

Time best demonstrates the correctness of political issues and the stability of certain expressive, speech forms in a particular political situation.

Time is the main criterion through which the expressive language of individual visual connections and codes are formed, filtered, and solidified. This is a form that emerges in its thoroughness over a while. How many things around us have not withstood the test of time, and how many things have given them a grounding?

Post-Soviet modernist architecture in Georgia has, in recent decades, attracted the attention of a narrow professional group. Researchers are trying to uncover and preserve the scattered memories across Georgia. In the West, the study of late Soviet modernism goes beyond professional interests. This is evidenced by many important studies, exhibitions, and publications accessible to the general public, such as: *"Soviet Modernism 1955-1991: Unknown Stories"* (2012 exhibition at the Vienna Architecture Center/Architekturzentrum Wien), *"The Destruction of Modernisms"* (2013 exhibition at SALT, Istanbul), and others.¹

Interest in the mentioned topic was sparked, or rather, the question became relevant due to the Cold War, driven by the desire to rethink the rich modernist architecture, separated from the Western narrative, in a unified global context.

However, time is inexorable to a form that creates a political structure distinct from the present. Moreover, this refers to the architectural form empty of function in many cases that becomes unsuitable for use. Perhaps this is why, to some extent, we have sacrificed the late Soviet architecture (as well as many other things), but among the buildings that can be counted on one's fingers, there are still examples that speak to us of the complex path of our country's development.

One of these is building the current Georgian Public Broadcaster, the TV Center. Unfortunately, its value is truly clear only to a narrow professional group and is not understood by many, including those entrusted with determining its future.

However, what is the role of its presence in our society, and why should we protect it?

What is late Soviet modernism?

Preconditions

When we talk about Georgian culture and architecture of the early 20th century, we always mention the disruption of the natural course of development caused by the Soviet Union and the Sovietization of the country. Georgia, like the rest of Europe, naturally followed and absorbed all the technological

¹ <https://www.goethe.de/ins/ru/en/kul/sup/sms/exh/21967504.html>

and cultural innovations offered by the civilized world. However, since 1921, Georgia has been artificially placed in an abstract, mythical environment.

The main idea of great Soviet architecture – "national in form, socialist in content" – created monumental and festive forms. However, the Soviet period and Stalinist architecture of that time existed in a separate, independent world, developing not parallel to the contemporary world, but asynchronously from it.

It should be noted that in Western civilization, the International Style emerged in the 1920s, with the Industrial Revolution serving as its main foundation. The minimalist expressive language, without any embellishments or artistic adornments, was aimed first of all at the function and its maximum use.

In this same period, separate architectural movements began to form in European countries. The emergence of modernist design was largely due to a group of European architects who drew on the teachings of Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier and German-American architect Walter Gropius. The phrase by German architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe: "Less is more" became a distinctive leitmotif of the architectural concept of this period. Architecture, in which "form follows function"² gained recognition in the literal sense.

In 1917, the movement of De Stijl emerged in the Netherlands, encompassing both architecture and various art forms. By breaking down shapes and colors to their basics, simplified forms with the principle of pure abstraction and generalization became the key characteristics of this style. In 1919, the Bauhaus school was founded in Germany, which had a significant influence on modernist design and the formation of the so-called "International Style." The coexistence of form and function, technological advancements, and the synthesis of art shaped the common characteristics of design. Since the 1930s, the International Style gained widespread popularity in America, largely due to the exodus of intellectuals from Nazi Germany – including the migration of leaders of this style, who were already establishing their movement in the U.S. at that time.

It should also be noted that the International Style was linked to a political direction and mindset that was infused with socialist and communist ideologies. The main idea of functionalism surpassed individualism, which, on the one hand, served to spread the collective ideology.

From the perspective of form, architecture played an important role in society, with its main idea being the maximum merging of function and aesthetics.

Soviet architecture of the 1950s-60s.

Soviet architecture after the 1950s was based exactly on the ideas of European and American modernism. This was a period known in history as a kind of "Détente period". The influx of foreign architecture and literature, exchange missions, and trips to socialist and capitalist countries marked the beginning of a period when Soviet architects, for the first time since the 1920s, felt themselves to be participants in global architectural processes.

