

Frequency
Andrew Vass

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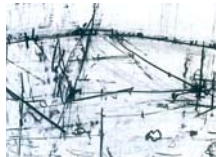
Frequency
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broadbent

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Frequency

Think of the sound of drawing. Perhaps it is a childhood recollection that springs to mind, or maybe drawing classes once attended where the scurrying sound of shading or the brisk audibility, almost resistant, of a sweep across the paper accompanies the memory. Add to this the occasional squeak of too much pressure, or a snapping of lead or charcoal, and we begin to arrive at an index of the sound of marks. Such sounds are bound up with the bodily fusion of mark-making and looking. They record the probing of the eye as it is translated into a materiality. Roland Barthes once put it this way: "The line, however light, or uncertain it may be, always refers to a force, to a direction; it is an energon, a labour which reveals – which makes legible – the trace of its pulsion and its expenditure. The line is a visible action."¹ In the drawings and paintings of Andrew Vass we find a similar energon – whereby the mark or the trace is a unit for directly building and constructing without losing any sense of this physicality or sensuality. Each mark appears to hold its own pressure, its own composure while adding to, and interweaving, a complex whole.



Kiln Hill 06, 2000
charcoal on paper 52 x 75 cm

Kiln Hill 04, 1999
charcoal on paper 52 x 75 cm

Vass's drawings are often made on location, and document a particular interface between the artist and a specific perceptual grasp of what lies before him: pressure and erasure document proximity and distance, a well as the movement of the eye and the sensation of perceived planes and masses. It is an approach that grasps, in his words, "a property that lies between surface and image."² Earlier drawings display more prominent horizon lines and therefore might be more resonant of 'picturing' particular places and incident. As soon as this meeting point of land and sky is edited out of the frame, as in most of the more recent works, then there is a direct change in sensibility. In the series entitled Shift there is more a sense of geology of landscape in an abstract sense rather than place or location. Landscape, as J.F. Lyotard once suggested, is the "Opposite of place. If place is cognate with destination [...] . Landscape as a place without destiny."³ Likewise the spaces in the Shift series are stripped of destination, they are devoid of the

empathic or anecdotal. "Estrangement" Lyotard goes on, "would appear to be a precondition for landscape."⁴ Here, landscape becomes an expanse: of impressive and yet impassive spatial coordinates to be edited and 'framed'. A further transposition takes place in the drawings Fused 01 and 02. Here, surface allows an activation of the all-over (as in 02) or gently congeals into a slightly more activated centre (01). Implying very different optical experiences (Lyotard: "Myopia has one advantage. Always the possibility of two distances; with or without glasses"⁵). Fused 02, with its sense of rippled, sometimes half erased marks, suggests a boundless surface, liquid in feel (also sensed in Night Shift 07). While Fused 01 with its pink hue of marks suggests an image impressed upon on the retina but still below the threshold of recognition. Vass describes these procedures as being the result of the mobility of 'line-in-flux' and dependant upon a "visual locking into place – or 'tuning-in' - on the paper or canvas."

In the paintings Stretch 02, as in others, we sense a repertoire of marks which are slightly broader, and which hug the plane a little more, accentuating a process of visual refraction. What Vass develops here is an incremental approach to painting. Not process-based exactly, because it maintains a singularity to the behaviour or response of each mark in relation to each other. Sometimes these marks form visual scaffolding or contour-like structures, at other times they are almost smeared, fluid and planar. Stretch 02 develops this integral relationship between mark and colour. Predominately in its cooler blues, greens, and pinks this evokes an ambiguity of proximity or distance as mentioned above. It could be a vast terrain as seen from the air, or, on the other hand, something seen so closely its form has become amorphous. In this way, the paintings actively produce space. A space that reverberates somewhere between observation and construction, rather like what Willem de Kooning referred to as a 'glimpse.' This is akin to a peripheral vision that generates a space of slippage between the viewer and the painting: "when I'm slipping I say, hey that's interesting! It's when I'm standing upright that bothers me; I'm not doing so good; I'm stiff. As a matter of fact, I'm really slipping most

