

Revisiting Footnotes

Tulkojot atsauces

Footprints of the Recent Past
in the Post-Socialist Region

Nesenās pagātnes nospiedumi
postsociālisma reģionā

Pirimze

Sophia Tabatadze

Built in 1971 in the centre of Tbilisi – the capital of Soviet Georgia – *Pirimze*, a six-floor building, was specifically designed to house numerous forms of manufacturing, maintenance and services. Shortly after the independence of Georgia, in 1995, the status and ownership of the building changed from state ownership to a shareholding enterprise. By 2003, the enterprise declared bankruptcy and consequently was put up for auction and sold by the state. In 2007, following the eviction of all employees, the building was reconstructed. Built to house a new commercial centre, the new *Pirimze Plaza* now stands empty where the old building stood, claiming the same name, as well as the fame the *Pirimze* had formerly enjoyed.



Old Pirimze

Vecā Pirimze



Pirimze Plaza

Shoes, watches, glasses, jewellery, bags, zippers, suitcases, belts, hairdryers, kitchen appliances – it was possible to repair almost anything in *Pirimze*. Knives and scissors could be sharpened, hair could be cut and shoes polished. Furriers and tailors could fashion clothing from fur, leather or fabric for individual customers. People in the entire city knew *Pirimze*, customers would come from all over, even the villages outside the city, to use its services.

My father and his friends were of a generation that despised the Soviets. They thought that if the regime ended things would automatically get better. My father also thought that everyone possessed a natural talent for commerce and business, and the main problem was that it was forbidden in the Soviet Union. So after the collapse of the Soviet Union, he stopped being an architect and started a business. Several businesses, to be precise. One was more unsuccessful than the other, up to the point where he had to ask his mother to sell her own apartment in order to rescue him from financial collapse. He never succeeded. He never could catch up to the new system – let alone get ahead.

On the ground floor of *Pirimze* there was a semi-dark corridor with private-like booths on both sides where craftsmen worked. Glimpsing inside these booths one could discover personalized interiors, covered with cut-outs from glossy foreign



Pirimze interior

Pirimze interjers

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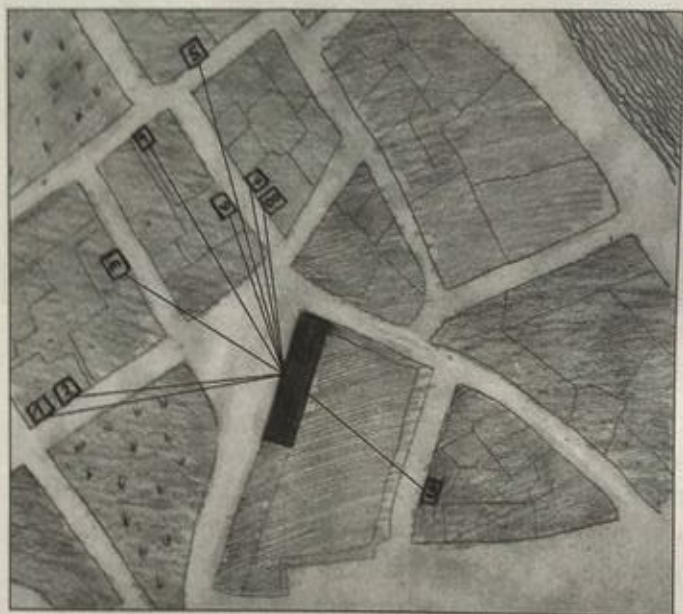
Pirimze interior

Pirimze interjers

magazines and photos of naked girls. It was a man's world. The men working there had their own rules. One could get lost in the dark corridors of it, and one's foreign watch batteries would surely get lost in there, in the hands of anonymous men, who all looked the same. They often cheated and understood much more about commerce during the Soviet period than my father ever did, even after the fall of the Soviet Union.

At the age of 54, my father died unexpectedly. I suspect that fear of the computer killed him. One morning he got up, switched on his computer, sat in his armchair with a cup of coffee and died. He was taking computer lessons, but was

extremely scared of it, he never crossed the point when the computer became a tool. It was a monster, without which it seemed that nothing could function in this present time.



