

Article #1

From the mimetic moment to a mental matrix as a dynamic, interactive field of links between the layers and forces within the image.

Within a contemporary context I am of the opinion that representations with respect to reality can only be read as a **complex structure** of symbols and interactions between layers of meaning, variable dimensions, mental connections, changing medium properties, etc., as well as mutual relationships that in theory are always liable to change.

Blueprint for artistic research

This piece of artistic research endeavours to uncover and describe unknown parameters in images along with existing parameters in order to study specifically their interaction and experimental interplay.

Analysis of the image from the **intersecting lines and the intersections between the image layers** (connections) is therefore attempted in various ways (formally, experimentally, semiotically, philosophically, etc.) in order to get into the **'intermediate area' of indirect**, conscious and subconscious image elements so their narrative can be approached as a new force.

Moreover, the elements outside the image (surroundings, carrier material, frame, splits, etc.) and the specific medium properties (e.g. the grammar of photography compared to painting) will play a specific role in this matrix.

The **interchange between the different variables and the perception** of the whole is brought together in a matrix that becomes **the breeding ground for new links**. A unique image analysis model can emerge from this, but will mainly function as a **concept** within a new image-consciousness in order to stimulate the evolution of cross-fertilization between associations, perceptions, external factors and connotations.

There is still an influence on all of this from our connecting powers of imagination and our constantly projected viewing behaviour. This way we are able to make the incomprehensible image clearer so that with this knowledge we can enter into deeper regions as an **artistically new environment**.

We attempt to show this entity using reflective interaction between (1) artistic practice, (2) 'artistically' experimental methods and (3) theoretical exponents:

- via artistic practice: seeking the other track in an image through paintings, video, installations & projects, to expose the complex structure of images differently and to understand better the expressive spaces between significance and the signifier;
- via experiments in and with new media: the image grammar such as we now know it can be retrieved from new media or via crossover with other image languages and it is precisely this new use of images that is captivating and is also the breeding

ground for artistic scientific research, specifically around the dynamic language of imagery;

- but also using the matrix as the starting point for ideas between the various possibilities for images;

- by way of theoretical discourse and discourse regarding content; via literature, symposia,... regarding new image depictions (falsehoods, image manipulation, etc.), changing perceptions, ...image philosophy and visual thinking.

New understanding can also arise through collecting, categorising and managing images: (films, photos) containing the indirect language of images:

www.analyzing-images.com

<http://pinterest.com/pceyssens/>

In a first chapter I will identify some new areas of imagery and their effect on the changing image consciousness.

This will serve as a starting point and research material in an artistic process that I will describe in the second chapter.

Chapter 1: Renaissance 2.0.

Why should we embark on new areas of imagery, or study our changing viewing behaviour?

By analogy with the initial layer parameters: colour, composition, form, surface division, etc., there are also unknown and deeper image components present that are often virtual, subconscious or suggestive, but that can have an enormous influence on the greater meaning, impression and fascination with the same image. The progression of indirect imagery via the contemporary associative capacity for observation, forms an essential part of this research. These subconscious elements of imagery act as stimulants and impulses that go intentionally for more associative traces.

The modern grammatical language is more easily found in the things we cannot see, than in the things we can see, as well as in the things that provoke thought. It is this stream of association in images that say more about that image, and therefore take on meaning. It is a continual process of comparing, testing, assimilating, linking, etc., in order to bring a new image to life.

Simultaneously, our way of viewing, in the broadest meaning of the word, has changed and is even undergoing constant evolution:

- thanks to technological advances (telescopes, 3D, macro fields, etc..) that increasingly are releasing these indirect elements and also permitting us to look back even further and in detail, etc., into the reality with which we are already familiar;

- because the powers of imagination and associative behaviour of the viewer have increased, for example by way of programs such as Photoshop, games, virtual reality, etc.;
- thanks to the advances made with 'knowledge' about images, which has increased enormously over the last few years, and also image terms such as personal perception, implementation, conception, etc.;
- iconoclasm has ensured that everybody has created their own library of images from which they can easily draw on when formulating an image;
- new representations of depicted reality present themselves. The conscious use of falsehoods, manipulation, etc., posing as new images that we already know from different applications;
- that images are increasingly being used as instruments in communications. In art education for example, the image has become an essential part of the artistic mental process next to drawing and conceptual texts.

