

ADVENTURES IN THE ORGASMATRON, HOW THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION CAME TO AMERICA

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Christopher Turner writes for *Cabinet* magazine, a British quarterly that publishes articles about many facets of society, culture, science, and what have you, some of them allegedly rendered in a scholarly way.

The present book, Turner's first, is, I believe, intended to be scholarly in that Turner sets out in some detail the historical background for what he perceived to be the sexual revolution. In it, he provides interesting, reasonably well written information about political and cultural conditions in Europe and the United States in the early and middle part of the 20th Century, when the modern sexual revolution germinated and came into full force.

However, it is difficult to decide whether the central theme of the book is the sexual revolution, per se or the life and work of Wilhelm Reich. Of course, the two are inextricably bound together, as it was Reich who laid the scientific foundation for understanding sexuality in depth and for actively educating professionals and the masses about these facts and their significance for physical and emotional health and societal functioning. It is Reich's book, *The Sexual Revolution* that originally documented this shift in societal mores. Other pioneers in modern times who worked toward changing our sexual mores - Freud, other psychoanalysts, Kinsey, Marcuse and Perls, are also mentioned and their work reasonably described, but they are given short shrift compared to Reich. It is here, however, that scholarly objectivity disappears.

Before offering the reader my critique of Turner's book, I think it well worthwhile to offer a very brief synopsis of Reich's work since some readers of this journal may not be familiar with its scope.

Wilhelm Reich was born in Austria in 1897 and, as a physician, became a practicing psychoanalyst in Vienna in 1919 at the age of 22. His elders and peers, including Freud, recognized his brilliance, and his seminal work on the analysis of character was accepted in large part by the psychoanalytic community as a major modification of the standard technique of free

association. In addition to character analysis, Reich's major discovery during the psychoanalytic phase of his work was the clinical finding, made through detailed questioning of the sexual practices of his patients, that the majority of them by far were sexually impotent, that is, incapable of true gratification from the sexual act. Women were anesthetic or focused exclusively on clitoral climaxes rather than vaginal orgasm; men were often erectively impotent or suffered from premature ejaculation. When they were potent, too often they were incapable of surrendering emotionally to their partner. In all cases there was a great fear of giving in to orgasmic pleasure. When, through the character analytic process, they overcame this fear they rapidly lost their neurotic symptoms. Following Freud's original thinking, Reich thought that this fact indicated that there was an "economic" factor in neurosis: if the patient became capable of discharging stored excessive quantities of libido, neurotic fixations lost their energy source and, as a result, their power to influence the individual. This quantitative energetic factor became a cardinal element in all his following work.

Extensive deep investigations of social practices convinced Reich that neurosis might be treated on a mass level through education about healthy sexuality. Therefore, through a temporary alliance with the Communist Party in Berlin, where he was practicing at the time, he organized clinics and rallies where people, including adolescents, could receive information about healthy sexual practices including contraception. The rallies were attended by thousands eager for scientific information about sexuality and life.

In Reich's practice of psychoanalysis this meant that the goal became increasing the capacity of patients to surrender to their deepest impulses. When this could be done in the sexual embrace with a loved partner, bound energy would be adequately discharged and neurosis cured or prevented. This could not be done, however, simply by wish or command because patients consciously and unconsciously resisted such surrender. The resistances took the form of character attitudes on both psychological and somatic levels. The psychological attitudes, the "character armoring"

described by Reich, was rather well known, but Reich also discovered that the psychological attitudes were anchored in chronic muscular tensions (muscular armoring). Complimenting the analysis of the patient's character, dissolution of the muscular armoring was now utilized as a means of helping the patient overcome his/her resistances. This innovation became the basis of what is now known as "body work" in therapy, utilized by thousands of practitioners independent of those studying and utilizing Reich's methods on a more formal basis.

In the process of conducting "vegetotherapy", as Reich initially called the method, he noted that with the dissolution of the patient's armoring strong clonisms and pulsations appeared along with "electric currents" that patients described coursing through their body. Following a bioelectric theory of life extant at the time, Reich postulated that the libidinal energy was electrical in nature and that the fundamental life process was its spontaneous pulsation, its rhythmic expansion and contraction. In the 1930s Reich studied this phenomenon experimentally with a DC millivoltmeter of his own design. Readings on subject's bodies, when in acute emotional states of anxiety, anger, or pleasure, confirmed Reich's concept of spontaneous organismic pulsation. Certain of the objective findings did not, however, fit an electrical concept. This set Reich on the path to the discovery of what he later called "orgone energy".