These processes were based on the fact that, since the 1930s, there had been a gradual trend of rapid development of Soviet cities, which, in turn, had to be based on fast, simple, and inexpensive construction. The so-called Stalinist Empire style, on the contrary, promoted expensive, bourgeois, and lavish construction, which was completely contradictory to the rapid development and industrialization of Soviet cities.

² Louis Sullivan – „Form follows function“

In 1953, Nikita Khrushchev became the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, publicly criticized the existing expensive and luxurious architecture, and in 1955 issued the decree "On the Elimination of Redundancy in Design and Construction."

As a matter of fact, the mass construction of the Soviet Union began in this period, with the main idea being the unification of design, cheapness, and the simplicity of technology.

The principle idea — fast and cheap construction — required the development of new technologies that would enable the formation of structures that would facilitate construction. Accordingly, reinforced concrete constructions and their mass production experienced rapid development.

The new architectural culture led to the suppression of creativity and individualism, an example of which is not only the standardized buildings but also entire neighborhoods planned during this period.

The statistics show that 97 percent of construction was based on standard projects, while 3 percent consisted of individual projects.

The expressive language of architecture during this period realized against the backdrop of political changes, was conditioned by the re-discovery of the International Style and its affirmation. Soviet modernism³ on the one hand, embraced the ideological, stylistic, and functional characteristics of modernism, while at the same time, within the context of Soviet standardized ideology, it managed to create a new, independent, and quite modern form (the building of the Chess Palace and the Alpine Club in Vera Park, the aquatic complex "Laguna Vere," the Tbilisi department store complex, the Isani and 300 Aragveli metro stations, and others).

The Iron Curtain between the Soviet Union, and thus Georgia, and the West during the aforementioned political changes was more or less permeable. Consequently, Soviet and Georgian architecture resonated on the international stage, which is reflected in individual architectural examples scattered across its territory.

Tbilisi TV Center

The architecture of Tbilisi in the 1960s developed within the framework of the aforementioned ideology. Among the numerous large-scale and standardized projects, there are certainly examples that can be considered vivid expressions of the style and iconic works. Among them is the building of the former television center.

There is not much information about the mentioned building in the Central Historical Archive of Tbilisi, possibly because the construction of the television center attracted special attention during the Soviet era. And, like many notable construction projects in Tbilisi, it was kept secret.

The Soviet government had been planning the construction of the TV Center since the 1950s. In 1953, the design of the television tower on the top of Mount Mtatsminda began, and its construction was completed in 1956. The foundation of television broadcasting in Georgia was laid in a specially equipped studio within the tower.

³ The final definition of the term has not been even determined, therefore it is sometimes referred to as Soviet modernism and sometimes as Soviet modernist style.

It seems that plans for the construction of the TV Center began to take shape around this period, with Lenin Street chosen as the site. The construction was entrusted to architect Archil Kurdiani who was tasked with preparing sketch proposals for a closed commission⁴.

The Kurdiani family archive preserves not only the final design of the building but also the competition materials. The analysis of these materials vividly reflects the process of political changes—the "transformation" process—and shows how the project is simplified, tempered, and molded into its final form following the political conjecture.

The stages of the project development -1955 to 1963 years.

The first three of the four surviving architectural designs for the building, designed in 1955-56, vividly reflect the author's creative struggles and a distinctive stylistic eclecticism.

The first version of the project features a vertically constructed tower, topped with a massive dome. The building stands on a faceted tower-like pedestal, emphasizing its vertical form. The anatomy of the building is shaped by a combination of forms on three different facets, which seemingly oppose each other mechanically, with no connection between them. The heavy dome seems to give the building an oriental touch, and although the building has no decorative embellishments, the small openings are perceived as a kind of ornament on its structure.

The second version of the project is more simplified compared to the first, but the emphasis is placed on the massiveness and heaviness of the forms. The building here also consists of two parts — a circular gallery topped with a tower of a similar shape.

The two mentioned projects, despite their differences, are built on a common foundation and still, to this day, cannot genetically break away from the connection with Stalinist imperial architecture.

The third project is relatively simplified: it no longer features a tower and consists only of an elongated horizontal volume.

The facade of the building is monotonous, divided by a rather massive arch built on a small basement. Despite attempts to simplify the structure, it remains heavy, which is achieved primarily through the rhythmic repetition of the arch. The building is structurally slender, but artistically mute and withdrawn. Here, too, the connection with the monumental forms of Stalinist architecture can be traced.