of the time, into that glimpse. I'm like a slipping glimpser."⁶ De Kooning, in typically faux-naif style, marvellously captures here a painterly space that isn't about grounding representations; a glimpse could be seen to avoid analysis yet retain an emotive resonance. Paradoxically, in Vass's painting we have a methodical construction of something that might be akin to this glimpse, not as something to extrapolate from (as in tying it back down to a specific representation), but to move towards (a condition of indeterminacy and openness). In many ways this accentuates the processes of translation and transposition that occur between, or within, the drawings and paintings: the translation from place to landscape; from landscape to space. Ultimately these translations and operations could be related back to specific urges within modernism: that of the naturalistic and the anti-naturalistic (let's refrain from using the problematic 'abstraction' for now). What Vass manages to hold on to is both positions, while acknowledging that the paintings ultimately possess an "independent life." Such a tension leads right back to Cezanne, and Joseph Masheck has recently located Cezanne's practice within these naturalistic/anti-naturalistic readings developing a model that might well be applied to Vass himself: "The operative analogy is not of painting mirroring nature but perhaps of the painter as a power transformer whose work converts from nature, more specifically nature as coloured, into painting as a very different system of colour constitution."⁷ This leads us back to the beginning: of the force that underlies the individual mark and the service to which it is directed – Barthes' *energon* – and such productive labour (of looking and construction) lies at the heart of Andrew Vass's project.