We make different links to those we made 50 years ago and are more inquisitive about what is not, or not yet present. The regenerative mental process concerning the indirect, offers us a new environment within imagery.

Because the camera (still or movie) is an instrument that makes us react differently to reality thanks to its typical properties (focussing, reproducibility, enlargement, etc.), we have become more alert and focus differently on that reality in which there is more interest in the hidden.

Our daily lives consist of a stage setting of possibilities, we slow down, zoom in, etc., and therefore we view things in a more sophisticated and encompassing manner.

We 'tentatively grope' our way from the existing elements and in this way obtain more information. Stephen M. Kosslyn event called this 'groping' a 'spiritual eye'. (Pauwels & Peters 2005)

1.1. Making a complex structure of symbols and mental reflections legible

The enormous explosion of images and their possibilities with regard to content can be elucidated with a number of mind-boggling figures: together we all take around 500 billion photos each year, and every minute around 72 hours of video is uploaded to YouTube. The Pinterest image website attracted more than 10 million visitors in just nine months and was therefore one of the fastest growing websites ever...

The culture of images is therefore going through hyper-evolution. Nowadays communications use more images than words and at the same time more thought is given to personal experiences and perceptions of images. Furthermore, our sensations are being expanded by the internet, virtuality and other advanced image technologies.

In image 2.0 it is therefore the makers, users and readers who want to raise the interactively layered character and associated opportunities.

But currently both, we and the computers, still have too little understanding of the images.

Computers can only understand the text or information that we add to an image and visual understanding is either given too little attention, or not taught at all in the education system.

Traditional image analysis as taught in art education (art school, art history, etc.) is based on a decades- or indeed centuries-old understanding of image composition, semiotics, chromatics, etc., but this has very seldom been tested against indirect image elements such as: suggestive axes, associative behaviour, constantly changing image-symbol relationships, etc., innovative theories of perception.

E.H. Gombrich: 'Something complex like the process of observation becomes too simplified. The entire imitation of nature, the idealisation and abstract thoughts are based on the proposition that sensory impressions are immediate, but processed, distorted and generalised later on. The emphasis must be shifted from sensory stimulation to the response of the organism that never ceases to investigate and test its environment.' (Gombrich 1960)

Thus the language of the image stimulates several senses and certain areas of tension are activated and linked up from their perceptions. This is the language which you as the viewer must use to examine and constantly switch between new areas of discovery, because it is a language that we have not been taught.

1.1.1. Another image consciousness

I would like to address here the evolution of conceptualisation and the fast evolving perception that has led to a different image consciousness by using a simple example from the daily TV news programme. Around 15 years ago we witnessed the evolution from one news reader and one still picture in the background to a multiple, moving entity within which eight layers are active in all different directions. (CNN).

It appears that people need complexity in these times of deconstruction, economic insecurity, capital depletion, etc., and so we identify ourselves in the world by sharing 'provocative' images on social network sites. And these images have to be complex in order to represent our degenerate identity.

'Taking photographs is a sort of overstatement, a heroic pairing with the material world' according to Paul Rosenfeld. (Susan Sontag, 2008)

You can apply this proposition to all images, on the understanding that most images will survive us. The exceptional power of images therefore gives them a rather bizarre *raison d'être* in these difficult times. Some see the camera as the sublimation of the gun (Susan Sontag, 2008), while others find the Bacchanalian imagery responsible for the downfall of mankind.

I see the contemporary complex imagery as a new type of quest in image ontology (as a network of concepts) that we need in order to understand better our disordered reality.

The essence of being is freer by making the 'back' of things more visible and tangible.

The contemporary image is more a source of contamination, associations and reflections from the inevitability of arranging the lasagne into possibilities. It for this reason that expressive opinions about existence these days lead to complications and interaction as a matter of course.

