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Country Report

Performative arts and pedagogy – A British Perpective [1]

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1. https://doi.org/10.33178/scenario.13.2.2

This report resulted from a number of meetings in the context of *The Performative Arts and Pedagogy Project – Towards the Development of an International Glossary* (for further details click here). Representatives from five different countries (Austria, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Switzerland) have contributed to the project, engaging in an interdisciplinary and intercultural exchange that aims at an increased awareness of (culture-)specific concepts and associated terminologies that are applied in Performative Arts and Pedagogy contexts.

1 Introduction

The aim of this report is to provide an overview of the history and current state of 'performative arts and pedagogy' in the United Kingdom (UK) and, in doing so, identify key terms that have been dominant in the associated discourse. In compiling the report, there are clear challenges that need to be acknowledged. The first of these is the danger of making over-generalised statements without acknowledging the diversity of contexts, for example: different sectors (school, higher education, community), different phases of schooling (pre-school, primary, secondary), different countries within the sovereign state of the UK (England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland). Any statement about drama practice in a country can easily mislead if it is assumed to apply equally in all contexts. One possible solution would be to avoid too much speculation and attempt to stick to empirical data, numbers of drama courses in schools and colleges, numbers of trained drama teachers, etc. However, even the reporting of facts involves some selection, and therefore has the potential for bias. Moreover, the avoidance of opinion and analysis can sacrifice insight for a form of bland neutrality.

The dangers of over-generalisation in part determined the approach to the structure of this report, with the decision to address different sectors in separate sections rather than create a single chronological account. Having three authors

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with different backgrounds and experience also provided a source of different insights (Mike Fleming: schools; Meretta Elliott: higher education; Katja Frimberger: community). It was also decided to include one specific case study to provide a concrete example of current practice and to balance the more general statements.

The identification of key terms was also challenging. This was not just to do with making a choice but rather because in many cases their meanings could not be described in simple definitions. Meanings evolve and change over time, as theoretical perspectives alter and more nuanced characteristics are identified. Even the meaning of a basic concept like 'drama' changes when it is being used to describe a type of literary genre or to make an ideological point about its relationship to 'theatre'. Such considerations serve once again to re-emphasise the relevance of context and the importance of analytical discussion rather than simple lists of terms and narrow definitions.

2 The school context

The growth of drama in the school context in the UK has its origins in the progressive ideas about education that were developing around the same time as compulsory elementary schooling was introduced in 1870. Although the predominant approach to schooling was traditional and authoritarian, there was growing interest in more child-centred approaches, including the value of play. Rousseau's ideas had influenced some of the educational publications, including Edgworths' *Practical Education* that had been originally published in 1798, advocating active approaches to learning. The use of drama was not widespread in the early part of the twentieth century but there were pioneering approaches in particular schools. Finlay Johnson (1911) used dramatisation as a means of 'arousing a keen desire to know' and as an 'incentive to learning' (Bolton 1998: 10). Caldwell Cook (1917) was an innovate teacher who used his 'play way' (active forms of dramatisation that produced a whole new culture in the classroom) to teach literature. Both of these approaches could justifiably be judged to be 'performative' (although the term was not used at that time), but the later advocates of drama in schools would not have accepted the use of this label.

Ideas which developed in the 1950s and 1960s moved away from the notion of drama as performance. The approach developed by Slade (1954) recognised 'child drama' as a separate art form and drew strongly on the value of dramatic play. The division between 'drama' and 'theatre' was reinforced by Way (1967) who declared that theatre was concerned with 'communication', while drama was more focused on the participants' 'experience'. Theatre (and associated activities such as rehearsal and acting) was considered inappropriate for young people because it was thought to result in stilted, unnatural performances employing none of the creativity, individuality and spontaneity favoured by the progressives.