David Ryan April 2005

1. Roland Barthes, 'Cy Twombly Works on Paper', in *The Responsibility of Forms*, California 1985

2. All attributed comments from a conversation with the author

3. J.F. Lyotard, 'Scapeland' in *The Inhuman*, London 1991

4. Ibid

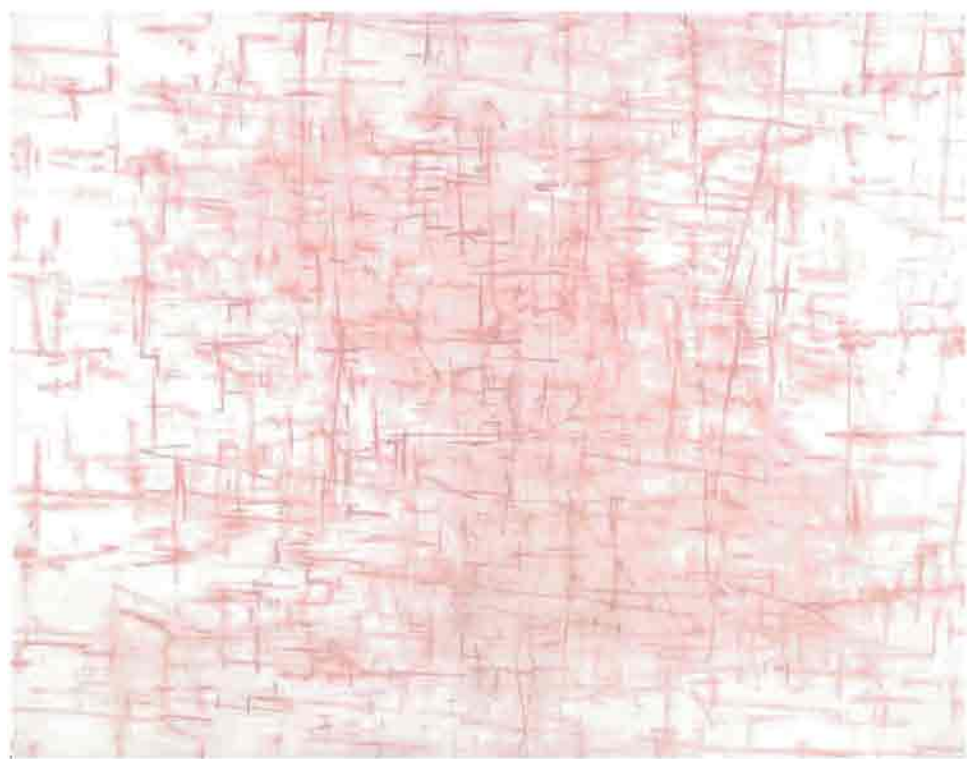
5. Ibid

6. Willem de Kooning, *Collected Writings*, NY, 1988

7. Joseph Masheck, *C's Aesthetics – Philosophy in the Painting*, Philadelphia 2004



Fused 01 2004 pastel on paper 122 x 152 cms



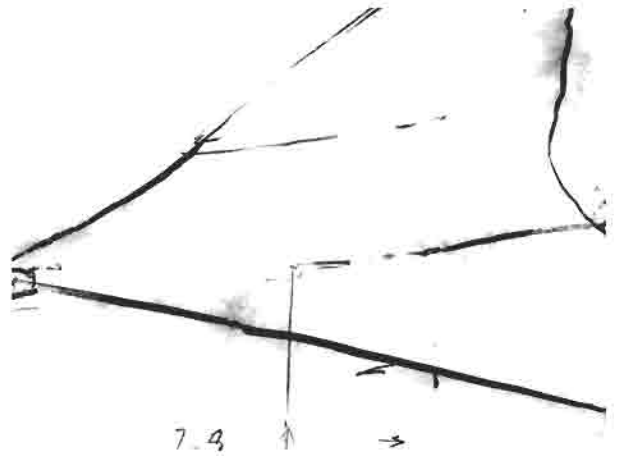
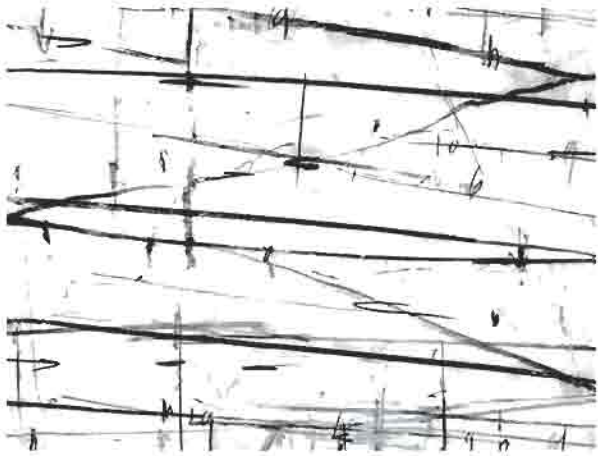
Night shift 08 2004 acrylic and pastel on paper 122 x 152 cms



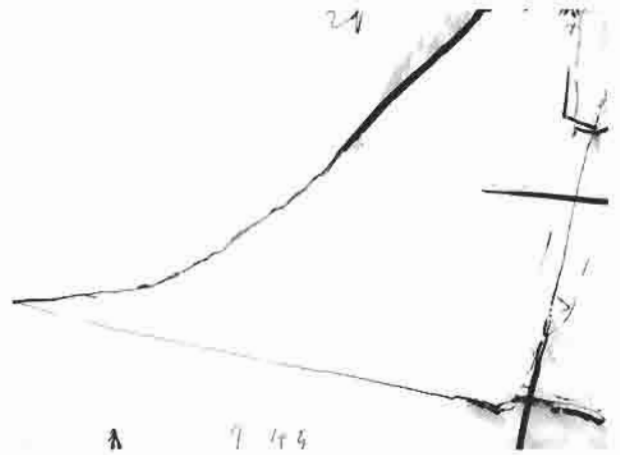
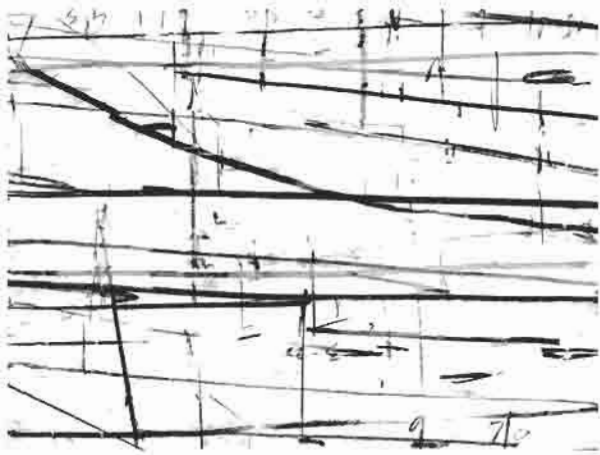
Tracking 01 2005 acrylic on canvas 152 x 183 cms



Shift 04 2005 charcoal on paper 52 x 75 cms
Rise 10 2004 charcoal on paper 52 x 75 cms



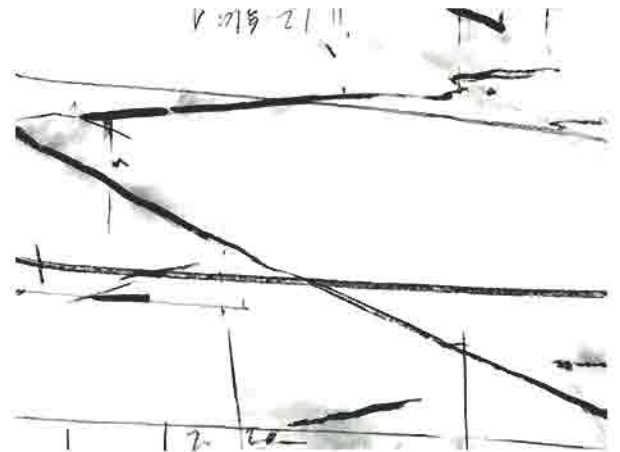
Shift 05 2005 charcoal on paper 52 x 75 cms
Turn 02 2004 charcoal on paper 52 x 75 cms