'Our poignant desire for beauty, for something that can get under the skin, (...). But there are certainly other, less liberating feelings that manifest themselves'. (Susan Sontag 2008)

We realise that many will end up simply as images (Facebook profiles, etc.), even our very existence... just as it all began (ultrasound imaging).
From image to image. (from ashes to ashes, dust to dust)

1.2. Changing momentum through digitisation

The digitisation of images results in the fact that we deal differently with 'the moment' because we believe that the image can be 'infected' afterwards by way of different effects and other processes. Therefore reality already exists (is formed) according to a specific perceptual, personal level that has previously been processed in our minds. On top of the fact that the aim of the image (Facebook, etc.) has a targeted associative influence on the making of that image. Virtual, superficial friendships and contacts require a different kind of externalization compared to that for real-life contacts with people. This way the entire phenomenon of representation becomes more of an expressive ballet of masquerades and a desecration of reality.

'According to reports it is always about seizing the moment, the moment when the most banal or most secretive people abandon their hidden identity. But what is more interesting is their alter ego. But rather than trying to find the identity behind the mask, you should endeavour to find the mask behind the identity - the figure inside that haunts us and withholds our identity - the masked deity that sooner or later will indeed haunt us if only for a moment.' (Jean Baudrillard & Johan Swinnen (ed) 1999)

Baudrillard called this turnaround in the perception of reality the 'precession (spin) of simulacra'. The illusion of lifestyle magazines, Hollywood films and Disney World is given preference and the reality that actually exists away from the internet and cinemas has become an evil stranger.

People create artificial worlds using what they see, hear or read in the media. The 'instilled' feeling of insecurity that has raised its head over the last few years is an excellent example. It is often an excess of exaggerated imagery that is perceived as the only reality.

The term simulacra comes from the allegory of the cave, related to Plato's theory of form, as an allusion to a 'false copy of reality'. With 'simulacra', Baudrillard distils the terms 'symbol', 'copy', and 'concept', etc., into a single, excellent definition.

We are constantly busy with exchanging an excess of information and imagery with each other. We are afraid to miss out on things if we don't stay online. This overabundance of imagery and information is not leading to glorified 'shared knowledge', but the forced freedom of information results into an artificial feeling of being noticed and belonging.

'Our viewing behaviour is connected and everything is linked to everything else', according to Henk Oosterling, philosopher.

'The outside position no longer exists. Involvement and engagement is no longer a matter of choice, even if it was only through the infosphere in which we move each day. Because of the internet the arts are increasingly cut into chunks within an image culture that is literally at our fingertips thanks to iphones and mobile devices. The daily routine has therefore been thoroughly politicised because of its micro-political impact on global events.' (Henk Oosterling)

We link everything and search for succession in imagery and thought libraries that we have filtered over the years from the image revolution that headed our way.

We are therefore quicker at making links between conceptual webs and meanings in images. A good example of this are the filmmakers Kieslowski, Greenaway, Lynch, ... they feed on the fact that audiences are offered more options by using glass and its reflections or multi-layered narrative structures.

When it comes to sensory perception, people are mainly viewers. We prefer to watch than read, so if we are given the choice we prefer to understand the world in images rather than text. Images make it easier to 'imagine' things, they allow more freedom and offer us more inspiration,... (Gie van den Berghe 2011)

1.2.1. New representations

It's not just our viewing behaviour that is influenced by this new evolution; the creation of images is also affected.

The reality depicted has been given bizarre new forms. For example, we know from various applications about the conscious use of falsehoods, posing as new representations.

Following the killing of Osama Bin Laden for example, we were already receiving manipulated images of his body just one hour after the event took place. Although to date, images of his dead body have still not been released.

In the meantime we know that virtually any image can be 'distorted, affected', and that mainly TV is susceptible to 'excessive' use of image editing programs, etc..

In L'Image-Temps, Deleuze bases himself on the notion that a new way of thinking is starting to manifest itself. As opposed to classical thinking, this verisimilitude is not measured against its negative identity, the true, but exists with Deleuze as a creative force in itself like the Nietzschean 'power of appearance'. The observer is no longer included in the new image regime in a totalizing entity that in its predictability and security predicates an image of the truth, but is confronted with new forms of perception that represent the unpredictable, the insecure, the dissimilar and that which is different.

(Deleuze, (ed) Ilse Huygens 2003)

Or there are the many reconstructions of reality that the media give us to consume, because the genuine reality was never available in the first place, or where it is simply an 'idea' of what might actually have happened.

A new phenomenon emerging from this whole context is the illusions appearing from the imagery possibilities. Many potential suspects were 'identified' from the images that were available of the area around where the bomb exploded in Boston. This resulted in various innocent bystanders and people living nearby being recorded on film, but in the insinuating context of criminality.

