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From Cultural Industries to Entertainment and Creative Industries. The Boundaries of the Cultural Field

De industrias culturales a industrias del ocio y creativas: los límites del «campo» cultural

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the current trend towards dilution of the concept of «cultural industries» and the increasing usage of terms such as «entertainment industries», «leisure industries» or even «creative industries». We review recent specialized literature, identify overlapping between the above terms and conclude that this change is a new turning point in the concept of culture, closely associated with new spaces and times for its enjoyment, with the technological evolution of cultural products, changes in the ownership of their suppliers as well as with the shifting roles of author, actor and spectator. To understand this change, we identify and explain three factors: 1) from the strong, closed materiality and textuality of the classic cultural product to the malleability and convertibility permitted by new technologies; 2) from an essentially contemplative, reverent cultural experience to participant experimentation and play; 3) from a desire for permanence and intensity to constitutive contingency and superficiality. We conclude by suggesting wider implications that go beyond the scope of this work: the melting pot that blurs the boundaries between culture and entertainment, which undermines the autonomy of the disputed cultural «field» situated between work and leisure (more pleasant than the first, more demanding than the second), and which also erases the boundaries between cultural entertainment and work (a merged environment of «otium and negotium», «homo ludens» and «homo laborans»).

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza la tendencia actual a la dilución del concepto de «industrias culturales» en fórmulas como «industrias del ocio», «del entretenimiento» o incluso «industrias creativas». Revisamos la bibliografía reciente especializada, acotamos el alcance y los solapamientos entre los términos mencionados y argumentamos que rubrican la deriva del concepto de «cultura», íntimamente asociada a nuevos espacios y tiempos de su disfrute, a mutaciones tecnológicas de los productos culturales, a cambios en la titularidad de sus proveedores, así como de los roles de autor, actor y espectador. Para entender esta mutación recurrimos a tres factores: 1) de la materialidad y textualidad fuertes, cerradas, exentas, del producto cultural clásico a la maleabilidad y convertibilidad que permiten las nuevas tecnologías, 2) de una experiencia cultural esencialmente contemplativa y reverente a una experimentación participante, en constante circulación, mancomunada y lúdica; 3) de una aspiración a la permanencia y la hondura, a una constitutiva contingencia y superficialidad. Finalmente apuntamos implicaciones más ambiciosas, que desbordan el alcance del trabajo: ese totum revolutum que desdibuja las fronteras entre cultivarse y entretenerse, que socava la autonomía de ese disputado tercero en discordia –llamado «cultura»– entre el trabajo y el ocio (más placentero que el primero y más trascendente y esforzado que el segundo), también alcanza a borrar los límites entre ese ocio cultural y el propio trabajo (el neg-ocio, en definitiva).

KEYWORDS / PALABRAS CLAVE

Cultural industries, leisure industries, entertainment industries, creative industries, postproduction, cultural field.
Industrias culturales, industrias del ocio, industrias del entretenimiento, industrias creativas, postproducción.

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1. Culture and leisure in retrospective

Less than half a century ago, there was a clear difference between Mass Culture (or Cultural Industries)[1] and Mass Entertainment or Leisure. Proof of this lies in two anthologies which came out within a year of each other from the same publisher, both containing work by highly prestigious contributors (Rosenberg & White, 1957; Larrabee & Meyersohn, 1958). In «Mass Culture», interests listed were popular literature, comics, cinema, radio and television, popular music and advertising. In «Mass Leisure», interests were attributed to the person at play or recreation, not to the consumer of cultural and media industries, although all these activities might be pursued in one's spare time. Pursuits analysed were sport, hobbies, vacations and activities such as membership of an association or social life away from the home (restaurants, social gatherings, bars, pubs and dance halls). We could say that the editors made an implicit distinction between services or products (books, records, films, TV programs) created by others, which required a mere contemplative attitude (as readers, listeners or spectators), and leisure time… for essentially active pursuits where participation in the spatial sense requires that we actively join in.

The authors of the collected texts in both publications were authorities in their field.. In «Mass Culture», contributors included Ortega, Greenberg, Kracauer, Adorno, MacDonald, Löwenthal, Riesman, McLuhan and Lazarsfeld, among others. «Mass Leisure» compiled texts by Huizinga, Mead, Piaget, Russell, Lafargue, Riesman (again), Lynes and Katz.