Stretch 02 2004 acrylic on canvas 152 x 183 cms



Fused 02 2004 charcoal on paper 52 x 75 cms
Shift 06 2005 charcoal on paper 52 x 75 cms



Fused 03 2004 charcoal on paper 52 x 75 cms
Shift 07 2005 charcoal on paper 52 x 75 cms



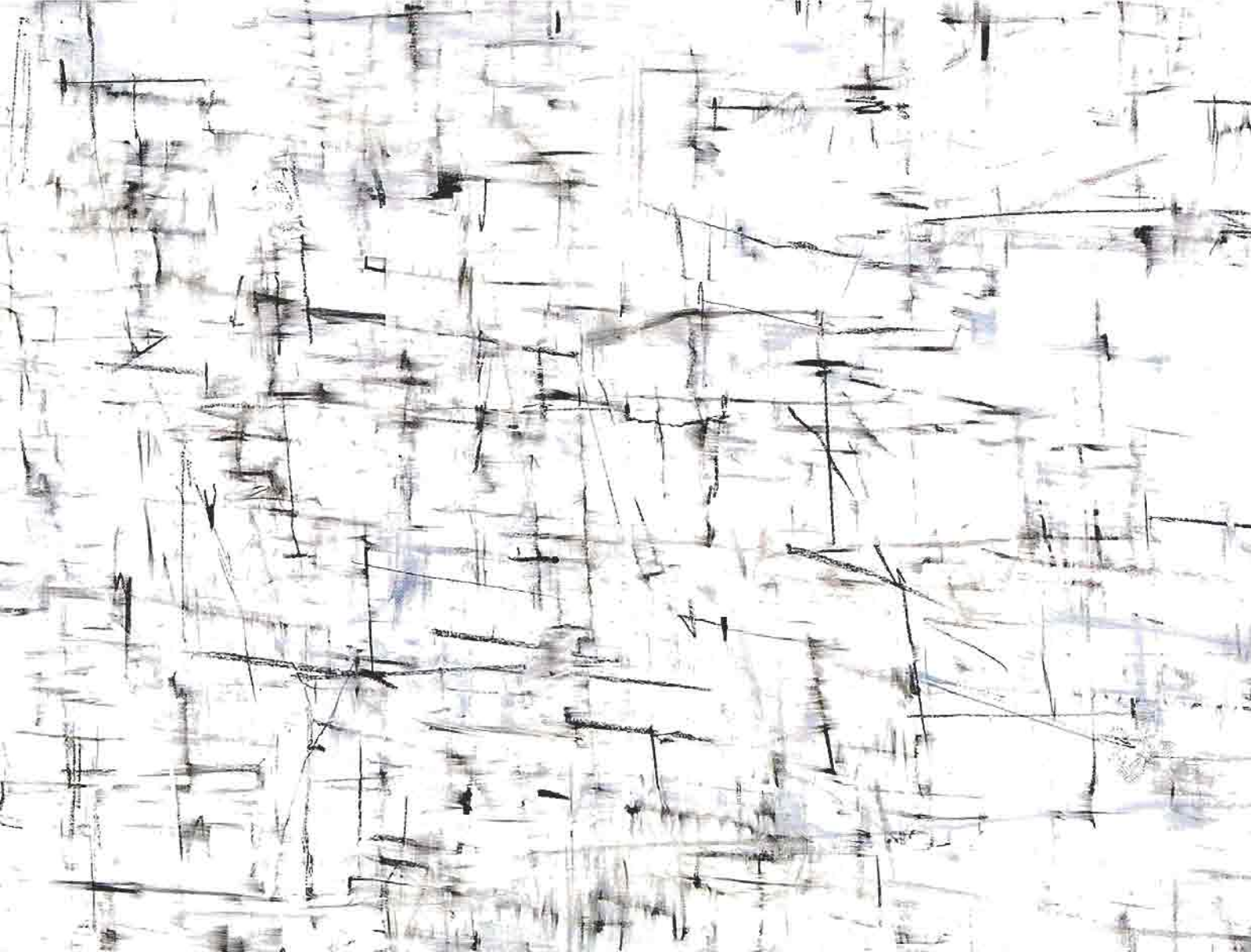
Stretch 03 2005 acrylic on canvas 152 x 183 cms



