

MEDIJŲ KULTŪROS
balsas
TEORIJS IR PRAKTIKOS



MEDIJŲ KULTŪROS BALSĀI: TEORIJS IR PRAKTIKOS

Voices of Media Culture: Theories and Practices

Waiting for Godot

This is 72 minutes and 5 seconds of pure green screen. Nothing less and nothing more. New movie by Nigel Tomm extends the boundaries of new absurdism. It had to happen sooner or later. Nigel Tomm redefines classical drama one more time. Film adaptation of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, directed by Nigel Tomm, serves us more than meets the eye. The scene apparently represents the shift into dream state, and it's the most beautiful and surprising screen of mind. This is not a drama revolution. This is a visual morphine where tragedy is expressed in the purest prospect. It's just a tiny little line between you and the inside of the screen. It's all in the head, isn't it? Now you see it. Now you don't.

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JULIJONAS URBONAS – interakcijos dizaineris ir Londono Karališkojo meno koledžo doktorantas. Šešerius metus dirbo atrakcionų parko plėtros srityje. Trejus metus ėjo atrakcionų parko direktoriaus pareigas. Tikėdamas „gravitacinio teatro“ estetiniu pajėgumu sugrąžinti (ar bent atšvesti prieš metamirtį) technologijų atrofuojamą kūną, jis tiria ir eksperimentuoja su gravitacine žmogaus kūno sensorika. Laisvalaikiu kuria naujus dizaino žanrus, kuriuose vartotojas atlieka pagrindinį vaidmenį.

HARTMUT WINKLER – vokiečių medijų teoretikas. Paderborno universitete (Vokietija) dėsto medijų teoriją ir kultūrą. Knygų *Switching/Zapping* (1991), *Der filmische Raum und der Zuschauer. 'Apparatus', Semantik, 'Ideology'* (1992), *Docuverse* (1997), *Diskursökonomie* (2004), *Basiswissen Medien* (2008) autorius.

PREFACE

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Note to English-speaking readers: this book is in Lithuanian, yet contains English summaries of selected texts. Besides, there are quite a few full English texts in the online magazine on media culture www.balsas.cc, the precursor to this book. Reading this English preface (an exact translation of the Lithuanian one) further, you will get a fuller impression of the book's content.

This book aims to define what media¹ and media culture are, as well as to draw a picture of the manifestations of the latter in Lithuania in the recent years and present some theories that focus on media.

While compiling this book, the editor was faced with the question of how to meaningfully bring together various aspects of media culture,

¹ As used in this book, the term *media* (the plural of *medium*) refers to various means of communication (i.e. various tools of storing and transmitting data), instead of being used as the short version of “mass media”, habitually used to refer to the entirety of news and entertainment services.

academic, experimental and creative alike: media studies, media art, media philosophy and media theory. The structure of the book serves as a step-by-step answer to this question and creates its own narrative.

This book is global just as it is local; it primarily addresses the global phenomenon of media culture and the theories that analyze it, yet a considerable part of the book is dedicated to local reflections of media culture – events, artists' projects and texts by Lithuanian authors.

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THE BOOK AS A MEDIUM

As a medium, the book is important to today's media culture because it is a finished product of information and entertainment that frees the reader from drifting through the crossroads of the Internet and transfers him or her to a different spatial situation. On the one hand, the spatial and temporal finiteness of the book limits the range of experiences; on the other hand, however, it also reduces the fear of forgetting the initial destination and getting lost. The user can revert from being a Web surfer to being a reader and try to move through the lines of the book, having abandoned the habit of hectic browsing. Surely, reading online and from the screen has

multiple advantages, yet the book can still generate a peculiar pleasure of reading that can take hold while on the train, on the beach or in the bath.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book is an attempt to introduce the Lithuanian reader to media culture. Opening with introductions to media studies, it presents different viewpoints and can be useful to students and the academia as an initial insight into the worlds of media and a set of links for further exploration. Here one can find valuable insights into studies of both the old (writing and script in Tomas Sodeika's introduction) and the new media (hypertext and interactivity in Lina Michelkevičė's introduction). The introduction by Eglė Obcarskaitė expands the problems of visual media to visual studies, while Valentinas Klimašauskas indulges in visual games himself, exchanging roles with Marshall McLuhan in a book written by the latter/himself. In these introductions, the subjects of media philosophy, phenomenology, visual studies, communication studies, media studies, literature studies and technology studies, brought together, engage in interactive discussions and demonstrate a collective interdisciplinary approach.