By examining boiled food stuffs, a natural source of life energy, Reich found under sterile conditions using high magnification microscopy that, no matter what the original source, all foods broke down into microscopic vesicles that Reich called "bions." The bions consisted only of a membrane and some inner fluid, water. They glowed blue and moved from place to place in the microscope field. Bions could also be secured from non-organic sources such as carbon, iron filings, and ocean sand by heating them to incandescence and placing them in sterile nutrient media. Remarkably, they divided. Cultures of bions from ocean sand seemed to luminate strongly and the laboratory containing them showed anomalous effects;

light phenomena such as lightening-like tiny rays, a blue glow in the air, the magnetization of metallic instruments and light impressions on closed film cassettes without exposure to light. There were also strong biological effects such as "sun burned" skin exposed to the bions, and conjunctivitis in the eye Reich used to view bions in the microscope. Fearing some form of nuclear radiation, Reich had the bion cultures tested by a radiation specialist at a nearby Oslo hospital. Nuclear radiation was ruled out as were all possible other known forms of radiation. Reich was forced to conclude that he had discovered a previously unknown kind of radiation, which he called "orgone" because he discovered it in the course of his study of the sexual orgasm and because it was absorbed by organic materials. Metals attracted and repelled it as revealed by electroscopic investigations.

In order to examine the luminations more carefully, Reich built an enclosure consisting of non-metallic walls and an inner metal lining. He reasoned that, with the bion cultures within the enclosure, the orgone radiation would be concentrated inside. The light phenomena were more readily seen, but to Reich's surprise the phenomena remained after removing the bions and even after washing down the inner metal lining. Even building a new enclosure without placing bions within it showed the same luminations. It was clear to Reich that the enclosure was somehow concentrating a radiation that existed in the atmosphere. Reich named the enclosure the "orgone energy accumulator" (ORAC). He demonstrated many powerful biological effects, including prolongation of the life of mice with cancerous tumors as well as anomalous physical effects within the enclosure such as a spontaneous elevation of temperature and an anomalous prolongation of discharge times of statically-charged electroscopes. Later he found that Geiger-Mueller Counters could also detect the orgone. In the next decade, Reich was able to experimentally demonstrate a motor force by hooking specially prepared devices to accumulators; anomalous interactions between nuclear radiation sources and concentrated orgone energy; and weather modification by a device that could alter the distribution of orgone energy in the atmosphere.

All of these experiments, including aspects of the nuclear radiation experiment, have been independently replicated by scientifically competent investigators including myself and have been published in a variety of scientific journals.

Wilhelm Reich died in 1957. Since then there have been three books published on Reich and his work, orgonomy, to the present time. The first was *Wilhelm Reich and Orgonomy* by Ola Raknes, a student of Reich, in 1970. This was followed in 1973 by *Wilhelm Reich, the evolution of his work* by David Boadella and then, *Fury on Earth* by Myron Sharaf, a student and assistant to Reich, published in 1983. All are an accurate and sympathetic recounting of Reich's life and work.

Now we have Christopher Turner's *Adventures in the Orgasmatron, How the Sexual Revolution came to America*. Turner reports on most of the scientific issues described above, writing within the context of what was happening in the world at that time.

In Woody Allen's film, *Sleeper*, there is a complex-looking cabinet-like device called the "orgasmatron." Its function is obvious from its name. Turner would like us to believe that the device bears a reasonable similarity to Reich's orgone energy accumulator: therefore one should take neither of them seriously. And that sets the tone for the entire book. Unlike Sharaf, Turner is neither accurate in his reportage nor even-handed. Indeed, there are so many factual errors in his book that one is inclined to say that Turner "isn't even wrong," as Nils Bohr said of a student in advanced physics. Turner gives us the references, the footnotes, the conversations with those who knew Reich, and so on in an effort to convince that this is a scholarly work, but to no avail; anyone checking up on Turner's quotations and allegations will find innuendo, diversions, half-truths, and outright lies all designed to denigrate Reich and make him appear as a crazy fraud.