The final version of the project is, in fact, an already realized project, radically different from the previous versions. The difference between them is so significant that it is hard to believe they were developed by the same author.

The architect, who had worked for many years on the design of a building with a similar function, minimized the heaviness, massiveness of the forms and any sense of buffoonery and created a light, open, wide-spanning building that played an important role in shaping not only the specific site but the street and surrounding area as a whole.

Even though the development on the street already had an established appearance and was filled with a diverse stylistic repertoire of Soviet architecture (Buildings I, II, VII of the Technical University,

⁴ There is not much information about the competition, and, most likely, Archil Kurdiani was commissioned to directly build the mentioned structure and present the relevant options. Obviously, despite the years, the architect's approach has remained unchanged.

"Georgian style," a multi-apartment residential building, the so-called 11-story building, 2, Pekin Street), the author was able to break away from it and create a modern and harmonious form that integrated well with the landscape. However, this was done in such a way that it did not disrupt the overall image of the already established environment and the main feature – the rather sharp bend of the avenue.

The building extends horizontally along the avenue, and its curved silhouette resembles a sail stretched at both ends. The first thing that stands out is its curved, flexible silhouette, clearly visible against the sky behind it. The building is situated on slightly inclined terrain, with a gently curving slope from the street perimeter, the shape of which is the primary expression of the building.

It is precisely the topography and relief of the site, along with the accuracy of its placement, that allow for a full representation of even the most important details of the building's concept.

The building is designed over the terrain in such a way that when moving along the avenue, especially when walking from the square, it appears in all its fullness, while its curve remains visible from every angle. The uneven topography serves as a natural pedestal for the building, which the author naturally utilizes and develops access in two directions by thoughtfully placing the building: one access is from the so-called street, via an open staircase, and the other is through the driveway on the northern side of the building, providing access to both the central and rear facades.

Composition and Structure

The horizontally elongated rectangular building is constructed based on the principles of symmetry and balance. Symmetry plays a fundamental role in its overall composition. Vertical elements are evenly distributed across the wide glass panels, giving the facade a sense of organization and rhythm. The building's facade is divided into rhythmic sections, designed by alternating glass panels and decorative vertical panels. This composition helps capture the core structure of the facade, which points to the principle of functionality.

In the mentioned building, the main entrance is architecturally emphasized and harmoniously integrated into the overall composition of the facade. The platform and steps at the entrance create an additional visual emphasis – the canopy, placed over the entrance, essentially repeats the overall silhouette of the building and serves as a kind of small replica of it. The flexible silhouette of the tensioned sail is repeated twice on the building (both in its silhouette and at the entrance), and in the vertical modular structure, it introduces a horizontal dynamic emphasis.

The building is constructed with a reinforced concrete frame, ensuring the durability of its structure. However, in the facade design, the main structural expression is made up of metal frames and their rhythmic contrast with the glass. Wide glass panels are positioned vertically and are framed by reinforced concrete supporting piers, which define the structural strength (including visual) of the facade.

The glass panels are wide and tall, designed to allow maximum natural light penetration into the interior; however, they also play a significant role in connecting the interior and exterior spaces. These stained glass windows generate a kind of connection between the interior and exterior worlds, which can be both metaphorically linked to the building's function and be part of the architectural concept. However, the glass gives the building facade a visually illusory lightness, and in this respect, its role is quite significant, which is achieved through the texture of the glass. Yet, it seems that the use of glass

in practice did not have a positive effect, as the contemporary architect D. Jashi wrote: "In recent architectural practice, buildings have emerged where the overall architectural form consists of reinforced concrete structures and glass panels, which adhere to the methods of modern architecture. In some cases, excessive use of glass surfaces was not suitable for the southern climate conditions and provoked serious complaints." It is likely for this reason that the interior layout of the building was designed in such a way that the glassed spaces were enclosed with double-layered panels, so the building could maintain some degree of coolness. However, most likely, these double-layered panels were also part of the artistic-architectural concept, serving to enhance the building's clear visual perception – they closed off the connection between the exterior and the interior space, adding a greater sense of coziness to the latter.