In the second part of the book, the repercussions of media culture in Lithuania in 2005-2008 generate a totally different pulse. Here the very dominating medium of print is different – a hybrid of newspaper, magazine and chronicle formats. The most interesting texts published on *Balsas.cc*, providing the greatest reading pleasure, which appeared to be of a higher long-term value than mere reviews of concrete events, were selected for this section. It contains reviews of events, concerts, exhibitions, performances, experiments, books and other things, as well as subjective essays conceived of reflections on media culture. Some of the authors' names recur – these members of the *Balsas.cc* community have been writing most actively and engagingly. The texts are intermingled with artists' projects, even though there are only a few active media artists in Lithuania (the sparse creative content in the book is a perfect illustration of this situation). The cyan pages, inserted every several pages, document the special *Balsas.cc* projects, seminars or theme issues.

The book concludes with a brief collection of media theories, alternatively called a reader in media studies, published in Lithuania for the first time. These texts by renowned international theorists present different perspectives on media philosophy and media stud-

ies. Essays by the German Hartmut Winkler and the Austrian Frank Hartmann, two theorists representing the German tradition, as well as Geert Lovink, who analyzes German-speaking media theories (these three texts mostly focus on general media problems) are followed by the Dutch Eric Kluitenberg's insights about the relationship that today's media have with the audience, American Lev Manovich's statements about today's aesthetics of media and, finally, Geert Lovink's very recent thoughts about a new media phenomenon – the weblogs. This text is adapted from his 2007 book *Zero Comments: Blogging and Critical Internet Culture*. All other selected texts are new as well, written in the last decade, thus each of them can be read as a reflection of the newest problems and directions of media research.

THE PRETEXT – BALSAS.CC

The pretext for this book is the interdisciplinary online magazine *Balsas.cc* that has been broadcasting texts, images and sounds on the Net. During the span of four years (from early 2005 to late 2008), it has been researching media culture in Lithuania and abroad, translating foreign theories into Lithuanian, organizing seminars and publishing its paper versions, usually in the newspaper format. As it is

written in the editorial section of the magazine, the voice (*balsas* in Lithuanian) is an omni-directional medium that transmits information to the audience and receives an echo in the form of public discussion.

Besides, the word *voice* itself has its own history of being a constituent of mass media titles in Lithuania and in the world in general. The first example of this is probably the newspaper *Lietuviszkasis balsas* (*Lithuanian Voice*), first published in 1885. In the early 20th century, the newspaper *Darbininkų balsas* (*Workers' Voice*) saw the light of day, in the Soviet times – *Leniniečio balsas* (*Leninist's Voice*), while today there are still multiple regional newspapers that have similar titles (e.g. *Panevėžio balsas* and *Tauragiškių balsas* – regional Lithuanian). Besides, the legendary *Voice of America* (in Lithuanian *Amerikos balsas*) radio station could be included in this list as well. To be sure, *Balsas.cc* is not an extension of any of these media outlets and is not responsible to them in any way – it simply finds itself in the midst of them and justifies its status as a medium that speaks about media (and media culture).

Balsas.cc began as a creative and educational platform dedicated to local voices and their communication with the reverberations of voices abroad. The idea of the

magazine was conceived after the international seminar and workshop RAM6 (*Re-Approaching New Media*) that took place in Vilnius on August 25-29, 2004. The seminar was organized by *jutempus*, a collective for interdisciplinary art projects (www.vilma.cc). The magazine was initiated in collaboration with media artists Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas, as well as media theorist and activist Geert Lovink from Amsterdam, who supported the idea.