The living room evokes to a diabolical control room, a wilderness full of illusions and hallucinations.

'The real grows like a desert. 'Welcome to the desert of the Real'.

Illusion, dreams, passion, madness, drugs but also artifice and simulacrum were the natural predators of reality. All these have lost their energy as if they were suffering from some incurable, surreptitious disease (that might very well be reality itself).

(Baudrillard & Žižek. 2002)

Many explanations have already been given about the relation between content of an image and its aesthetic form.

A new post-apocalyptic aesthetic is now sprouting up everywhere to colour everything more exuberantly, super-fast montages, digital overkill, fluorescent colours, digital animation, holograms, gold and silver printing, etc..

It is my conviction that aesthetics opens up art. As soon as something appears to imply a sense of beauty, it receives attention more easily.

Of course our own sense of beauty and aesthetics is no longer just that of harmony and balanced compositions!

1.3. Knowledge versus images: every medium has a different story to tell

For example paintings are unique and cannot be reproduced in the way that photographs can. The materials in combination with painting techniques have the potential to more easily stimulate mental interaction. Simultaneously as in photography, it is also an ideal medium to satisfy our tendencies to reduce reality to a small surface area.

Painting, as a language or medium, will never limp along behind or become corny, because its origin lies in the image. And since there are constant evolutions and developments going on - we look at them differently with every passing decade. Painting also gives us gifts of expression through coincidences that are very difficult to judge in advance - as a medium it is always susceptible to the unforeseen, the unexpected.

Moreover, several media can be used together simultaneously (photography, film, etc.). Converging various media has resulted in a constantly changing way of reading images and in an increasingly interwoven concept of imagery.

For example, a smartphone that can digitally paint, facilitate video conferencing, act as a gaming console, take photographs, show films, etc., ...and this is all still evolving.

The move away from the era of mechanical machinery into the realm of cyber technologies and the evolution of the language of painting has resulted in our having totally different 'powers of imagination' in order to represent reality.

1.3.1. An image as a collection of moments in time

People experience time in two separate ways simply by existing (mentally & physically).

On the one hand there is the unmistakable constant of the cyclical (day & night, seasons, etc.), and on the other hand there is the threat of the end of existence (linear experience). This paradox is for many the subject, even the cradle of art expressions in many civilisations.

It is also the case that imagination which recalls the perception, or memory of an image, also brings back specific emotions that are experienced simultaneously.

The aspect of time as cited by Bergson plays an important role here.

The basis of Bergson's thinking lies in the distinction that intelligence only analyses measureable time, and that intuition is involved in sensing the passing of real time. The term 'duration' that Bergson uses, pops up in a multiple experience. These are several moments together. Today, the 'now' moment includes both the past and memories that slowly fade, as well as the future, ... the movement in our mind as a distributor of time versus our body that is slowly, but continuously making progress. (Van Groenland 2011)

From our memories and imagination we human beings, perceive the image as the common denominator of all the different moments and experiences. This in addition to the fact that images often invite projection and anticipation ensures that they are able to become more than just reality itself.

In this way new meanings can grow based on a reorganization of existing experiences, associations and projections. Pure recognition however is replaced by new meanings constructed with (in)direct elements.

Our experience is immediately linked to several different moments that can be given a place in either the past, or the now, where time is not defined.

After all, an impression is actually very difficult to understand from a time framework

Chapter 2: An artistically new environment: new opportunities in this 'impossible multiplicity' or 'complexity' .
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An important objective for me is to increase communicability and transparency regarding the decision-making processes involved in making an image.

Certainly from the perspective of the matrix theme, this could be more of a game between ideas and visual thinking.

In my art I refer not only to images, but rather to what the image makes the viewer think about.

This artistic research certainly does not claim to make something provable or even verifiable (in the form of a coherent pedagogical instrument for an identical

understanding of images), but must be seen as a stimulus, an 'instigator' for going deeper and therefore discovering unknown territories. By discovering additional layers and combining elements of these layers into new sensemaking 'symbols', we are able to make the incomprehensible image clearer. With this knowledge we can inhabit more unusual and extraordinary regions as **artistically new environments**.

Furthermore, I think as an artist it is necessary to nourish yourself multidisciplinary in order to address this kind of research.