The strong division between drama and theatre was fairly short-lived but it

was in this period of innovation and growth of ideas (even though some of them were misplaced) that the term **drama in education** became established. It was originally used in a narrow sense to refer primarily to the work of Heathcote and Bolton that, although not performance oriented, was markedly different from the Slade/Way tradition. Their approach to drama has been described as a form of improvised play-making where the teacher and whole class constructed a 'living through' drama, aimed at exploring and understanding some aspect of the human condition. The approach had distinctive features in methodology as well as outcomes, most notably the involvement as the 'teacher in role' and the sustained combination of improvised drama and deep reflection on the process. This approach to drama was far from being universal in schools where a wide diversity of approaches could be found: games and exercises, movement and mime, small group play-making, work with script, theatre arts. Drama in education was not without its critics who argued that the emphasis on learning was a betrayal of the artistic/aesthetic elements of the subject. Abbs (1994: 123) argued that by focusing on 'issues', the emphasis on social and psychological outcomes was a form of instrumentalism that neglected the art form; he and similar critics thought that *learning in* the subject was being marginalised in favour of *learning through*. The issue of justification will be addressed further in the Community section of this report.

The original drama in education approach with its emphasis on whole group play-making, emotional depth and significant content was very demanding on the teacher and, not surprisingly, evolved into the more accessible genre, **process drama.** This approach also involved the teacher, frequently in role, leading the class through a made-up scenario but now using a wider variety of techniques, strategies or **conventions,** as they are commonly described (e.g. tableau, questioning in role, small group work, thought tracking, spotlight, etc.), that made the structure of the work more defined. The emphasis was still very much on experience rather than working towards a performance, but the strong antipathy to theatre receded. The use of conventions has been subject to criticism when used as stand-alone techniques to give structure to drama lessons because they can easily become decontextualized and treated as a series of superficial exercises.

The employment of drama as subject in its own right or as a method to teach other subjects in the curriculum has been the subject of much discussion as well as leading to some confusion about terminology. The term **drama for learning** is now sometimes thought to refer exclusively to the use of drama across the curriculum but this is to ignore much of its history when 'drama for learning' or 'drama for understanding' was a central goal of drama in education, where the learning was very much about the human condition embodied in the content of the work. Similarly, the phrase **drama as art** can be a source of confusion when it is used exclusively to refer to the teaching of drama as subject, with the unwarranted implication that the use of drama to teach subjects does not employ the full artistic and aesthetic dimensions of drama. In fact, the **mantle of the expert** approach invented by Heathcote that places learners in role as

experts to explore specific curriculum topics, when executed properly, is very much a case of using the art form of drama to further learning. Its use has grown considerably, particularly in primary schools.

The introduction of the first National Curriculum in 1988 had important consequences for drama in schools because of its exclusion as a separate subject (both music and visual art were given subject status), although it did appear as a component of the programmes of study for English. Some commentators saw right-wing conspiracy in the exclusion of drama because as a subject it offered a 'forum for independent thinking' (Davis & Byron 1988). Others thought its exclusion was a result of the emphasis by its exponents on drama as methodology rather than as subject (Hornbrook 1992). The references to drama have varied in different versions of the National Curriculum but in 2014 these were reduced further, even in the speaking and listening component of English.

One of the results of the wider reforms that accompanied the introduction of the National Curriculum was the diminution of the influence of local education authorities that has continued to the present day. This resulted in a reduction of the provision of in-service work and the support of drama advisers. National drama associations (notably 'National Drama' and 'The National Association of Teachers of Drama') do much valuable work to support teachers but cannot fully compensate for the absence of official infrastructure.

The approach to education changed with the introduction of the National Curriculum, with more emphasis on standards, national testing, clearly defined outcomes and a more instrumental approach to teaching. This has not been a comfortable climate in which the arts could grow and flourish. In 2017 there were 1,700 fewer drama teachers in UK schools than in 2010; there was also a 24% drop in students taking Drama GCSE. Despite these negative statistics, many schools are finding ways of keeping the arts alive. Participation in the Artsmark and Arts award schemes run by the Arts Council is strong and fosters innovative work both in drama and the arts more widely. Advocacy for drama and the arts is also strong. An increase in empirical research in drama has strengthened its academic standing. The current proposal to reform the system of national inspection of schools (OfSTED) provides some reason for optimism because the intention is to reduce the emphasis on data and outcomes, and evaluate the more general contribution a school makes to a child's education; this has the potential to strengthen arts provision.