By the turn of the century, these limits became less well-defined and cultural industries were attracted to and absorbed by proximity to other industries that began to colonise people's spare time.

The «Entertainment Industry» (Vogel, 2004; Caves, 2006) or the concept of «Leisure Industries» (Roberts, 2004), or even crossovers such as «culture and leisure industries» (García Gracia & al.; 2000, 2001, 2003) are categories that mix stage productions, popular literature, cinema, radio, television and videogames together with participative sports, betting, gambling and casinos, theme parks and tourism, adult toys and games and even shopping, dining out and the consumption of alcoholic drinks. (Vogel[2], 2004: 355-530; Roberts[3], 2004: 61-198). As far as the label «Creative Industries» is concerned, and its apparent desire to prevail (Caves, 2000; Blythe, 2001; Negus, 2006; Deuze, 2009), the limits are less clear: in some instances these are restrictive rather than classic «cultural industries», since they identify more with the

Arts (plastic, literary, stage, musical, plus film and television fiction) and exclude mass communication and the news media (Caves, 2000), whereas in other uses their embrace is wider as they include all the classic sectors plus advertising, industrial design, fashion and interactive software (Jeffcutt & Pratt, 2002; Blythe, 2001)[4]. In the drift away from traditional cultural industries, as the subject of studies on economic and political culture (Huet, 1978; Flichy, 1980; Miège, 1986; Zallo, 1988, 1992; Bustamante & Zallo, 1988), to the all-inclusive «leisure» or «entertainment» or «creative» industries, we find a number of interrelated features which are common to the evolution witnessed in other industrial sectors.

2. Digital leisure and culture: convergence, hyper-productability and transfiguration

The material nature of cultural «texts» (whether written, visual, audiovisual, musical, etc.), is exactly what allows their conversion into economic «goods», as the sequence of their transmission presents them as what we might call «acquirable objects»: books, records or videos (publications) but also television (flow culture) increasingly marketed in the shape of catalogue products («video on demand» for example), or where the stream itself is on sale (pay per view). We might remind ourselves at this point that one of the most solid features of the concept of the Cultural Industry was not the mere commercialisation of culture, but also its industrialisation, which allowed for reproduction of its media format, using specific equipment (Benjamin, 1973; Lacroix & Tremblay, 1997: 68; Hesmondhalgh, 2007: 55-58; Lash & Lury 2007: 1-15).

Nevertheless, what we are witnessing now is the «hyper-reproducibility» of cultural products transformed into a numerical matrix which, on the one hand stimulates demand –by ensuring availability and enabling that insatiable appetite for new products, which is the defining feature of telematic cultural consumption– and on the other, promotes the free access to the product itself, due to cooperative exchanges (creative commons licences and «copylefts», p2p exchange protocols for mp3 and mp4 files and the circulation of free software), as well as through social networking (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter), which stimulate exchange and specialised websites for music (Spotify, Goear, Lastfm, Grooveshark), photography (Flickr), vídeo (YouTube, BlipTV) and film (Peliculasyonkis, Cinetube).

Yet we are lacking in certain aspects. Prior to the revolution in new technologies, many authors spoke of

