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Performing the Archive: Following in the Footsteps

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This is for the performer, the spectators, and for those who, like me, were not there, but wish they had been.

Assemblages -- performance and document -- are inevitably partial.

Rooted in uncertainty, they all require acts of interpretation. And there is no end to what can be said about them, to how they might be interpreted... There is never a complete and definitive picture.

(Pearson and Shanks 2001: 56)

In 2001 a call for proposals for a conference on Landscapes catches my attention, makes some piece fall -- not into place -- but into my horizon. I wonder about performance, autobiography and landscape. It was there (or somewhere close by) that I began to think of the practice I term autotopography.

The aim, whether it is recognized or not, is to construct something new out of old, to connect what may appear dissimilar in order to achieve new insights and understanding. This emergence of new meaning depends on the perception of instability, of retaining energies of interruption and disruption – the quotation interrupts the smooth surface or text; it is distracting.

(Pearson and Shanks 2001: 51)

This writing, here and now, is not concerned with autotopography, but I hope that it will help me get there in the future, or at least nearer.

Some (short) time before the Landscapes conference, I happen across the documentation of Mike Pearson's Bubbling Tom, in Small Acts: Performance, the Millennium and the Marking of Time.

Bubbling Tom is in the form of a leisurely stroll around the village, pausing at ten key points to remember significant events and people in a sequence of performed texts and informal chat... The following documentation includes some images and fragments of the text for each station. But there is no attempt at completeness here. The document is as fragmentary and partial as the memories which inspired the work, and the memories of the performance work itself, after a couple of days have passed.

(Pearson 2000: 176)

Small Acts. I am positive I have never heard of the project prior to buying the text of its documentation. I think again, think back, and as I sit here typing I see in my mind an advert somewhere inviting artists to submit proposals for a Millennium project. I should have kept my eyes wider open, my ears closer to the ground. It passed me by. (Can I catch up with it?)

For Bubbling Tom, Pearson returned to the village of his childhood, Hibaldstow, in Lincolnshire in the North-East of England, to become a 'guide'. There is another red

day in this year's calendar, more personal for Pearson than some generalized, capitalized Millennium. In the year 2000, he is also 50. Pearson has performed in many sites, but he has never performed 'at home'. This will be the first time that his 'Mam', who lives in the village, witnesses what it is that he does. And what he does here, in Hibaldstow, on the 24th and 25th of April 2000, is revisit childhood haunts, recite childhood memories, replay childhood events, blowing the past into the present and taking his fellow travellers along with him in order that they too might revisit, remember, replay.

Pete: In fact, up till a short time ago, I thought Mike was into archaeology or something.

Dee: He did do a degree in archaeology, yeah.

Pete: Right, and I thought he was still doing that, and then somebody said he was doing these performances.

(Peter Gilbert, interview 2002)

I very much want to think about Bubbling Tom in relation to my concept of autotopography. **But I was not there.**

I was not there, and yet I love this performance.

I was not there, can I write about this performance?

Is it only legitimate to write about that which one has personally witnessed?

(Given the 'Shakespeare industry', surely not?)

I was not there, but can I think myself into this performance, and produce my own version of it, my own 'As if (I was there)'?

Can I become a spectator after the event?

How to see and write the 'unseen'?

At a symposium recently,¹ a commentator admitted that 90 percent of the work he taught he had never seen. I nodded. Later, another commentator suggested that we should stop writing about performances we haven't seen. I shrank. At the same symposium, I also heard, twice:

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance.

(Phelan 1993: 146)

Surely this is not all that can be said?! Isn't this only where the conversation begins? I wonder whether it can't be 'some(thing) other (than) performance'.

The object of documentation then is to devise models for the recontextualization of performance as text and as second-order performance, as a creative process in the present and not as a speculation of past meaning or intention

(Pearson and Shanks: 59)

Pearson's documentation of Bubbling Tom is not, cannot be, the live performance; although it may constitute another (textual) performance. I have not seen Bubbling Tom, but I have 'seen' its documentation. If I take this documentation, this other

performance, and 'write' about it, then perhaps this 'writing' is itself another document/performance. And these documenting/performing activities will themselves contribute to the archive of various performances, each going by the name Bubbling Tom. The process might go something like this:

- Pearson assembles a performance from fragments, stories, anecdotes, memories...
- His documentation of this performance is then itself assembled from various moments and processes connected to the performance, but it is not, nor does it attempt to be, that performance. It is something else, complete with its own creative process.
- I, the 'virtual spectator', then engage with that second performance of Bubbling Tom, interpreting Pearson's assembled document through my own creative-interpretive process. This creative-interpretive process is active and is perhaps even another performance, a third-level Bubbling Tom, if you will.
- This in itself requires some form of documentation, but it is not that creative-interpretive act. The documentation of that creative-interpretive process is yet another (textual) performance, complete with its own creative process...