Understanding of the relationship between drama and learning has been deepened through such concepts as 'constructivism' and 'embodied cognition', and through insights drawn from neurological research and aesthetics. Cognition is no longer viewed merely as a process of making formal operations on abstract symbols but is seen as a more embodied, active process that involves feeling and is highly situated. Because cognitive processes are rooted in the way the body interacts with the world, the case for performative approaches in education is strengthened.

It is probably fair to claim that whereas, at one time, the UK was a

leading influence in the world in the development of drama in education, the contemporary situation is fairly gloomy. Excellent, reative work continues to flourish in many schools, but this is despite, rather than because of, official policies and infrastructures.

3 The Higher Education Context

The impact of the marginalisation of drama in state schools (England), and creative arts practices in general, can now be seen in Higher Education. The introduction of the English Baccalaureate in 2010, set the government agenda for state education for the foreseeable future. It created a set of core subjects (English language and literature, maths, the sciences, geography or history, a language), while music, drama and art were designated as additional/ optional.[2] Schools therefore feel the pressure to prioritise these core subjects if they want to survive in the world of league tables, although there are many schools and individual teachers within schools who are working to maintain access to arts subjects. This climate of decline in participation in arts has necessitated universities to review their tariffs in relation to required subjects.

The arguments for the importance of studying creative practice in some form have had to be restated frequently. This is curious considering the success of the creative industries in the UK. 'From 2011 to 2017, employment in the DCMS Sectors grew at a faster rate than in the UK as a whole; 15.0% versus 9.3%' (Department of Culture Media & Sport 2017).[3] Students study at university to equip themselves for future careers; but they also study to satisfy their own desire for fulfilment and to develop personally. It is within this context that drama/theatre/performing arts undergraduate degrees are now operating.

Individual universities present data regarding performance indicators for individual programmes to applicants via a range of websites enabling quick comparisons. Potential earnings are emphasised as are 'student satisfaction' (National Student Survey) and 'employability' (Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education). Undergraduates can study single honours (one subject discipline) or joint honours (two disciplines). These programmes are named and focused in a range of ways: Drama Studies, Theatre, Performance, Applied Practice, Theatre Making, etc. When combined with another subject various combinations become possible: Theatre and English, Drama and Film Studies, etc. The teaching methods range widely: lectures, seminars, practical workshops, rehearsals, viewing productions, tutorials. Within drama-based programmes experiential learning is a central approach. Students are given opportunities to develop practical skills and theoretical understanding; the amount and depth will vary from programme to programme. The development of practical skills, to a greater or lesser extent, is available in universities

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-baccalaureate-eligible-qualifications [last accessed January 8, 2019].

[3] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dcms-sectors-economic-estimates-2017-employment [last accessed January 8, 2019].

where drama-based degrees are offered; actor training still remains within the conservatoire.

Students can also study Applied Drama Practice as their main degree focus or as a part of their studies. This introduces students to the range of approaches and techniques that can be utilised when working with different communities. The term 'applied' (as in **applied theatre**) is an umbrella term first coined in the 1990s encompassing a wide range of practices: **Theatre in Education,** Theatre in Prisons, Reminiscence Theatre, Theatre for Development. Theatre in education has a long tradition in the UK and has been described as constituting the historic roots of applied practice. It typically involved a theatre company performing and interacting with young people in pursuit of learning goals. The applied programmes and modules have proved popular with students as they provide a different set of challenges and experiences; they give students the opportunity to see how their drama-based experience can be used to enhance the lives of others, in other contexts, beyond more conventional roles, e.g. actors, writers, directors, teachers, arts administrators, therapists, etc. Some of these students will then go on to further study in one of the Applied Practice MAs offered across the UK. Students wanting to go into the teaching profession also find that they benefit from these experiences.

The drive to foreground employability and the wider application of drama/theatre-based skills has meant that institutions encourage work experience/placements in the creative industries. These opportunities for real-world experience in a career they may choose to pursue in the future are valuable. There is also a growth in apprenticeships, education/training schemes that allow entry into careers for school leavers or facilitate people who want to change careers and study while working. Typically, they spend one day per week studying while engaged in full-time work.