MEDIA CULTURE

Five years ago, in 2004, media culture was a vague phenomenon, while the new media movement appeared to be a distant echo heard from beyond the vast expanse of the Internet. Back then, there were no blogs and *Youtube*, the video broadcasting service, no social networks like *Facebook* and no possibility to explore the interactive satellite images of the whole Earth through various “virtual globe” software. There used to be different new media then, which are practically extinct today, and it may well be that the current ones simply won't be there in five years too. The media landscape changes faster than media theories, yet we hope that this captured current of the recent years has acquired a tangible form and will allow the reader to

get a glimpse of the local media culture. If back in 2005 we were keen to proclaim the emergence of a new discourse and new media culture, today we tend to be more realistic and call the culture that interests us simply *current culture*. Sometimes it may look like we write about culture that is far from being current, yet the only thing to do in this situation is to check each other's stances and viewpoints.

P. S. NOTE TO THE AUDIENCE: WAYS OF READING THE BOOK

If you view this book as a *textbook*, then I recommend those studying one or another media discipline to read the first part and one or two texts from the third part, especially before meeting your instructors (including myself and some other authors of this book) during the exams. If you're interested in the pulse, faces, events and critique of media culture, start from the second part, which at the same time serves as a chronicle. If the one holding the book seeks entertainment, then the second part is also a good place to start, treating it as a *collection of images and essays* from which everyone will select the ones that attract him/her the most. Although the material is assembled in a chronological fashion, I recommend browsing through it hyper-textually and interactively (the

keywords provided with each text should assist in that). In the online archive of www.balsas.cc, you will find not only more texts, but also sound and video clips, which did not find their place in the book due to the aforementioned specifics of the latter. The artists and those who expected to open a comprehensive *catalogue* of Lithuanian media art, may be slightly disappointed, yet if you are interested in topics and problems related to media art and culture, you will definitely enrich your imagination with new ideas, and if it is your first encounter with media culture, you will find yourself in a state of light creative chaos.

Have an engaging reading experience.

Vytautas Michelkevičius
Köln, 2009

SUMMARIES OF PARTICULAR TEXTS PUBLISHED ON THE MAGAZINE BALSAS.CC

(More on www.balsas.cc/english)

THE INFORMATION SOCIETY IS AN “OCCIDENTAL RUPTURE”

Kęstas Kirtiklis
2006-06-24

There's a big difference between the terms *information society* and *informational society*. While the first one refers to a society saturated with telematic technologies that become its basic structural element, the second is the radical form of the first, a radically new epoch where all the essential processes take place in the digital domain (which hasn't arrived yet). Taken one step further, the information society becomes the *knowledge society*, where competence and ability to effectively use it become just as important as the dissemination of information itself.

In this entertaining interview, Marius Povilas Šaulauskas, the head professor of information society studies at Vilnius University, discusses the nature of information society in simple terms that even

the uninitiated can possibly understand. Among other things, the professor expresses his disappointment over the issue of mixing the three mentioned terms by Lithuanian strategists and policymakers, recommends rejecting the attempts to *create* a knowledge society in favor of *creating the conditions* for its development, and warns against being misled into thinking that a global information society exists, calling it a purely “occidental rupture”.

E-CITY AND E-CITIZENS

Nerijus Milerius
2006-07-14

In contrast to traditional notions of *topos* (the actual structure of a city), *utopia* (an imaginary perfect future city) and *dystopia* (the pessimistic forecasts of a city’s development), the newly developing discourse of *e-topia*, focused on networked and digitalized cities, is hard to explain in simple terms. The *e-topian* description of a city combines its present state with possible states based on the analysis of the current social, economic and cultural situation, and thus the *e-city* is neither the purely physical city of the present nor the purely utopian or dystopian vision of its future.

Referencing such diverse thinkers as Mitchell, Castells, McLuhan and Gates, philosopher Nerijus Milerius seeks to arrive at a veritable and critical description of the *e-city* and its *e-citizens*. Though a networked city like Vilnius claims itself to be absolutely inclusive and transparent, in reality the differentiation of power remains, albeit taking the form of the *e-citizens’* unequal ability to design information flows and forms of participation (as opposed to merely being those information flows themselves). That’s where the notion of *e-consciousness* comes into play; while some *e-citizens* use the information technologies only occasionally, the *e-conscious* “information elite” use the *e-city’s* digital nervous system as a full-fledged extension of their own one, basing new priorities and opinions on the new media.