Façade Design

The design of the building's facade with its structure, was an equal representation of its texture and individual details. According to the project, vertical panels were inserted into the areas between the stained glass windows.⁵ These panels gave the building visual depth in contrast to the glass and introduced a sense of dynamics into its somewhat ascetic form. Additionally, the paintings depicted on the panels and their content played a significant role (featuring Georgian themes, and recognizable and easily understandable storylines, with the content aimed at conveying information, establishing a connection between people and the world, and reflecting their historical and temporal unity).

Although these decorative panels were ultimately not implemented, it was planned to work with large metal plates using lithography, which would have created a decorative technological innovation while simultaneously altering the building's overall artistic perception (by gradually acquiring the aged texture of the metal).

The decorative inserts, with their geometric, generalized structure, are the only element that introduced a national touch into the building's otherwise simply recognizable non-Georgian form. This connection—communication, creative interpretation, free-thinking, and inspiration—is filled with artistic allegory and symbolism, collaborating with structural geometry and simplicity. The synchronization of lines and shapes originates a dynamic, yet artistically harmonious environment.

Although briefly, it is still necessary to address the synthesis of architecture and painting, which was also evident in this building and was officially founded in the 1960s. In 1961, the first exhibition of Soviet monumentalists was held in Moscow, where architects also participated. "For the first time in our practice, architectural projects for public and residential buildings were displayed in the halls, where the greatest role was played by monumental art".⁶ This exhibition became an impetus and motivation for the active use of monumental art in architectural practice, beginning with the design phase. When designing buildings, especially those with typical and standardized layouts, monumental art brought stylistic and distinctive elements. "This was a fundamental step from canonical ordered

⁵ Author of the compositions is Gia Kurdiani

⁶ И. Воевикова. Монуменальное искусство и современные проблемы синтеза. Синтез искусств и архитектуры общественных зданий. Советский художник. МОСКВА. 1974. 67 - I. Voeyvikova. Monumental Art and Contemporary Issues of Synthesis. Synthesis of Arts and Architecture of Public Buildings. Soviet Artist. Moscow. 1974. 67.

architecture to modern, free structural-spatial systems⁷”, which, together with modern constructions, formed a new type of Soviet socialist architecture.

Notably, by the 1960s, Archil Kurdiani not only developed this theme but also wholly incorporated it into his architecture, making it one of his main expressive languages. The synthesis of architecture and monumental decorative art was introduced by the author in this building with a certain "canonicity". There, the rhythmic alternation of panels produced a modern interpretation of the classical ordered system.

However, it was distinguished from Soviet ideology, where the synthesis of art and architecture was viewed as a unified whole, with elements of rationality playing an equally significant role. In the case of the television center building, rationality is only reflected in the typology of the decorative panel paintings, which are practically lost within the overall structure of the building and only make a faint, subtle accent in the general composition.

Architectural plasticity is the material substance of architecture, which is a product not only of our society's material but also of its spiritual culture. Architecture, as an art form, interprets ideological worldviews and manifests itself in its class character. It is no coincidence that in bourgeois art, the concept of "architectural autonomy" is primarily propagated from societal processes and the community. This so-called postmodernism is not only a professional direction in contemporary architecture but also a reflection of the "cynical ideology of the petty bourgeoisie."⁸.

The building of the TV Center, although fully inscribed in the stylistic discourse of Soviet modernism, by its form and general concept goes beyond its ideological framework and slightly reminds of the tendencies of postmodernism.

"Sharp, original architectural form should not be evaluated without other criteria, without its social significance. Forgetting this truth leads to meaninglessness, decorativeness, pretentiousness in architectural plasticity, and some cases, even worse, toward the channeling of ideas alien to us".⁹

In our case, the modern, original architectural form is considered, on one hand, as a slight reference to the socialist narrative, but, in terms of its content, it creates a completely independent "architectural autonomy." Accordingly, the TV Center building not only reflects the architectural dialogue of a certain period with political ideology but also, through its independent creative force, ahead of it by at least several decades.

Internal Planning

Louis Sullivan's famous phrase "form follows function" is most strongly evident in the building's interior space. The building is designed so that every part of its interior space is functionally utilized and optimized.