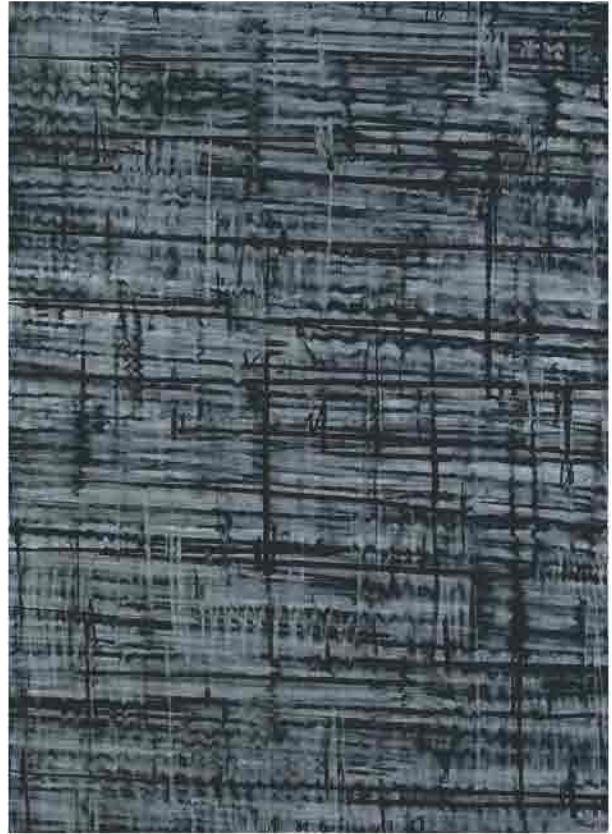
Night shift 09 2005 pastel on paper 52 x 75 cms
Shift 08 2005 charcoal on paper 52 x 75 cms



Fused 04 2005 charcoal and acylic on canvas 152 x 183 cms (detail)



Rise11 2005 charcoal on paper 75 x 96 cms



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Andrew Vass

1961 born London
1978 - 1982 Cambridge College of Arts and Technology

Solo Exhibitions

2005	<i>Frequency</i> , Broadbent, London	2003	<i>Jerwood Drawing Prize</i> , London, Cheltenham, Glasgow & Manchester
2000	North House Gallery, Manningtree		Fresh Art, London
1998	Christchurch Mansion, Ipswich	2003	
1993	Amalgam, Barnes, London	2002	<i>Drawn Together</i> , Bury St Edmunds Art Gallery
1990	Amalgam, Barnes, London	2001	<i>Jerwood Drawing Prize</i> , London
1989	ETNA Community Centre, London	2001	Oliver Contemporary, London
1987	Alba Fine Art, Kew, London	1999	Broughton House Gallery, Cambridge
1987	Old Town Hall, Richmond, London	1998	<i>Drawings for All</i> , Gainsborough's House, Sudbury
1985	West London Institute	1997	Artwalks, Ipswich, Suffolk
1985	Trumpington Gallery, Cambridge	1997	St Cyriacs Open, Swaffam Prior, Cambridge
1984	Trumpington Gallery, Cambridge	1996	Artwalks, Ipswich, Suffolk
1982.	Trumpington Gallery, Cambridge	1995	<i>Making a Mark</i> , Mall Galleries, London

Joint Exhibitions

2004	<i>Will and Compulsion</i> , Broadbent, London	1992	<i>Drawings for All</i> , Gainsboroughs House, Sudbury
2002	<i>Out of Space</i> , Ipswich	1989	Hunting Group, Mall Galleries, London
1999	<i>Three Painters</i> , Gainsborough's House, Sudbury	1987	South Bank Picture Show, London
1997	Charles Mayes Fine Art, London	1986	South Bank Picture Show, London
1996	Conservatory Gallery, Cambridge	1984	South Bank Picture Show, London
1995	Ozten Zeki, London		
1995	Amalgam, Barnes, London		
1994	Halesworth Gallery, Suffolk		
1984	Amalgam, Barnes, London		

Mixed Exhibitions

2005 London Art Fair, Broadbent, London
2004 *Slow Art*, Broadbent, London

Awards

1993 Painting Symposium, Valtice, Czech Republic
1989 Richmond Council Painting Commission, presented to HM, The Queen
1987 Commendation, South Bank Picture Show
1987 Fourth Prize, Camden Open
1985 Prizewinner, Channel Four Painting Competition

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Andrew Vass
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broadbent

25 Chepstow Corner Chepstow Place London W2 4XE
T: +44 (0)20 7229 8811 F: +44 (0)20 7229 8833
info@broadbentgallery.com www.broadbentgallery.com

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