3XPOZICIJA.LT: USING A WEBLOG TO CURATE AN EXHIBITION

Vytautas Michelkevičius
2006-08-12

The *3xpozicija.lt* virtual community is the first project in Lithuania that employs the platform of a weblog to collectively curate a non-virtual exhibition. Artists, critics and curators can contribute their ideas for the exhibition’s form and content

and freely comment on them, thus the project is based on mechanisms of collaboration and active participation of those involved. The ultimate reason for using an open online format versus the traditional curatorial model is the transparency that the former offers, as well as its ability to thoroughly document the process.

The purpose of the project and the exhibition itself is to review the various states of today’s photography that can be described by one word: *postphotography*. Rather than being a photography exhibition, the resulting event will be an exhibition *about* photography. The interdisciplinary project aims to look at photography as a part of the general context of contemporary art and trace its links with other media, such as sound or moving image, thus exploring it as a medium, not content.

METATHEORETICAL SEMANTIC SWAMP AND OTHER FRAGMENTS OF THE ART + COMMUNICATION: WAVES FESTIVAL

Giedrius Gulbinas
2006-09-02

The 8th *Art + Communication* festival, taking place in Latvia’s capital, justified the theme chosen for this

year’s event (*Waves*), presenting a broad spectrum of philosophical, scientific and artistic perspectives on subjects like radio technology, electromagnetic waves and astronomical observations. While some of the program’s parts chose a strictly technical approach, other gravitated toward metaphysical interpretations of various wave-related phenomena. Some participants even engaged in constructing pseudoscientific “semantic swamps”, coming close to New Age-like speculations.

According to Armin Medosch, one of the festival’s curators, an artist working with advanced technologies will inevitably deal with two essential elements: waves and code. The first is the naturally spreading “eternal medium”, the second is the means of its organization. The codes chosen for structuring the waves of the tenth *Art + Communication* were very diverse: from Gints Gabrans’ “hypnoteleportation” performance to Radioqualia’s sonification of electromagnetic waves emanating from the Sun, including exhibitions, conference presentations, sound and video art sessions. Such diversity and richness of the festival’s content leads one to hope for similar initiatives to emerge in Lithuania, concludes the reviewer.

PARIS QUI DORT VS CINEMUSICA: DIFFERENT MODELS OF MERGING MOVING IMAGES WITH SOUND

Jurij Dobriakov
2006-10-30

Merging the visual material of old films with newly composed music has become a synthetic artform in its own right. Such synthesis can take different forms: from simply augmenting a silent film with a new soundtrack to radically rearranging and processing the image and making it into a sort of “image track” for the music. In the first case, the sound is just a means to “expand” and revitalize the silent film, adapting it to the “multichannel” perceptual schemes of today’s viewer. In the second one, the relationship is much more complicated: the image may be cut, collaged and desynchronized, becoming alienated from itself or revealing new shades and layers of meaning.

Gaida 06, the festival of actual music taking place in Vilnius, featured both types of old image / new sound synthesis. In the concert titled *Paris Qui Dort*, the acoustic ensemble, assisted by the sound engineers of the music research institute IRCAM, performed a real-time electroacoustic soundtrack (composed by French composer Yan Maresz) to Rene Clair’s classic. Meanwhile, the Lithuanian com-

posers’ cycle titled *Cinemusica: (un)silent Lithuanian cinema* explored a totally different approach, cutting the old Lithuanian films into pieces and constructing new audiovisual narratives (or eliminating them altogether). While the second approach was more intriguing, it did not always achieve an equally strong aesthetic effect.

A CRITICAL VIEW ON THE METAPHYSICS OF COMMENTING

Jurij Dobriakov
2006-11-02

Both the work of art and its comment can be viewed as statements. However, while the former is (at least ideally) a primary, active and independent one, the latter depends on the object that it comments and is therefore secondary. Both types of statements are important; the problem arises only when the second type starts to prevail in the art sphere. Works of art that attempt to be critical comments on other works, artists and whole periods in the history of art can gradually replace the commented autonomous works, breeding tautological “comments on comments” and eventually becoming self-referential.