The deception begins in the introduction, where Turner would have us believe that Reich came to the U.S. in order to spread his findings about sex and politics. Factually, with the rise of Nazism, it was no longer

tenable for Reich to stay in Norway where he had made his major biological discoveries. Reich came to the U.S. on the invitation of Theodore Wolfe, M.D., a Professor of psychiatry at Columbia University, to lecture on his medical discoveries at the New School for Social Research in New York City. Still in the introduction, the ORAC is described as, "a box in which...his (Reich's) ideas came almost prepackaged...an almost magical device that could improve its users orgasmic potency...and their mental health," both of which claims Reich categorically denied, although they became the mantra used by all who wanted to attack him, and which, conversely, identified his attackers. A bit further on Turner alleges that, "People sat in the orgone box hoping to dissolve the toxic danger of conformity." This is pure nonsense and simply unsupported opinion on Turner's part. At the end of the introduction we find out Turner's M.O.: the ORAC is to be seen as, "a prism through which to look at the conflicts and controversies of that era (the era of the sexual revolution coming to America)." For those of us who really know about Reich's work it soon becomes clear that the eye of Turner is peering cockeyed through this prism.

Turner admits that Reich made seminal innovations in psychoanalytic method with his discovery of character analysis, a method of analyzing how a patient presented himself rather than the content of his associations, a method accepted by psychoanalysts that revolutionized psychoanalytic technique. However, Turner denigrates all the other discoveries that complimented character analysis. These were the orgasm theory, the rooting of psychic disturbances in chronic muscular tension (muscular armoring), and the social consequences of successful character analysis. The criticism is not rendered impartially but contemptuously, utilizing sources who knew little or nothing about Reich or his work. Often the source simply dismisses the man or his work as "crazy" or "ridiculous." For example, after reasonably describing Reich's original findings about the nature of the impulsive character, made while Reich was first assistant at the Vienna psychoanalytic clinic, Turner blithely labels Reich as having that same diagnosis based on something that Dr. Elsworth Baker, an

experienced psychiatrist and therapist and Reich's most able American student, wrote about him. Such a diagnosis implies instability, extreme emotional lability, secretiveness, and a tendency to sociopathic behavior. Baker did write that Reich was "impulsive."¹

But there is a world of difference between having a psychological trait, such as impulsivity, which anyone can have, and being someone who has that trait rule his life, as is so for a character type, such as the impulsive character. It is obvious that Turner has little understanding of Reich's characterology, declaring Reich to be an impulsive character, as just mentioned, or as "schizophrenic," or as "manic – depressive," depending upon whom he wishes to quote at the time. Borrowing most heavily from those who became enemies of Reich, as he traced a meteoric path through science and society, Turner never presents substantive information that would confirm any of these diagnoses.

Those who worked with Reich knew of his intensity, that he marched to a different drummer, and that he did not tolerate fools, but generally, his co-workers recognized his genius, kindness, and capacity for deep emotional and interpersonal contact. These are not the qualities of someone with severe emotional disturbances. Those who could not keep up with Reich on the level at which he functioned either dropped out with grace, or too often fell by the wayside, furious at Reich for abandoning them. Turning on Reich, they accused him of their own shortcomings, trying to tear him down to their level. Reich called this "the emotional plague."

This is not to say that in his later years Reich was not at times emotionally agitated, especially when having drunk too much. It is not surprising, when considering the great amount of disappointment and calumny Reich received from many of his contemporaries after opening his heart to them and to the world to the great extent that he did, that he developed some extreme, defensive postures. But as Baker put it, describing Reich, "impulsive, but insane, never."

In a book that purports to be an accurate historical document, I was surprised to find over 30 factual errors

