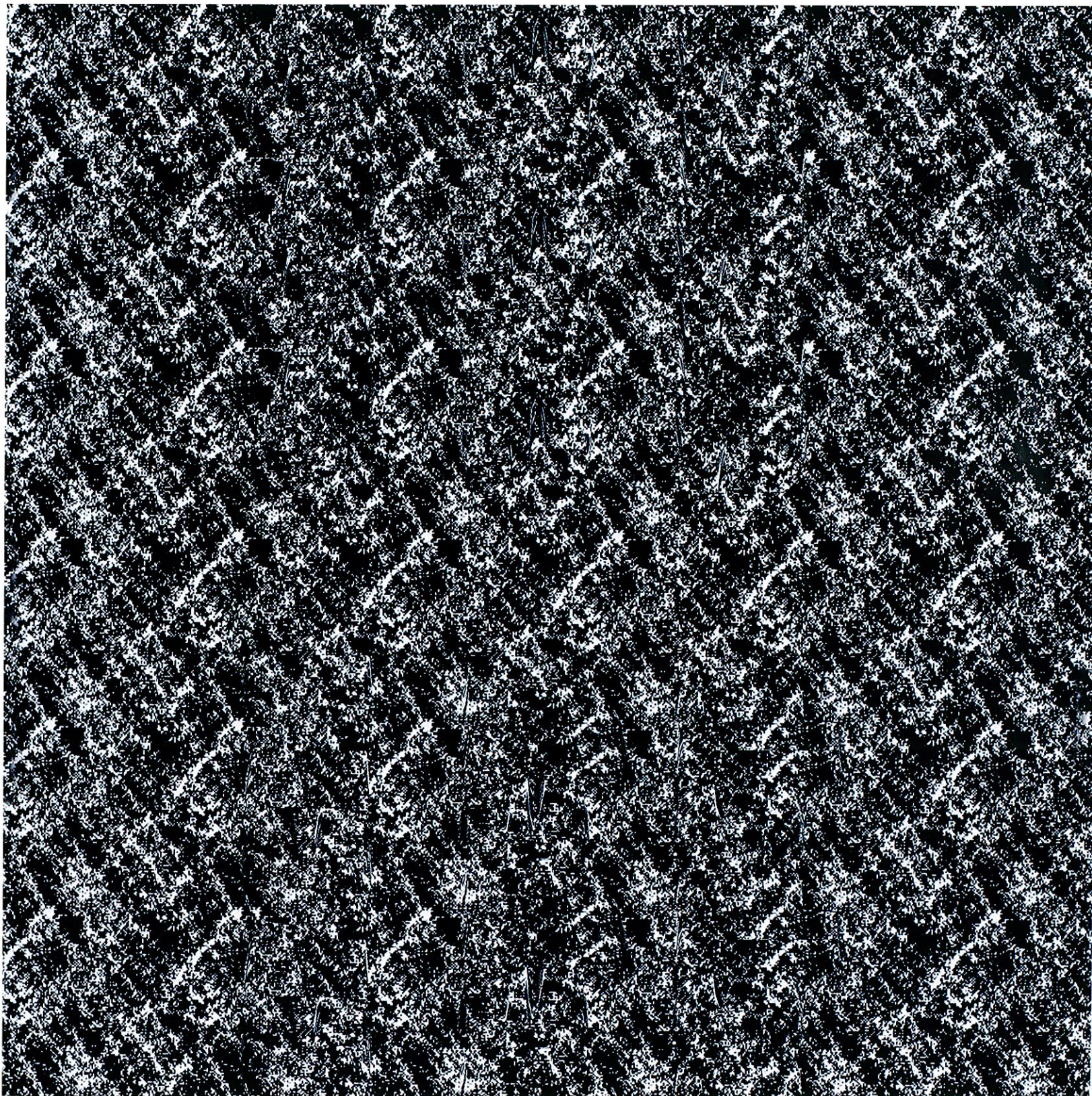
URA... 2006

digital print, plastic glasses

80 x 80 cm

Image courtesy the artist and Fireworks Gallery, Brisbane © the artist

Photograph: Mick Richards



Now You Are A... 2006

digital print

80 x 80 cm

Image courtesy the artist and Fireworks Gallery, Brisbane © the artist

Photograph: Mick Richards



You Have... 2006

ink on mirrored paper

100 x 64 cm

Image courtesy the artist and Fireworks Gallery, Brisbane © the artist

Photograph: Mick Richards



© 2006

DVD and durotran, 0.45 minutes

101 x 66 x 8 cm

Image courtesy the artist and Fireworks Gallery, Brisbane © the artist

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