As soon as you enter the building from the northern facade, you encounter a large open foyer, from which a free staircase leads to the upper floors on the right.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

The fairly spacious foyer is located in the center of the building, with studios on both the right and left sides. On the left side is a large studio of 600 m², while on the right side is a smaller 300 m² concert studio.

The small inserts between the foyer and the studio include spaces necessary for the running of the studios. Both the large and small studios have specially adapted small chamber studios.

Around the studios, there are all the necessary technical spaces for the functionality of the building – starting from the makeup rooms to the spaces for the director's equipment.

Technical spaces are arranged along the entire perimeter of the rectangular-shaped building, on all four sides, so that the entire space is almost fully and optimally utilized.

The spatial layout of the second floor is the same, but here the technical spaces are more expanded as they include workrooms. The layout of the third floor is also of a similar structure, with laboratories, a library, and conference rooms. On the fourth floor, workspaces are arranged along the entire perimeter, while on the eastern side, above the small studio, there is a suspended terrace.

The interior design of the building is undoubtedly organically thought out for the functionality of the television center. It is clear that the architect thoroughly studies the building's function and its technical parameters. Based on that, he designs a quite large-scale structure.

Construction

It should be noted separately that the building's construction, the design of which was created by the constructor David Kadjaya, is of particular importance.¹⁰

The building is based on the "Scotia principle," which involves the use of T-1 and T-2 type foundations arranged one meter apart. The foundations are supported by reinforced concrete elements distributed along vertical and horizontal axes, which provide overall stability of the structure under earthquake and weight loading conditions.

The walls are made of multi-layer panels, constructed from concrete and thermal insulation materials. The primary function of the walls is sound insulation, as the building mainly houses television and radio studios, which require acoustic precision.

The roof of the large studio consists of 110 individual small elements, which are unified into cylindrical-shaped reinforced concrete panels. The small studio uses a "natural corbelled dome construction," combining lower and upper cylindrical vaults. These have a special role in improving the building's energy efficiency, as the cylindrical shape reduces the likelihood of thermal losses.

The roof surface is covered with a special waterproof material, which protects it from atmospheric precipitation. The building includes special sound insulation materials that ensure the suppression of low frequencies and improve the acoustic effect in the studios.

¹⁰ D. Kadjaya, The Construction of the Radio and Television House in Tbilisi. Architecture of the USSR. 1965.

The internal infrastructure includes central heating and ventilation systems, which are integrated into the building's supporting structures. Each studio is equipped with its air filtration system, ensuring an optimal microclimate.

Innovative approaches were used in the construction of the Television and Radio House, which represents an advanced example of the architectural and engineering technologies of that time. The building is based on the principle of simplicity, which allowed for cost reduction and the possibility of simple functional adaptation, thus directly responding to the political directives of that period.

The complex of the TV Center

According to the initial concept, the building of the TV Center was not limited to just the structure facing the street; it also encompassed a large area behind the building, stretching nearly 2 hectares. The general plan of the territory, compiled in 1962, provides detailed information on the main building and its functional, auxiliary, and secondary objects.

The territory is planned in such a way that, on the side of the Vere Gorge, there are primarily green plantings, which somewhat demarcate and create a visual buffer for the complex. The entire area can be divided into three main zones: 1. the main building oriented towards the street; 2. the relatively large volumes located behind it, with small auxiliary spaces, and 3. the courtyard garden designed with landscape architecture, which also encompasses the buildings.

Despite these technical-functional zoning divisions, the unity of the complex is created through the elements of landscape design, which maintain the functional and substantive connection between the basic and secondary buildings.

Notably, there is the dendrology surrounding the main structure, with its evergreen plants that constantly "revive" the building's environment.

It is important to note that the main building facing the street was initially planned, and later the development of the area behind it and the placement of the buildings as outlined in the plan were carried out. Consequently, they initially had a unified spatial-architectural composition, which was, on the one hand, conditioned by the building's function, and at the same time, each structure found its appropriate place in the section and, more broadly, in the spatial-architectural urban landscape of the city.

The general plan, as the building's design, was carried out under the commission of the State Committee of the Council of Ministers of the Georgian SSR – according to the order #790 protocol 27#19 of the Tbilisi City Council, under the leadership of *Tbilikalakproject (Tbilisi City Project)* and architect A. Kurdiani. Accordingly, the buildings on the territory were gradually constructed, also authored by Kurdiani.