Therefore I have also attempted to find theoretical descriptions and definitions in language, as an abstraction of reality.

This research, concerned with the grammar and philosophy of the image, as well as being perceptively artistic and psychological is extremely complex.

However it is feasible by attempting only to understand and integrate the specific parts of philosophy, iconography, perception psychology that are relevant.

This is why there is coöperation with various partners who are quite at home in these individual disciplines and who have led me to a better understanding of the working of the matrix.

2.1. Several projects with external partners

We know more, want to know more, think in pluralities.

Contemporary man is swamped with a deluge of information. From biopsychology we learned that by using the left hand side of the brain we try to comprehend all this data in a single system. But the real progression manifests itself in the right hand side of our brains when we make links and therefore add more meaning to everything.

Matthijs & Hessels provide an interesting philosophical contribution to the matrix:

'In a mediatic society bombarded with symbols, the reference of those symbols have become of secondary importance.

The dynamic of the simulacrum, the referent without the referred, creates an avalanche of meanings, among which the original reference, and therefore the argumentation, is lost. That is why there is an overkill of nameless explanations and a jumble of possible connotations.' (Matthijs & Hessels 2007)

It is therefore certain that the field of new media arts is an ideal feeding ground for researching the impact of science and technology on art. The speed of technological developments obliges us constantly to adapt and remember the accepted image-theories.

Some projects as example:

2.1.1. Round a Roundabout

Round a roundabout is an installation/stage play filmed 2 x 360° from which the actors and their game cannot escape.

But, because of the changing algorithms controlled by the actors (seen as both

negative and positive, seeking other reference points, extending viewing axes, etc.) and a changing consciousness around the perception of the visual, they attempt to make a way out possible.

Being lost in a 360° image of classical reference points and image parameters is one of the starting points in the project. It is about watching and being watched. The layers in an image are interwoven in one take, so that the viewer needs time to look around and see everything.

The production will be recorded by ourselves (MAD-faculty), Takt (www.takt.be) and Expertise-centre Digital Media / University Hasselt (www.uhasselt.be/edm), the actors are Wouter Hendrickx (from films and series: 'Helaasheid der dingen', 'Witse', etc.) and Geert Van Rampelberg (from films and series: 'De zaak alzheimer', 'Parelvissers', etc.). Prof. Johan Wagemans (Laboratory of Experimental Psychology / University of Leuven / KUL.) as an experimental psychologist doing interdisciplinary research, is the academic partner who will support the research aspect of visual perception.

'How you observe things depends on which area of the brain is active. And you can switch over from one situation to another. You then see the activities in these areas either strengthening or weakening.' (Wagemans, 2012)

There is also a challenge in the indirect area of how we read and understand this.

'Observations of the whole can influence the perception of the parts in various ways: sometimes the parts are no longer visible, sometimes they are. There are several ways of observing: our perception is very complex and flexible. Future research must outline which ways are taken in specific situations and how the brain mechanisms differ. We must not dwell too much on one single way of shape-forming through gestalt-theory.' (Wagemans, 2012)

So there's more to it.

Cracks, noises, a whole range of possibilities, a demonic démarche of technological innovation, intertwined psychological reflections, etc..

I see this as a new renaissance in imagery, not a rebirth per se, but more the blossoming nursery of an innovative, dimensional fabric of an idea in which we also arrive at new mental views.

Other partners include: Prof Frank Vanreeth & Prof Philippe Bekaert EDM (expertise centre for digital media, University of Hasselt).

The Expertise centre for Digital Media (EDM) is the ICT research institute of Hasselt University. Their research focuses on two core competences: 'Visual Computing' and 'Human-Computer Interaction'. EDM's key objective is to be a leading research institute in human-computer interaction, computer graphics, multimedia, computer vision and virtual environments.

2.1.2. Talking with images

In the new image experiment on the internet: 'talking with images', people are challenged to react to each other's images with a new one. I would like to find out how people communicate using only images. It emerged from the initial experiment

with master's degree student Joren Peters that image communication is a progressive creation process occurring in several associations between the different participants in the experiment.

First test case via master's project: www.beeldgesprek.com

Partners: masterstudent EDM (expertise centre for digital media University of Hasselt).