The exhibition titled *comments@3xpozicija: postphotographic states*

in contemporary art, collectively curated by the means of a virtual community connected by a weblog, is a postphotographic exhibition in the sense that it presents works that critically reflect on the very medium of photography. The problem with this exhibition is that it assumes “traditional” photography to be an irremediably obsolete and exhausted form. There is no denying that the participating young artists can effectively deconstruct and demystify the stereotypes and myths of the photographic medium. On the other hand, seeing their autonomous statements on the nature of reality would be much more interesting, says the critic.

TROLLEYBUS NR. 0: A TRIP THROUGH VILNIUS’ SOUND DIARIES

Tautvydas Bajarkevičius
2006-11-05

Public transport is rarely viewed as something other than the domain of routine, automatic practicality and regulated monotony. Can it become a medium for a more engaging and immersive experience of the urban space? As this poetic review by Tautvydas Bajarkevičius shows, it certainly can. However, an alternative transport route is necessary for that to become reality – such as the route of trolleybus Nr. 0.

Trolleybus Nr. 0 is the culminating part of PB8_001_V, media artist Andrius Rugevičius’ (better known as PB8) project occupying a multifaceted territory that spans psychogeography, mediation, urban anthropology, collective strategies and self-exportation. The route of the “irregular” vehicle is a loop that offers its passengers an adventure instead of a usual trip with the starting and destination points. It merges different experiences and sound diaries of the city, with PB8 himself mixing the collective soundtrack for the trip as the trolleybus rides through Vilnius’ various zones, alternating between subtle ambience and pulsating beats. Besides that, trolleybus Nr. 0 is a cozy place to meet one’s friends in the know and browse the capital’s sonic map together, welcoming the accidental commuters who happen to go in the same direction.

CENTRAS6: THE END

Tomas Pabedinskas
2006-12-05

The fifth *Centras*, which took place on 24-29 November, was at the same time the last one. During these five years, Kaunas’ multimedia art and music festival did a lot to kickstart the careers of many up and coming Lithuanian artists,

providing an open platform for their experiments. Started small by a couple of likeminded enthusiasts in 2002, *Centras* grew to become a full-fledged multimedia festival incorporating audiovisual performances, exhibitions, lectures and video screenings. Yet there's always a proper time for something to come to an end, as the festival's organizer Gediminas "Skrandis" Banaitis believes. The annual event ceased to be the only starting point for young multimedia artists, and better and more focused events will no doubt appear in its place.

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REVIEWING THE FIRST CONFERENCE: ARE THERE BLOGS AND BLOGGERS IN LITHUANIA?

Vytautas Michelkevičius
2007-03-15

Are there blogs and bloggers in Lithuania? If yes, what is a Lithuanian blogger like? The purpose of the first Lithuanian Bloggers' Conference, held in March 2007, was probably to find this out. Though no definite answer was offered, Vytautas Michelkevičius, the observer of the event, attempts to decode the answer from what he saw and heard at the conference.

The critic's conclusions are not too optimistic. Far from being the plat-

form for participative journalism and civil activism that blogs seek to be in other parts of the world, Lithuanian blogs tend to resemble mere online diaries, concerned with trivial topics that might be of interest only to the blogs' authors and their friends. A typical Lithuanian blogger is, simply put, a consumer reflecting on his daily life, short-term dreams and newly acquired gadgets. These observations lead the author of the review to assume that Lithuanian blogosphere is still in the early stage of its development, not quite qualifying as the viable alternative to corporate mass media yet.

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E-ELECTIONS, E-DEMOCRACY, E-INTERVIEW

Valentinas Klimašauskas
2007-03-27

When increasingly many citizens become highly mobile, an electoral system based on fixed place of residence with no in-built option of remote electronic voting starts making increasingly less sense. Yet, despite the advent of information society, proclaimed a while ago, e-democracy remains a fiction in most countries. This is quite understandable, however, when one considers the fact that the current political system and the thinking

behind it will have to undergo a fundamental transformation if direct democratic government through digital communication technologies is to become reality.