Scattered *Pirimzes*

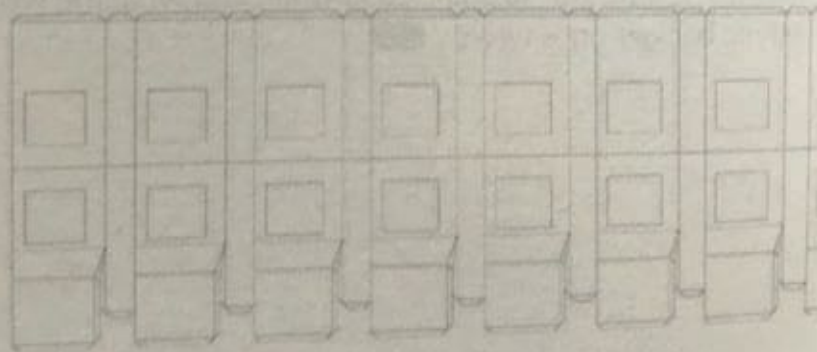
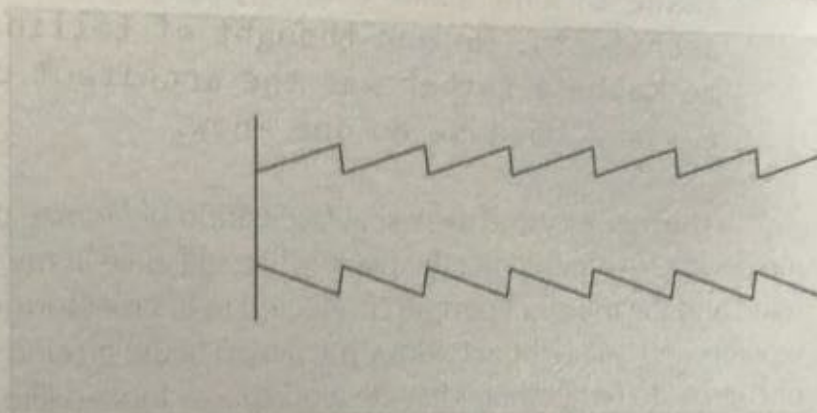
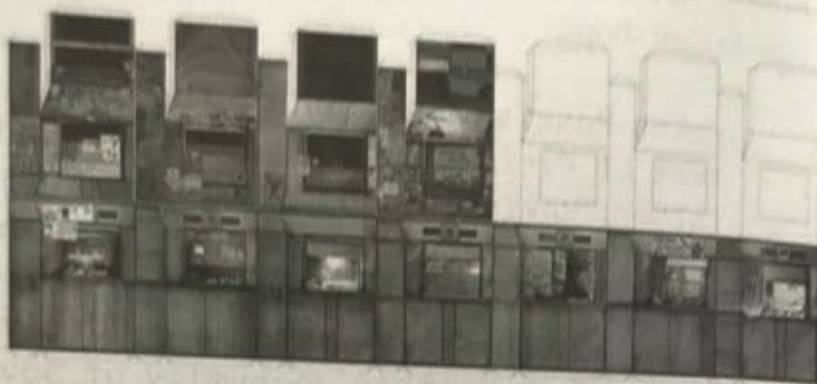
Izkīdušās *Pirimzes*

Just as the Soviet Union broke up into different countries after it collapsed, *Pirimze* exploded and smaller workshops with identical names sprung up where the debris fell. These workshops are scattered in a circumference around the old *Pirimze*. They all use the same name in order to claim their identity and prove their authenticity as former workers of

Pirimze. Some have even kept the old signs displaying them outside their shops.

Kakha Poskishvili, son of the head architect of *Pirimze*, was a good friend of my father. Having found this information in archives, I rang Kakha's apartment doorbell looking for the first architectural sketches. This link made me suddenly aware of the sombre anonymity of Soviet architects. No one thought of telling me Kakha's father was the architect of *Pirimze* because no one knew.

The memory and the visual fascination of *Pirimze* made me decide to re-construct the place while still alive in my own mind and the minds of people connected to it. I met former workers and asked them to draw me a map of the ground floor of *Pirimze*, to remember what the workspaces looked like, who sat where, who was specialized in what, and what the workers' ethnic backgrounds were. ●



Reconstructed *Pirimze*

Pirimze rekonstrukcija