2.1.3. Repositions

'Repositions' is the project in which I try to express or interpret the matrix from photographs I made myself. These moments nurture the fact that the observer is offered several possibilities including the use of glass and her reflections for example. Rearrangement of the moment by adding an external expressive element: shadows/bright spots above the printed image with images of shadows, rips and folds that influence the image in question...

This is more about expressive contamination. In the language of imagery this combination of two existing forms can lead to a new image manifestation, with correspondences in meanings and functions. The new entity generates new possibilities in the approach to images; the observer will reinterpret even more.

Partners: other artists and master's students involved in the research.

2.2. 'The daily opera'

In my own individual artistic work and research, I -as a captor of impressions and as an archivist of memories-, often start out from the images that I gather around me (photographs, 8 mm films, slides, etc.).

Many of these treasured keepsakes are confined to our cakeboxes and risk to become lost relics of a pre-digital era.

But there is more.

Their historical importance as holders of memories for the protagonists in the picture will, in time, be replaced by interpretations of strangers to these pictures 'inventing' new stories.

Daily life takes its own path without any historical awareness.

I am attempting to reverse this, from this multiple body of thought that old pictures enclose attempt to change a fundamental doubt about the original image into a new opportunity to approach reality.

According to Dr Tom Lambeens 'I present the representation', because the representation after all accommodates images, portrayals, depictions, ideas, impressions, descriptions, figures, resemblances, etc., in a constant symbiotic togetherness.

2.2.1. New forces and links that are active in an image from the matrix

In my work I look for demonstrative links between parts of the image.

In search for an expressive equality of terms such as undercurrent, commutation, transition, intermediate space, impression, sensation, etc., as representatives of the indirect.

Different sections of an image appear through artistic interventions as repetition, half-tone printing, duplication, polishing, allowing cracking, manipulating time dimensions, extending boundary lines, etc.. They appear to be impulse techniques that purposely head for several associative tracks.

The active forces in an image offset each other or bring extra movement into being. The merging of different movements, links and qualities, etc., creates new environments and correlations that go further than the initial expectations. This phenomenon pervades my imagery .

Joannes Késenne after many conversations about my work stated:

'This artist wants to preserve the brief experience of a moment in the memory of an image. How is this interpreted? Something like the ocular spectrum of a ship on our retina, the ship that was lying at anchor just now and has dissolved into a mist without horizon. But above all: the metamorphoses that the ship undergoes in our mind. The distorted knife-thrusts planted by our minds into the back of our first impression is what the art of Patrick Ceysens is all about. After all, everything is always completely different in reality'. (Joannes Késenne 2012)

In a lot of literature the image is too often described as 'illustrating something', the inability to break loose from the language of the imagery of things. My opinion in this research is that, as with the evolution of words, which today are considered increasingly abstractly, we are going through a similar upheaval. Just as with the different descriptions and turns of phrase that are often difficult to represent, certain 'intermediate areas' in between things can also sometimes unlock certain descriptions.

2.2.2. From image maker to visual thinker - or vice-versa

Despite the stratification and the apparent pressure in images, I often attempt therefore to bring a feeling of inertia to my work, a remaking of the snapshot - a pause needed to sharpen up thoughts: A state of mind ? However, that pause only arises after a long, sleepy quest between the layers. They can only bear a proper relationship, a balanced narrative. The impressions and perceptions are quietly piled up, mixed and are spewed out again after a period of time. This is why sometimes I am not active as a creative artist for months on end, but I am always a thinking artist - like a collector of information about the image.

'Nonetheless it is the little things that we take from our observations that are decisive. Collecting images from the past is impossible: how can you ever touch that past reality? The reconstruction made to replace the original is but a vain ambition. It will not be possible to understand things. Actually quite the opposite: they will become more enigmatic. The way in which various things merge in the mood of the moment, that very ambiguity, is precisely what the artist can bring to light. The reality of that moment can never be regained a second time. It is not the rebirth of anything, either.

Far from it: new spaces arise visually. Like the Renaissance artists integrated vistas into the landscape context of a scene.'

(Joannes Késenne 2012)

That's why I love to see the matrix as 'Renaissance 2.0 stimulator', as a tool to understand new image-areas and contact with other forces within an image.

'Because any image doubts what it is and what it wants to be.'

Patrick Ceysens

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