Some of the more detailed processes involved in these types of courses can be illustrated by a concrete example. In July 2018, Brunel University recruited its first cohort of apprentices. This was achieved through the collaboration of the Central and North West London Health Authority (NHS). The objective of the programme is for these students to learn about Arts in Health, in order to increase their knowledge and understanding of the possibilities of arts therapies including drama. Their job title is Assistant Health Practitioner and they are all based in Mental Health units. Their experience ranges from working with acute patients through to patients preparing to go back into the community.

The apprentices studied drama in an existing undergraduate module alongside BA Theatre students who had chosen the module. The workplace experience of the older apprentices and the openness of the younger students created a very fruitful dialogue. The objective of the module is to introduce students to both, the theory and some of the practice associated with applied work. This is taught mainly through practical workshops but there is also some lecture/seminar input in the first term. The second term focuses on the forming of student groups/companies. These companies research a specific client group (in the case of the apprentices the patients they already work with), in order

to develop and deliver a tailor-made workshop/s for this group. This process draws on the knowledge they have gained so far and requires them to make research visits in the field, as well as liaise closely with the specific organisation. Projects have taken place in prisons, a range of schools, care homes, refugee centres, etc. The needs of clients, and therefore projects, varies from year to year. The students themselves select who they want to research and design their project for.

The application of drama-based skills in an off-campus setting makes significant demands on students. They have to manage the process and each other while out of the comfort zone of the university. In order to function in their chosen environment they are taken through a series of workshops to develop the relevant skills and awareness they will need. One of the workshops they experience is entitled "How to Run a Successful Workshop", and takes place in week three of the course. The aims of the workshop are to develop:

- an understanding of team working
- an awareness of drama techniques of use in applied drama contexts
- an awareness of research and workshop structuring processes
- confidence in running drama-based activities for a client group
- a practical understanding of forum theatre

At the beginning three chairs are placed around the room and the group are asked what they think are the three key things they need to keep in mind as facilitators**.** Three volunteers sit in the chairs. Each volunteer/chair is labelled as: time management, the planned activities, and awareness of the participants' responses. By physicalising each key concern, students are offered an embodied image rather than a simple label. The central theme/action for the workshop is **forum theatre**. This technique, pioneered by Augusto Boal (1979), is very useful for increasing the students understanding of applied practice and its possibilities. At its simplest forum theatre involves the enactment of a scene that can be stopped and replayed by any of the spectator/participant members of the audience who show how the scene might be changed. It is widely used and allows them to practice their skills on the floor in a safe setting.

The challenge within the workshop is to deliberately 'interrupt' their participation in the pleasure of the creative process, to allow for a different kind of engagement. This is the hinge of the whole experience: "Experiential learning is a process in which an experience is reflected upon and then translated into concepts, which in turn become guidelines for new experiences" (Saddington 1992). For most students this is a challenge they enjoy and respond to quickly. However, there are always a few students who are less appreciative of the reflective phase and want the momentum and energy of the workshop to run on uninterrupted; this always comes up as part of the discussion. The partnership

between undergraduates and apprentices adds much to the experience. The apprentices are implicitly encouraged to take their lead from the confidence of the undergraduate students to ask questions themselves and challenge what is happening and why. This adds an extra layer of excitement in learning to the dynamic of the workshop.

The above example seeks to demonstrate the richness of the experiential, performative learning experience. The role of the facilitator is to provide an appropriate environment for learning, and this is a creative act in itself.

4 The Community Context

Engagement with performative arts is not confined to formal educational settings but can also be found in various community contexts. The term most commonly used in UK cultural policies and by practitioners working in community contexts today is **participatory art.** Since (roughly) the 1990's participatory art has acted as an umbrella term for a diversity of artistic and cultural practices and terms (applied theatre is one of them) that have at their heart the creation of small or large scale artworks that involve professional and non-professional artists in the creative process (Matarasso 2019: 19). Practitioners and the multiple participatory art sub-terminologies they use to describe their work (dialogic practice, co-production, relational aesthetics, community art etc.) can be found in a variety of areas. Museums and galleries, the prison education service, community festivals/carnivals, health care environments, cultural centres and referral units are only some of them.