about scientific matters alone. Many of them were the same old canards about the orgone energy accumulator (ORAC), for example: that it was a Faraday cage (it is not grounded like a Faraday cage); that it was an atomic shelter in reverse...where the radiation could be "contained and neutralized" (never one of Reich's concepts); that one could increase one's orgasmic potency and have orgasms by sitting inside an accumulator (not so, as Turner himself knows by quoting Reich, "I wished it did, but it does not"); that the ORAC, "...dissolves the toxic dangers of conformity" (not so - the ORAC has nothing to do with social change, being strictly a physical device); that the ORAC could cure cancer (never claimed by Reich, despite experimental evidence that it could prolong life in mice with spontaneous tumors); that the metal lining of the ORAC stopped orgone energy from escaping from the enclosure (not true – metals first attract and then repel orgone, as demonstrated experimentally); that Einstein proved that an observed, apparently spontaneous elevation of temperature within the ORAC could be explained by convection (not so, as Einstein failed to control for his own experimental refutation of the observed phenomenon); that Reich claimed that his laboratory was radioactive after placing one mgm of radium within an ORAC (not so, although an anomalous elevation of background counts was measured even when the radium had been removed 1/4 mile away to a lead container within a steel safe – this led Reich to conclude that the orgone had been excited to a new state of functioning); that Reich's invention, the orgonoscope, a device for visualizing orgone energy, could move waves (not so, as the orgonoscope is a closed, inches-long tube, whereas what Reich described was a hollow metal tube several feet long); and so forth.

Regarding Reich's biological discoveries, it is clear that Turner either had not carefully researched Reich's publications or chooses intentionally to misrepresent them. For example, in discussing Reich's discovery of the "bions," microscopic vesicles that develop spontaneously in disintegrating organic and inorganic matter, Turner writes as if Reich were claiming he had discovered particles that were alive and originated "de

novo,” as it were. In fact, Reich was careful to describe the bions as not arising de novo but as being transitional states between the non-living and the living.

Turner reports on the FDA’s scientific case against Reich. While preparing to indict him for transporting a “fraudulent” medical device- the ORAC- across state lines, various of Reich’s experiments were allegedly replicated by scientists and physicians at different laboratories. Turner describes some of their results, all negative, but also includes, without comment, the scientists’ attitude toward the very work they were asked to do. A three-man committee on mathematical biophysics at the University of Chicago found the accumulator to be “a gigantic hoax with no scientific basis” on purely theoretical grounds. One of them said, “The material is beneath any refutation.” A physician testing for basic physiological reactions stated, “It was very difficult for me to bring myself to take the time to prepare this report because...this quackery is of such a fantastic nature that it seems hardly worthwhile to refute the ridiculous claims of its proponents.” So much for scientific objectivity and openness of mind!

A physician tested a variation of the ORAC on a trichomonas infection of the vagina and found in one case that the infection cleared up immediately after treatment. This was written off as due to a strictly mechanical effect of introducing the device into the vagina. According to Turner, when a physician consulting for the FDA was presented with Reich’s finding that red blood cells from cancer patients develop “spikes” in physiological saline solution, he said the spikes were “...the natural crenellation (sic) of red blood cells.” Anyone who has faithfully performed this blood test using Reich’s strict protocol can easily differentiate naturally crenating (scalloped edge) red blood cells from the spiked cells described by Reich. Since physicians are familiar with “crenation,” the use of the term “crenellation,” which refers to the embattlements of forts, not red blood cell disintegration, must have been Turner’s error. Furthermore, the spikes rarely develop “naturally,” but only where there is an energy-deficient chronic illness such as cancer. Obviously Turner doesn’t know what he is writing about here.

I was working at the Jackson Laboratory in Bar Harbor, Maine, the summer that the FDA granted the lab funds to conduct a test of the ORAC on cancer mice. On speaking to the assistant who was conducting the experiment I found out that the treated mice were dying significantly faster than the controls. On Reich’s suggestion, I found out that an x-ray machine was in close proximity to the laboratory where the studies were done. Reich had previously found that the presence of high frequency electromagnetic radiation induced a negative, disturbing effect on the radiation within the ORAC and he asked me to explain this to Dr. William Murray, the scientist in charge of conducting the study. I did so, suggesting to Murray that he read the literature where this effect is described. Murray told me that, “I won’t do that because I don’t want to prejudice myself while running the experiment.”

After detailing all the negative reactions to the ORAC, you would think that Turner would make an effort to balance his reportage by documenting some positive comments. Nary a one! And he had ample access to literature on experimental work using the ORAC published by James DeMeo, Ph.D, Dr. Stefan Muschenich, who found an anomalous elevation in temperature in subjects using the ORAC compared to suitable controls, and myself and others who replicated Reich’s cancer experiments on mice. Nor does Turner refer to the detailed analysis of the FDA’s scientific experiments published by Dr. Courtney Baker (writing under the pseudonym, C.F. Rosenblum) and myself.² Obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, we found it was shoddy work at best, something that would never be published in any self-respecting scientific journal. We even found some results that confirmed Reich’s findings, but were not mentioned in the conclusions of the articles. In most cases, Reich’s strict protocols were assiduously avoided.