cultural goods as «immaterial» goods (Hirsch, 1972: 639, 641-2; Lacroix & Tremblay, 1997: 11-19), such that one may be able to identify the fulfilment of this «dematerialising» destiny within the process we describe here. Nonetheless, «immaterial» is misleading since, in reality, its use aimed to contrast what we might call the prosaic, immediate and universal monosemous utility of «material goods» with that other aesthetic misdemeanour of cultural goods, namely the more ethereal, drawn out and subjective. Beware!. Cultural products are of an unquestionably material nature (Miller, 1987, 2005; Storey, 1999; Lévy, 2007: 40-1). This may sometimes take the form of a tangible quality, which they possess and can move from one place to another, and which have texture, colour and shape, to wit, a design (a bound book, with its pages printed using a certain font type with a picture on the front and back covers, its jacket and marker ribbon, or the packaging for a phonographic or video recording, with a special design for the album or movie cover and, of course, the design itself, its graphic image, the usability of the menu which allows one to access audiovisual content, but also the design of the computer –or TV set– itself due to its ergonomic design). Or it may, without the need to take the shape of a physical object, continue to occupy space and time in what may be described in physical terms (a film screening, listening to an audio recording, even from a computer screen, by means of its speakers). We refer to two series of phenomena which needed to be differentiated: it is true that cultural experience does not end in pure materiality, but that it should transcend it, thus signifying the need to read the book, listen to the record or see the film in order to get to their very core, and those experiences are infinite and thus repeatable. Nevertheless, we cannot overlook nor relegate the material dimension, a necessary condition which may go beyond the genuine aesthetic experience but which might determine the same. Our attention does not just penetrate the fonts of a printed book –or the screen of an e-book– we are reading to get the sense and the plot constructed within its pages; nor is listening immune to the balance of treble and bass, the positioning of the speakers or the acoustics of

the space where it is being reproduced, that is to say, strictly material conditions. To say that cultural products –even in the digital age– are «immaterial» is to confuse cause with effect. The cause is always material and its effect is always embodied in the interaction between this materiality (visual, audio, audiovisual, in any case, physical) and a mind which, through bodily senses, cognitive patterns and prior experience, interprets and enjoys.

Notwithstanding, what we have been witnessing for a number of years now is not so much the dematerialisation of the cultural good, but perhaps a «transfiguration» or «transubstantiation», so radical as to make it difficult for us to understand the «material» nature of these new figures or substances. It is not so

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much that the product vanishes into thin air, but rather it becomes voluble, malleable, «liquid», as Bauman might say, assumes it convertibility due to some type of digital «equivalence». One thing seems clear at any rate: our wonder at being able to fit entire libraries, news or sound archives in a computer or even a USB memory stick (shall we say, downloaded, off-line), or even more so, that they are accessible and linked to one another in the vast territory which is Internet (let's say, online, in that common ground called «the cloud»), must be about as exciting as the feelings of the early Twentieth Century music lover when listening to the gramophone or the radio, or those of the first television viewers midway through the same century.

In any case, having made these points, the conversion of what we might term a classic cultural product (the book, record, film or videotape) into a digital file or accessible online document and its assimilation into a setting such as a computer, where

reading, listening or watching these works converges and merges into other leisure forms (such as videogames, word puzzles and gambling, sports betting and lotteries, chat rooms) encourages the assimilation of culture from a range of entertainment opportunities, as well as offering absolutely indiscriminate, ubiquitous, portable, desecrated enjoyment, independent of moments of time, places, rituals and special or specialised intermediaries.

3. From contemplation to participation, from experience to «experimentation» and from informed to «performative»

The conversion of what we might term a classic cultural product the book, record, film on videotape) into a digital file or accessible online document and its assimilation into a setting such as a computer, where reading, listening or watching these works converges and merges into other leisure forms (such as videogames, word puzzles and gambling, sports betting and lotteries, chat rooms) encourages the assimilation of culture from a range of entertainment opportunities.

The textuality and materiality of culture, to a certain extent «cold», «shut», recede and, by contrast, emphasis is placed on their character as «experience», which is liable to result in coproductive participation. And from there, the drift towards phenomena as diverse as games, tourism, theme parks or betting, where the roles of author, actor and spectator become confused, looks to be much easier to digest. That is to say, culture ceases to be perceived as distant, closed work which is treasured, stored away, protected and admired but never touched, and starts to be seen as action, which is fulfilled as soon as the receptor finds something which stimulates and moves him, and that is when its proximity to other leisure time activities becomes immediate. The exclusive ownership of a cultural good, its withdrawal for enjoyment at a later time and the reverence afforded to its author are no longer what sets its value, rather its total availability for

access at any time and in any place. On the other hand, these goods are no longer private property occupying an unalterable space and time as set by their author, but constitutively unfinished texts which fluctuate, proliferate and which are always subject to the possibility of participative intervention, criticism, review, ironic transformation and parody, due to the possibility of mere unlimited reproduction and cooperative, globalised distribution (García Canclini, 2007).