Participatory, artist-led art is welcomed in prestigious cultural institutions like the Tate Modern and is a vital part of the programme of National Theatres. It even features in the **socially engaged artworks** of Turner-prize winning contemporary artists like the London-based Assemble Collective "who work across the fields of art, design and architecture to create projects in tandem with the communities who use and inhabit them"[4]. At the same time, short and long-term participatory arts projects are flourishing in less high profile and less well-resourced community spaces. There is Boalian **community theatre** made by *Active Inquiry* in Leith (Edinburgh) "enabling grassroots communities to make and use excellent theatre as a catalyst to uncover and challenge injustice"[5]; Scotland-based KIN, an arts collective of young people who "have lived through having a parent or sibling in prison" and make art to challenge stigma and offer support to others[6] and **participatory filmmaking** projects like *Scotland, Our New Home,* which worked with refugee-support group *The New Young Peers Scotland* to offer training to young people who wanted to make films for other new arrivals making a home in Glasgow[7].

[4] https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/other-venue/exhibition/turner-prize-2015/turner-prize-2015-artists-assemble [last accessed June 20, 2019].
[5] https://www.activeinquiry.co.uk/ [last accessed June 20, 2019].
[6] https://www.voxliminis.co.uk/projects/kin/ [last accessed June 20, 2019].
[7] http://showmanmedia.co.uk/scotland-our-new-home/ [last accessed June 20, 2019].

Cultural engagement plays a role in the integration of refugees (New Scots: Refugee Integration Strategy 2018; England's Integrated Communities Action Plan 2019) and participatory arts activities are valued for their potential to "transform places and quality of life through imagination, ambition and an understanding of the potential of creativity" (Scotland's Creative Learning Review 2017: 17). The Refugee Council's yearly celebration of *Refugee Festival* (Scotland) and *Refugee Week* (in England, Wales and Norther Ireland) is based on the rights-based notion of cultural participation laid out in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (New Scots: Refugee Integration Strategy 2018-2022: 64). *Refugee Festival* aims to "bring people from refugee and local communities together to celebrate the contribution of refugees"[8]. During this year's Scottish Refugee Festival (20-30 June 2019), there will be more than 100 events taking place all across Scotland, ranging from community-led cultural celebrations to artist-led contemporary artworks and CPD (Continous Professional Development) events for teachers and community workers who want to use participatory arts in their work.

Participatory arts activities are also promoted as a "springboard for positive change within the criminal justice system"[9]. The *National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance* "represents a (UK-wide) network of 900 individuals and organisations that deliver **creative interventions** to support people in prison, on probation and in the community"[10]. In Scotland, the *Scottish Prison Arts Network* SPAN (now called *Justice and Arts Scotland*) and *Creative Scotland* (the development body for the arts and creative industries in Scotland) delivered a three year programme of arts activties aimed to "support the integration and normalization of arts & creative activities within the education service provision (Learning Centres) in Scottish prisons and communities affected by crime" (Naylor & Lewis 2015: 2). This resulted in "the first ever arts festival in a Scottish prison, the accreditation of the long running Drama programme in HMP Perth and the establishment of the multi-award winning STIR magazine, produced across a number of prisons with an editorial board in HMP Shotts" (Thorpe 2015: 3).

As can be seen from this (admittedly rather eclectic) summary of current practice, "participatory art is everywhere" (Matarasso 2019: 25). The pioneering arts practice of 1960's and 1970's 'outsider' artists collectives like *Welfare State* (1968-2003) and agit-prop inspired radical theatre groups like *Red Ladder* (founded in 1968), with their outspoken socialist politics and "site-specific theatre in landscape, lantern processions, spectacular fireshows, community carnivals and participatory festival"[11] have moved from the margins into the cultural centre of government policy and institutions. The **community art movement** of the 60's and 70's wanted to distinguish itself from the 'bourgeois' art of established cultural institutions (Matarasso 2019: 20). Their ways of working were often underpinned by leftist concerns for economic

[8] http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk [last accessed June 20, 2019].
[9] https://www.artsincriminaljustice.org.uk [last accessed June 20, 2019].
[10] https://www.artsincriminaljustice.org.uk/ [last accessed June 20, 2019].
[11] http://www.welfare-state.org/pages/aboutwsi.htm [last accessed June 20, 2019].

justice and a belief in the individual's and community's autonomy as creators of art. Community art's experimental processes and outcomes, even if not always leading to high-quality results, were often considered political experiments in participatory democracy. Non-hierarchical work processes and horizontal decision-making procedures deliberately functioned outside of state-sanctioned artistic practices, hierarchical organisational structures and representative models of decision-making (ibid: 53ff).