The beginning of real reforms starts with a change in people's attitudes, states Martynas Mockus, the senior IT specialist of the Central Electoral Committee's secretariat. Introducing internet-based voting in Lithuania will require time, determination and resources. Yet optimising the system and providing different groups of citizens with convenient ways of expressing their political will is a necessary measure, since electoral activity is an indicator of civil consciousness in democratic countries, as the interviewed expert believes.

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A PHOTO/VIDEO REPORT FROM THE ENTER_5 FESTIVAL

Vytautas Michelkevičius
2007-04-28

Each April the media art festival *Enter*, hosted by the Šiauliai Art Gallery, attracts enthusiasts of electronic music, media art and digital technologies from around Lithuania. While this year's event was the fifth already, *Enter* still remains the only festival of its kind in the country. Opened with the conference

themed "Inter/activity", *Enter_5* culminated with motorcycle engine performances and an excursion through the local nightlife.

The fifth edition of the festival included, among other things, a lecture titled "The Archeology of Interactivity" by Virginijus Kinčinitis, the festival's curator, interactive film works by Vilnius Art Academy students, and the interactive sound installation *Wind Orchestra* by Julijonas Urbonas, which proved especially popular with the audience.

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WHEN THE OLD TECHNOLOGY WAS STILL NEW

Lina Michelkevičė
2007-07-19

The first Soviet computers required enormous resources and were nowhere near the compact, efficient and highly customized machines that today's generation is used to. While attempts to implement personal computers were made as early as the late 60s in the West, anything resembling a PC did not show up in Lithuania until the late 80s.

Seeking to hear a first-hand insight into the technological experience of the gone era the author interviews her father, a longtime programmer

of various computing machines currently working at the Institute of Mathematics and Informatics. The interview reveals a number of interesting details. Although electronic computing machines were revered as incredible “thinking” mechanisms by the official ideology, in reality their application was very limited due to both their inefficiency and the inherent flaws in the Soviet planning system. To entertain themselves between sessions of monotonous work, the programmers used to engage in a variety of “extracurricular” activities: from generating amusing graphics to making computer-printed copies of semi-illegal literature.

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WHAT IS VMS?

Vilnius Media Seminar (VMS) is an open research seminar for media culture in Vilnius. It is a series of seminars, which has a goal to create an independent and free space for communication between Belarusian and Lithuanian researchers, fellows, students, and to support academic as well as public co-operation between two neighbourhood countries. The presentation of actual media theories and critical thought is among main goals as well. VMS started in the spring 2006 and continued to the summer 2008. Each session was attended by 25-50

participants from Belarus, Lithuania and other countries. Most of presentations and discussions you can read in English at www.balsas.cc/vms.

List of seminars:

VMS#1: Lithuania through the eyes of Belarusian media: a case study of TV film Litva

(2006-06-02)

The TV film was screened and discussed from these approaches: gender studies (Nadia Gusakovskaya, BY), media studies (Alexei Krivolap, BY), cultural studies (Jekaterina Lavrinec, LT), philosophy of cinema (dr. Nerijus Milerius, LT), semiotics (Lina Michelkevičė, LT), political science (Tomas Tomilinas, LT).

VMS#2: Strategies of ‘tactical media’: noise makes sense

(2007-02-19)

Screening of Belarusian and Ukrainian tactical media clips. Presentations by Vytautas Michelkevičius (LT), Alexei Krivolap (BY), Benjamin Cope (UK, PL).

VMS#3: Media activism as a new dimension of public space

(2007-10-17)

Presentations by: Kestas Kirtiklis (LT) – “The public sphere debate as a matter of methodology”, Alexei

Krivolap (BY) – “Media activism: creating new reality or re-designing public space?”, Gediminas Urbonas (LT) – “Closing of cinema Lietuva and Pro-test lab (2005-on-going) www.vilma.cc/LIETUVA”, Alla Pigalskaya (BY) – “Tactical media and technology of visibility” (screening *Optimistic tragedy*, self-made movie of closing EHU in Minsk in August 2004).

VMS#4: DIY practices in media activism

(2008-06-07)

Organized as a part of anticonference *MediaBarCamp*. Media activism was analyzed as self-representational form comparing classical DIY with new net activism model.

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