It is often difficult to differentiate the block-headedness of the FDA inspectors and scientists from Turner’s own pathetic investigation, reportage and opining. For example, Turner writes that FDA inspectors, when first

visiting Reich's laboratory, carried radioactivity-monitoring film badges and dosimeters, allegedly because Reich had written in *The Oranur Experiment* (FN) that his premises were "dangerously radioactive." Reich never wrote this. What he did write was that small amounts of radium placed within an ORAC triggered off a field reaction in the orgone, causing G-M counters to output anomalous counts. In fact, as reported by Reich after the initial reaction, the 1 mgm of radium used in the experiment anomalously lost much of its radioactive quality, as measured by electroscopic discharge.³

With respect to all of Reich's psychological, biological, and physical research, I could find few areas in which Turner is not confused. For example, he describes Reich as finally embracing Freud's death instinct. In fact, what Reich had discovered was a toxic state of orgone energy ("DOR") which had life-negative qualities. Reich ventured that Freud's perception of a wish for death that he could see in some people had its biophysical basis in DOR. But this is a far cry from embracing the concept that people had an instinct to embrace death, as Freud alleged, in describing masochists who defied recovery despite extensive psychoanalysis. Nor do we find Turner giving Reich credit for solving the problem of masochism with his character-analytic technique.

Turner describes Reich as having, "assumed the *mythic* [italics mine-RAB] status of rainmaker" in conducting his weather control experiments. He then goes on to describe how Reich actually did make it rain according to Reich's son, Peter. No comment, however, by Turner about this apparent contradiction. Perhaps it wasn't a myth?

Nor is there any mention of the well-documented organomic weather work over a thirty-year span, published by myself in the *Journal of Orgonomy*, nor of Dr. James DeMeo's well-documented weather work in the U.S. and abroad, as well as DeMeo receiving his (published) master's degree at the University of Kansas for his controlled study of the use of the Reich weather apparatus, the "cloudbuster," in generating rainstorms.

Turner's use of the term "mythic" is typical of how in other contexts Turner denigrates Reich's work. Turner describes the ORAC as being similar to a 19th Century wooden cage named the "Utica Crib." Why? Because, Turner writes, Otto Fenichel, a psychoanalytic associate of Reich in Berlin, allegedly circulated the rumor that Reich had been hospitalized in the Utica State Hospital! In another context Turner implies that Reich is schizophrenic. Why? Because, as Turner states, Reich understood how schizophrenics functioned. So it follows that, in Turner's loosely associative mind, to Reich the ORAC must be little more than his very own "Influencing Machine," a fantasied device described by a schizophrenic patient of the psychoanalyst Tausk.

Turner interviewed or obtained quotations from many people who had known Reich, including his earlier psychoanalytic colleagues, his daughter, Lore and his son, Peter. Except for Reich's student, Dr. Elsworth Baker and Peter, all of them opined that Reich was either schizophrenic or manic-depressive. There is no substantiation of these opinions: indeed all of them are based upon the fact that Reich talked and wrote about "energy" in people and in the atmosphere. Since such concepts were unknown at that time (1930-1940), except for the main-stream concepts of physical energies, it was simply accepted that Reich was crazy and hallucinating. Turner goes with the opinions: when Reich sits in the ORAC he sees fog-like formations, bluish dots, lines of light, and violet light phenomena apparently emanating from the walls. Turner understands this as Reich having "hallucinations." Reich, the observing scientist, spent long periods of time in the ORAC to substantiate his original subjective impressions. This is understood by Turner as, "...Reich being locked in his iron cage (as) testament to his increasing alienation." Indeed, as Dr. DeMeo, myself, and others have found, anyone sitting in an orgone room for over 1/2 hour on a dry sunny day will see just what Reich saw, without being prepped to do so.