That is to say, it is not only a matter of immateriality –the convertibility, or rather, the transubstantiation– of cultural goods which stands above all else, at the precise moment of «experience», of true consummation – but rather encouraging democratic creativity, of experimenting one might say, by creative touching or holding. This refers to an experience which goes beyond mere contemplation –almost mystical, ecstatic and essentially static– and which implies intervention, practice, trial and error, a «game» if you like, which points to know-how and the transmission of knowledge, towards feeling, sharing and awaiting an appropriate answer. Paradoxes, or perhaps not: the greater the intangible nature of the cultural product, fragmented into bits –whatever their nature– which hurtle down fibre optic cables at frightening speed, the greater then is the intervention of a receptor who is required to use his senses, not only to receive information but also to perform operations with it: the operator must step forward (although this may be using an alias) and must reveal his behaviour, the more open, unfinished, random and provisional the product is.

This also applies to interactive narration –whether literary or audiovisual– where we are offered diverse prosecutions of the plot from which we are able to choose (or indeed, test them all or suggest others). There is also a proliferation of web-based initiatives which result in the creation of audiovisual or musical montages («mashups», DJ style mixes, «lipdubs» with their mass choreographed play-back performances of hit songs, false trailers –for movies which do not exist– or trailers where the soundtrack, titles or sequencing

parody the genre of a well-known file, home movies…) (Yúdice, 2007; Díaz Arias, 2009; Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2009). Not overlooking phenomena such as «wiki», «blogs» or social networking, telematic practices that do not feed off a single product as regards productivity, which are always ongoing, which exist precisely due to their own precarious stability at the moment of access, but which can be modified the very next second, by us or by complete strangers. This is not confined to the everyday web user, but also applies to still-institutionalised artistic practices –to wit, those linked to literary, plastic, film and musical creation– whose works reflect this vast (post) production so closely related to the «sampler» (Bourriaud, 2005; Fernández Porta, 2007, 2008)[5].

Moreover, it may be claimed that the digitalization of cultural goods –literature, painting, cinema, music– has greatly modified the way in which we understand the experience / experimentation. Before, cultural experience was a «circumscribed» activity, if you like, meaning that it applied exclusively to an object and was thus «intense» and almost always «intimate». Cultural experience today, however, seems to focus attention not on a single point with any vigour in an effort to get right inside the thing, but rather it follows a path which jumps from one place to another, without stopping for any longer than is necessary to gain the impetus needed to propel it on to the next interconnected node. It is not so much a case of diving for treasure, once located, but surfing skilfully over the crests of waves as they emerge intermittently and upon which we linger at our peril, due to the risk of sinking and thus ending our voyage. Before, a book, a film and musical score could, and had to be, self-sufficient entities which required no outside help to move them on to find fulfilment within, under many layers perhaps, but nevertheless within. In any case, the inner meaning might be traceable to other examples of the same species: books which found their meaning in other books or paintings in other paintings or movies in other movies. Today a book, successful books at least, are popular to a great extent because they connect to other portions of experience which go beyond literature and whose interpretation and greater enjoyment is not found within the scope of literature itself: it is found in film, television, music, advertising, comics, the daily news, in «Popular Science», in History, in the pages of the local paper… and vice versa (Baricco, 2008: 112-118; Fernández Porta, 2007, 2008).

All this, if we look carefully, is exactly the way the Internet works: that hypertextuality which undermines (or contaminates or sews) each text with «links» which take us to other links on any subject, inviting us to skip from one to another, without even finishing the first text before us and which now vanishes from sight (although it can always be recovered) as we move on to the next one that grabs our attention and which invites us to go on to another beyond, for connections which are full of logic, in this case fuzzy logic. That same experience of connection is what sets the hierarchy of Google searches: the results list is not ordered using the number of times the word we seek appears, but above all by the number and relevance of texts which refer to (which link and quote) the text which we are supposedly seeking. And that is supposed to be the most useful, since it is the most connected, where the greatest number of web-based documents converge and, thus, link together portions of knowledge in a series which is extendable virtually to infinity but is also especially dense and attractive at certain points (Battelle, 2006).