In contrast to the principles of self-governance that underpinned community art then, the value of participatory art in cultural and social policy today is often described in the language of amelioration, of 'giving access' and 'social inclusion'. Participatory art as an **intervention**, or tool for social inclusion is aimed at individuals and groups who are considered 'at risk', because they are, for example, culturally marginalised, socially excluded, vulnerable to social discrimination, or have been affected by mental health issues. Matarasso (2019) describes participatory art's move into the centre of power (and policy) as a double-edged sword:

> The normalisation of participatory art presents opportunities and threats. It is a remarkable achievement to which countless people have contributed over decades. As a result, many others have benefited through participating in artistic work. Millions of lives have changed for the better, in small ways and large. At the same time, the growing acceptance of participatory art in centres of power risks making it another arm of institutional control, its purposes, goals and methods dictated from outside rather than negotiated between the people concerned. (ibid. 25)

In the UK, the language of amelioration (over community empowerment) has evolved as part of the politics of privatisation and the neoliberal premises of policy embedded since Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in 1979 (Matarasso 2013: 216). In the 1990's, New Labour defined 'cultural participation' as the individual's responsiblity "to conform to full employment, have a disposable income, and be self- sufficient" (Bishop 2012: 13f). This neoliberal recasting of poverty, not as a problem arising from class-based inequalities of resources and opportunities (Evans & Tilley 2017: 9), but as a biographic problem, gave rise to a notion of *social efficacy* as the betterment and self-improvement of the individual, rather than the fair redistribution of resources for the common good.

In this last section of the report, we will look at the ethical tension that can arise for our practice from participatory art's move into social policy, for example when put in service for the project of integration of migrants and refugees. EU-commissioned reports like *How culture and the arts can promote intercultural dialogue in the context of the migratory and refugee crisis'*(European Agenda for Culture 2017) and the European Expert Network's communiqué *The Role of Culture and the Arts in the Integration of Refugees and Migrants* (McGregor & Ragab 2016) emphasise the arts' role in delivering identified key aspects of integration, such as cultural integration, language acquisition, well-being and economic opportunities (ibid. 19). The task of social inclusion and cultural

integration, and the associated release of the individual refugee's potential, is also intimately linked to the value of the hosting state's economic productivity:

> Failure to release the potential of third-country nationals in the EU would represent a massive waste of resources, both for the individual concerned themselves and more generally for our society and economy. There is a clear risk that the cost of non-integration will turn out to be higher than the cost of investment in integration policies. (European commission 2016: 4)

Martinez-Guillem (2015: 438) argues that the concept of integration performs an ideological role, when it naturalizes, as in this European commision statement, the relationship between migrants' and refugees' *cultural otherness* (in their non-integrated state) and their (potential) *economic productivity* in their integrated state. This unfortunate split of the term integration into 'challenging cultural aspects' and 'positive economic aspects' can run the danger of turning an individual's economic marginalisation and exploitation into a biographic and cultural problem (ibid. 436). Economic marginalisation then becomes a problem of cultural integration rather than a sign of systemic, precarious labour conditions and a "necessary component of a particular economic system" (ibid. 439). The association of cultural otherness with notions of economic non-productivity equally implies that "some cultural characteristics make some migrants less suitable for profitable labour than others" (ibid: 436).

Participatory art today is a valued, accepted and ever-growing, innovating practice. In light of its move into the centre of cultural power and social policy, we have to however be mindful to not unreflectively claim its transformative power for a project of integration and its associated social aims "intercultural dialogue, the celebration of multiculturalism, the fostering of diversity in an open society" (McGregor & Ragab 2016: 19), when these important objectives are bound to a logic of the state's economic productivity that could potentially justify migrants' and refugees' economic marginalisation and harden an already reductive public debate around who is a deserving 'good' or undeserving 'bad' refugee and/or migrant.

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