There is no one way to undertake this creative act of 'interpretation', but, given that Pearson works on many levels with the 'archaeological', that might not be an inappropriate performance/documentational mode with which to recontextualize Bubbling Tom.

There are and were only ever assemblages of practices, experiences,

retellings, memories, perceptions.

(Pearson and Shanks 2001: 59)

This documentation/performance of mine requires a few plans.

An application of forensic science and police procedure might be instructive to us ...

(2001: 59-60).

Composing The Archive: Where *Bubbling Tom* leads to ...

1. People: I was not there, but others were (and some still are).

Activity: Interview spectators of the event.

(a) Go to Hibaldstow and meet spectators who are from the village.

I know you will, but please do remember that these are older citizens who may or may not remember anything...

(Mike Pearson, email communication 18 March 2002)

(b) Interview spectators not from the village.

Some of it is very much forgotten. I mean my memory of it, I have particular images. ...

One tends to hold onto image sequences, and I have particular kinds of image sequences rather than exchanges. There's a couple of guys there whose faces I remember very clearly.

(Adrian Heathfield, interview 2002)

And from all types of watchers -- first-timers, aficionados, critics -- springs description, opinion, personal interpretation.

(Pearson and Shanks 2001: 57).

(c) Interview the performer.

From the watched comes the folklore of practice, coloured by aspiration, intention and rationalisation, preserved in memory as anecdote and analect and revealed in discussion and interview and in personal archive as diary and notebook.

(2001: 57).

Maybe this was the arrogance of it, maybe I thought I knew all the stories, or I didn't expect that somebody would go elsewhere.

(Mike Pearson, interview 2001)

2. Site: I was not there, but the site was (and still is).

Activity: Inhabit the site. In site-specific work, surely the site itself is a document which can be (re)turned to?

(a) Mark out Pearson's grid references on an OS map, and place 10 crosses on where I think the sites are. Find my/his route -- 10 locations -- through the 5-year-old boy's landscape of Hibaldstow. As Pearson stepped into his 5-year-old boy's shoes, so will I step into Pearson's 50-year-old shoes stepping into his 5-year-old boy's shoes.

(b) See how far off I was by asking some of the spectators to later guide me around Pearson's guided tour. Walk the walk three times.

I know you will, but please do remember that these are older citizens ... who may be a bit slow in the walking.

(Mike Pearson, email communication 2002)

(c) The site is a palimpsest. Note -- touch, feel -- any marks in it that are witnessed by the performance. The performance and the landscape are both testimony to one another's presence, and traces of each inhere in the other.

3. Stories: I was not there, but the words were, and having been spoken, they leave (regenerative) traces.

Activity: Hear some stories. Stories, and their ways of being told, speak people, places and events.

(a) Ask Pearson's travellers to recite Pearson's stories. This activity will not only document what was spoken, but will also document the process of forgetting, a testimony to the transitory nature of performance.

(b) Record personal stories that these people might also tell, in response to their own being in this place/space, or to Pearson's stories.

(c) Think myself back into my own square mile -- 'y filltir sgwar ... the landscape of our earliest years' (Pearson 2001: 181) -- and speak my own remembered experiences, by way of comparison.

What such work so often elicits is other stories, and stories about stories. It catalyses personal reflection and the desire on the part of the listener to reveal her own experiences. It works with memory: raking up old ones, stimulating new ones.

(Pearson and Shanks 2001: 159)

4. Artefacts: I was not there, but there are things I can hold in my hands.

Activity: Find what is already there. These traces are documents.

(a) Read anything already written about Bubbling Tom.

(b) Study photograph, maps, etc. Use these to locate myself in Pearson's place. Avoid the video 'document', as it may kill the imagination.

Orientation. Photographs, plans and initial observations are collated in scene-of-crime books which allow successive investigators to orientate themselves at site and to 'relive' events.

(Pearson and Shanks 2001: 60)

5. Imagination: I was not there, but I can imagine I was.

Activity: Imagine yourself as

(a) Pearson, aged 50, returning to his childhood village.

(b) Dee Heddon, aged 50, returning to her childhood village.

(c) someone who lives in Hibaldstow, and who witnessed this event.

(d) someone who saw this event 2 years ago and is now being asked to remember and recite it. Pearson walked “as if” in the couple of years either side of 1955’ (Pearson 2001: 175). I too will walk the walk of “as if”... Imagination conjures the performance/document.