To sum up, as opposed to the cultural experience of times gone by, which was circumscribed, intense, intimate, erudite and profound, today's is disperse, superficial and fast. That is to say, if we wish, a diversion (or a distraction. This explains the cohabitation of culture and entertainment: culture itself has become fun because it sparkles, glows, precisely in that «between» the interconnected points, in transit and not in coming to rest at a particularly dense point.

4. From transcendence to contingence, from conoisseur to consumer

Finally, the persistence or transcendence of culture, which outlives not only the moment of contact, but also the life granted both to its author and to its receptor and which travels down the centuries, embodied in works which are the object of veneration and study (Arendt, 1961, 1996), withers before the ephemeral, consumable characteristics of cultural input, always threatened by the fragility of the situation, of the opportunity, instant success and instant forgetting, not due so much to exhaustion, but to inundation: the unstoppable tide of other seductive offers, which are just as ephemeral but which replace the current number one story with those upcoming, just as each wave reaches, breaks over and erases the previous one, as it retreats and leaves foam which is not its own, but the echo of all those which have gone before mixed together. It is then that this immediate form of pleasure from cultural experience seems to merge into the immediate pleasure from other forms of leisure, in its irrelevance and in its, shall we say,

«frivolity» (Rodríguez Ferrándiz, 2008). Now, that superficiality –multidimensional or rather, multi-tasking– of current cultural experience, which allows the web surfer to simultaneously read, for example, a fictional story on the Internet or an article on naturo-pathy, whilst listening to chill-out versions of the works of Chopin or Mozart and all the while keeping an eye on the latest TV ghost story or crime series without having to resist the temptation to share what he is reading, listening to or seeing with his Facebook contacts, and digest, judge and perhaps even analyse, cannot be dismissed at a stroke by claiming that it is nothing more than a shortcut to the effort required by a genuine cultural experience. So, summarising, analysing, expressing opinions, linking the story to other texts and even modifying it cannot be discredited. That superficiality cannot be explained merely as the resource of the latter-day Barbarian who destroys the liturgies and rites of that experience at the same time as the very same sacred content which had been revealed. That experience is not merely an easy, convenient way out, but requires a different kind of effort. What precedes undoubtedly obliges us to reset the limits of the cultural «field» (Bourdieu, 2008): its agents (and patients), its autonomy or heteronomy with respect to other fields (far more difficult to distinguish today than was the case years ago), the appropriation of cultural capital and its impact on a far wider creative economy, the production of culture and its successive post-production, the productive routines required in any sector and, especially, the educational routines which serve to train those productive sectors, our responsibility as modest but increasingly empowered producers, prescribers or consumers of culture and leisure.

5. Balance and perspectives

All this portrays an ambivalent, paradoxical panorama. On the one hand, there are some who, quite reasonably, lament the fact that attending theatre or opera is to be compared, as regards ways of using one's leisure, with visits to theme parks or casinos (or in its virtual forms: videogames or betting websites), or that a record or book can be considered in the same light as dining out or adventure holidays (let's say, gastronomic or recreational experiences). Others would argue, and rightly so, that culture which requires the reverential pilgrimage to the theatre or opera is tainted by snobbery, as a ritual which expresses differences, and that a book, record or film as material objects become fetishes, to be revered, collected and exhibited without having been read,

listened to or watched. By contrast, there is the exaltation of the experience of doing something with culture (streamed music or video, in full flow at the moment of access, for example) and beyond that, creative experiments (enlarging, glossing over, modifying, embellishing, enriching, remixing internet content) and cohabitation (share, cast it back into the fray that is Internet, recommend or criticise it) is to bestow culture with its rightful factual dimension, where culture is not a hidden treasure, but the some-times bumpy journey, even if that pairs it with other experiences which are not cultural in the sense of being «cultivated» or of «excellence». Some may remind us, as Adorno does (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1994: 189; Adorno, 2009), that contact with culture generates pleasure, of course, but it is a serious, austere pleasure, in contrast to mere distraction or entertainment, which are its caricature. And others will argue that the gravity required of culture begs the question: cultural mandarins of all ages have always presided over what the appropriate attitudes are, and have demanded effort, made difficulties and erected barriers for both the creator and the receptor, difficulties or barriers that served to classify and to exclude.