For the clarification of the building's date

According to official records, the construction date of the building is considered to be 1967-68; however, this date is incorrect, and the planning and design work dates back to much earlier years. The first, experimental designs of the building are dated to 1955-56, and it is clear that the idea of designing the building began during this period. Accordingly, the project area had already been selected at that time.

The general plan of the television center is dated 1961-62, on which the main building is already depicted with its existing configuration and structure. This is confirmed by the detailed plans of the building from 1961, which have been officially approved.

According to oral tradition, in 1964, during Archil Kurdiani's anniversary, musical tapes were given to him as a gift by the television center. The tapes were specifically recorded in the studio within the building. Therefore, the building was already constructed by 1964. This is confirmed by the building project approved in 1961 and the general plan of the territory. It turns out that in 1963 there was a project for cladding the facade, but it was not realized.

The construction of the buildings in the television center complex, as shown by the archival project, was planned from the very beginning. Alongside the main building, the construction of the technical building was carried out according to the project by A. Kurdiani and K. Sokolova-Kurdiani. In the 1970s, a tape storage building was built in the backyard, designed by architect Gia Kurdiani.

In the 1980s, a reconstruction project for the building was designed, but it was not implemented. In the 1990s, as part of the expansion plan for the television center, a new project for the complex was prepared under the supervision of Archil Kurdiani Junior.

TV Center – the first communication system in Georgia.

In the Soviet Socialist Republic, television played a special role, as it was one of the main tools for propaganda and the dissemination of ideas among the broader masses of society. It was used to inform the population and for ideological influence over them. Television became the main support of the Soviet system, serving not only as entertainment but also as a tool for mass education and political control. Therefore, the emergence of television in Soviet countries and cities was extremely important.

The first TV Center in the Soviet Union appeared in Moscow in the 1930s. Gradually, television spread to other countries of the Union, and it was built at a rapid pace, not only in major cities but also in resort towns. In the 1956 issue of the newspaper *Communist*, we read: "By the end of the five-year plan, television broadcasts will have 25-30 million audience – 6-8 times more. To reduce costs and accelerate the construction of television centers, standardized projects are being developed."

Such standardized projects were designed for many cities in the Soviet Union; however, Tbilisi is an exception, and an individual project was planned for it.

The history of television in Georgia began in 1955, with the television mast set up on Mount Mtatsminda, where the appropriate studio was located, and from there, the first broadcast went out on December 30, 1956. At the same time, competitive work for the creation of the television center complex was underway, which was completed in 1961, and broadcasting moved to the new complex and building.

Therefore, the TV Center building is part of the country's cultural memory, which continuously and still today maintains a social, intense, and very necessary connection with the public. It is a kind of monument to communication, as part of cultural heritage, urban identity, and the collective memory of society.

Why should we preserve the TV Center building?

Thus, as the present research has shown, the essence of the TV Center building is a bearer of many political changes from the Soviet era, among which the form was shaped by the building that has been preserved to this day. The artistic form, however, is unusual for its time, modern, and inherently simple, representing a symbol for a country that created Georgian modernism throughout the 20th century, passed through the ever-exclusive and quality-infused Stalinist Empire, and, starting from the 1960s, rejoined the global processes of the world.

And how can one ignore, reject, or even sacrifice to destruction a part of this global architectural space, albeit located on the periphery of the then Soviet Union, when it speaks of the main characteristics of the era and its specificity: it creates a form that is one of the most innovative in Soviet Union modernist architecture, offers architectural construction-technical innovations, captivates with its artistic-aesthetic value, demonstrates a precise understanding of space and environment, introduces innovations in architectural forms, creates the most significant multimedia communication memory of the era, and, finally, creates architecture that surpassed its time and, through its artistic-architectural techniques, reached postmodernist architecture.

This is when the myth of the Soviet Union still exists and quite strongly at that, when there is no definition for the late Soviet modernist style, and architects, on the one hand, were subordinated to the political stylistics of "creative freedom," and on the other hand, tried to oppose the political system in terms of form and relate it to the global context. This is a period when everything was clear, yet still filled with more hidden, repressed energy, restrained freedom, and the promise of an unveiled future.

- The article uses materials from Archil Kurdiani's family archive.
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