When it comes to presenting Reich's views on sexuality, Turner does no better than most who have taken on this subject.⁴

Initially, at least, Turner appears to get it right when he quotes Reich: “It is not just to fuck, you understand, not the embrace in itself, not the intercourse. It is the real emotional experience of the loss of your ego, of your whole spiritual self.” Although Turner claims familiarity with Reich’s work, it appears that he doesn’t seem to really understand what Reich is talking about. Both subtly and not so subtly, Turner derides Reich’s concept of “orgastic potency,” and gives testimony by psychoanalysts and other prominent individuals refuting it. An examination of the testimony reveals, however, a failure to distinguish between primary and secondary sexuality. As Reich discovered clinically, primary drives are impulses moving out towards the world unimpeded by armoring, from the deepest part of the self – love fused with eroticism. Secondary drives are primary impulses that become distorted as they are expressed through the psychic and muscular armoring - loveless sex, sadism, pornography. In Western society, sadly, the primary drives are hardly known; the secondary drives are considered to be the norm, one’s “nature.”

For example, Turner, searching to bolster his view that Reich was some kind of sexual nut, quotes James Baldwin, “There are no formulas for the improvement of the private or any other life—certainly not the formula of more and better orgasms...The people I had been raised among had orgasms all the time, and still chopped each other with razors on Saturday nights.” (Baldwin, J., *The New Lost Generation*). Are we really expected to believe that such people were capable of love?

And Turner would have us believe that Reich thought that the cure of neurosis could be effected simply by having patients have sexual intercourse. Of course that is nonsense, since most intercourse lacks the gratification in energetic discharge that permits the establishment of a healthy “energy economy.” The reason? Emotional armoring against pleasure, established originally in childhood and perpetuated by a sex-negative society. It is not a matter of “how many times one can do it,” but of the quality of satisfaction and gratification in the sexual embrace. Sex without

love can never result in this. Turner’s further evidence against Reich’s thesis? The sexual libertarianism of the Nazis and the fact that this did not lead to political freedom! Again, no serious distinction between “fucking” and sex with love. According to Reich and the experience of many of his students, including myself, the process of therapy can spontaneously establish primary sexuality and secure emotional health.

Turner’s utterly abysmal reportage is well illustrated in his attempts to make Reich out as a sexual pervert. According to Turner, Lore Reich Rubin, Reich’s youngest daughter, told Turner that her father was a sexual pervert, at the very least a voyeur. “I wouldn’t be surprised,” she is quoted as saying, “if he molested my sister, though she would never admit that, I’m sure...He was really a sex abuser, excuse me for saying it...I don’t have any evidence, but I think he was.” Here, Turner accuses Reich of sexual perversity and using as evidence total hearsay from Reich’s daughter, who earlier in the interview, as Turner reports, states that, *she didn’t think there would have been anything wrong* [italics mine, RAB] with it if Reich had made sexual advances towards her when she was a child. If true, what an incredible statement! Is this the pot calling the kettle black?

Inuendo is heaped upon inuendo to paint the picture of Reich as a pervert, and Reichian therapists as therapeutic sadists, seducers of children and rapists. Turner reports that Susannah Steig, the niece of the cartoonist William Steig – himself an ardent follower of Reich, “...tells of another Reichian therapist who allegedly repeatedly raped an eleven-year-old-patient for months; apparently, the unnamed analyst was later put into a mental institution.” Pure Turnereze.

In summary, this book is muck-raking from the bottom of the barrel; much alleged, little evidence. The popular press loves it. To date, at least nine book reviews extoll Turner’s acumen and revelatory reportage, delighting in bringing Reich down. None view the book with a truly critical eye. Why? The answer lies in what Reich found to be true about other’s reaction to his findings and himself and, indeed, to most pioneering scientists and thinkers who have

disturbed man's emotional and cognitive equilibrium. Man has little capacity to tolerate the truth about himself; excited by orgonomy and incapable of tolerating this excitation, the *Little Man*, like Turner, attacks, quelling his inner disturbance by getting rid of the person that caused it. Put down Reich, try to kill him and his work, no matter what nefarious means are used, so the Turners of the world can breath easier. Reich called this the Emotional Plague.

This is not a perjorative term. Reich described the emotional plague as a medical problem. One feels genuine sadness that such responses as Turner's make it more difficult for the light of geniuses and pioneers like Reich to shine into the dark corners of the world.

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