Perhaps the error is not so much in having to choose between one set of responses or another, all of which, while still opposed, represent different forms of malaise with respect to what should be considered culture. The problem, perhaps, lies in the scope of the question. It is not so much a question of accentuating the levelling effect which would seem to degrade culture and exalt –within the action of making comparisons– the mere distraction, or as a way of spending one's time, but to take on board the complete removal of the limits between leisure time and working time.

When leisure is delimited, whether or not culture is included here – it would seem to be necessary to regard it in contrast to business, which would be its very negation («otium» vs. «negotium»). However, it is true that we are witnessing not only the confusion between leisure which lifts and ennobles and that which dissipates and brutalises (to exaggerate the extreme poles), but an overlapping and even coincidence in time and space for leisure and work, the industrialisation, rationalisation and commer-cialisation of leisure and a soft, malleable, informal view of work (Virno, 2003), both ravaged by the same torrential outburst which mixes new technologies, participative cohabitation, experimentation: of «homo ludens» and «homo laborans».

Notes

[1] This is not the place to discuss the terms «Mass Culture» and «Cultural Industry», which do not fit exactly, nor the transition from «Cultural Industry» in the singular, to the more descriptive, as opposed to qualitative «Cultural Industries» (Rodríguez Ferrándiz, 2009a, 2009b, 2010). There are very interesting discussions on this topic in «Cuadernos de Información y Comunicación», 9 (2004) and in «Revista de Occidente», 290-1 (2005), both dedicated to Mass Culture. There are also sectorial studies on cultural industries, applied to both Spain (Bustamante, 2002), Latin America (Mastrini & Becerra, 2006; Castro, 2008) and the world in general (Bustamante, 2003, 2004, 2007).

[2] Vogel's book was originally titled «Entertainment Industry Economics» (2001), but has since been translated as «La industria de la cultura y el ocio» (2004), a translation which is less confusing to the Spanish speaking reader. The author dedicates each of the two long chapters of his book to «Media and Entertainment» and «Live Entertainment», respectively, which would seem to suggest a distinction between «textual» mediation, which keeps it distance and where the viewer is limited to his or her condition as a contemplator, and live enjoyment, which allows and requires participation but which are both considered as «entertainment». In the first, he analyses film, television, music, radio, the Internet, the publishing industry and games and toys, and in the second, casinos, betting firms, sports, theme and recreational parks and «performing arts and culture». As can be seen, there are unexplained contradictions in both lists.

[3] Roberts organizes his study into three large sections, Providers (commercial leisure, voluntary activities and the public sector), Provisions and Policies. Among the leisure domains, he points out that the three most important, given the proportion of the population involved, the time dedicated to them and the volume of business generated, are tourism, dining out and the «media». Some distance behind come sports, games of chance and the arts. He suggests that many sectors are interrelated and overlap, and enjoy synergies which support them: tourism nearly always implies eating out and often also implies attendance at artistic shows or visits to museums, sports may be watched live or on the television, etc.

[4] The label «Creative Industries» already enjoys institutional recognition in Great Britain where, since 1998, it has been the responsibility of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (Blythe, 2001: 145-146). This Department claims that «Creative Industries» are «those activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property» and include «advertising, architecture, the art and antiques market, crafts, design, designer fashion, film, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, publishing, software and television and radio» (Jeffcutt & Pratt, 2002: 227). The label «creative industries» has been gaining ground since the beginning of the 21st Century, in academic literature and, above all, in publications on economic geography, the economics of culture and urban studies, especially in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries. For well-argued criticism of the concept, see Garnham, 2005; Zallo, 2007; Bustamante, 2009.

[5] This mutation, often presented in optimistic, even enthusiastic terms, also has its shady side. The participating consumer («prosumer» was the term coined by Toffler back in 1980, and «mass auto-communication» is the term given to the process by Castells (2009: 87-108) which, on the one hand, stimulates, involves, marks, creates and shares and on the other, may even tend to show off its own triviality, with no clear conscience of what it owes or leaves behind for posterity, encouraged by the immediacy, the cause of such confusion in Internet, at every moment of use, as regards the limits to the recognisable, the intelligible and also the usable, in true Do-It-Yourself style.

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