This is a creative process of speculative modelling which demands no hierarchy between empirical attention, analysis and leaps of the imagination ...

(Pearson and Shanks 2001: 60)

The Archive

Where Bubbling Tom leads to ... Babbling Tom

Encounters, movements, episodes, passings. All preserved as analect and anecdote, description and incoherent babbling, as a chorus of conflicting voices, as a way of telling.

(Pearson and Shanks, 2001: 55).

What follows is my way of telling Bubbling Tom (a performance I have never seen but have variously experienced). Performing/documenting with me in Hibaldstow on 6 April 2002, almost 2 years precisely since Pearson’s performance of Bubbling Tom, are Rachel Jury (my partner), Mrs Sheila Pearson (Pearson’s mam), Peter

Gilbert (Pearson's dad's cousin), *Sheila Gilbert (Pearson's dad's cousin-in-law)*, Pearson's trace (taken from Small Acts), Adrian Heathfield (interviewed 18 March 2002, London), Hugo Glendinning, by way of his photographs taken at Pearson's performance, and numerous people I have met in the flesh of stories but never in the flesh.

People, Sites, Stories, Artefacts, Imagination:

1 Top Corner SE 97760251 We had no idea what it was going to be.

It's 1953 and I'm squatting... here.

It's 1953 and he's/I'm squatting...

I seem... happy.

here. He/I seem ... happy.

The first cross that I've placed on the map locates me outside of the fish and chip shop. In this moment, this spot is the centre of my world: 6 feet from the step into granddad's fish-and-chip shop. It would seem that my first cross has hit the right spot. I am encouraged. It's difficult for Rachel to take this photo, as there are so many cars on the road. But he'll be alright, out there. He'll hear anything coming -- grinding gears, blowing exhaust -- long before he sees it. Well, it started at the fish-shop corner. He sat down on the footpath, to watch the traffic go by ... When he was talking about the traffic, he said you may see a lorry, and then not see one for such a long time, because there wasn't the traffic around. I can remember granddad Rogers. He used to be in the fish shop, he used to be chopping chips. He used to be a chip

chopper. Do you know the people who own the chip-shop now? No, they're Spanish...

2 Hibaldstow County School SE 97770246 Quite a few of his reminiscences were mine.

It's 1955 and we're all present, against this wall, some smiling, some a little apprehensive, not knowing quite how we're supposed to look. There I am top centre.

What you can't see is the playground, stretching out there...and across there, the dreaded toilets...

On the map, I marked the wrong wall, remembering my own wall. The two women who bought the school offer Rachel and me a guided tour. I imagine my small desk, the egg-timer round Miss Riddle's neck, Hiawatha films, tales of Tarantulas...

There were about six toilets in a line. Freezing cold. He said he held it in until lunchtime. There was the boys' urinal, and the girls' toilet, all in the one block. I mean, ok, you were only kids but it was damned embarrassing, because the girls would stand there, and look round the corner, and giggle. Three of us were away from school on the same day, and the headmaster said that we should have been in school. And I said, 'I was at home with a migraine. I don't know about the other two.' And he said, 'No you weren't. You've all taken the day off.' So we got the cane. The tingling sensation from the belt made me laugh out loud, and I got the belt again. There was very acute recognition from people of very particular references ... You

don't have access to those things, but what you have access to is your sense in which they might be like some of your own things ... Tommy Hancock... He was also a very big Labour man ... and at three o'clock in the afternoon, after we'd pushed his car for him, he would disappear to Scunthorpe to the co-op. *There was another dragon. Scevy. Evelyn Coulson. Scevy Coulson... With Scevy it was the edge of a ruler.* There was an orchard there, where we used to pinch the apples. About 10 minutes to 9, you'd get foggy bell, the first bell, and then about 5 minutes to 9, you'd get seggy bell. The one thing you didn't want to do was wee down your legs 'cos by, it chapped you in winter: blue knees, red thighs... We lived in the white cottage, that's 300 years old, and that's where I used to look out of the window, over to the school, and Mike was always upset. He never wanted to go to school.

3 East Street SE 97991257 There's a bungalow on it now.

It's 1953 again and I'm on the move.	Aged 8, dragged from bed to
We're whizzing down East Street and	watch the Capercaillies dance
I'm clinging onto Dad's handlebars ...	their mating dance, at 4am.

He said that I washed his mouth out with soap. So that he would speak clean? I don't think he would swear. I did hear him swear once, and I said, 'Where have you heard that?' and he said, 'Oh, Michael always says it', and I said, 'Well, don't you say it', and I never heard it again. Now this was the house I was born in. I remember when we got to this place, Mike saying about his granddad

liking a pint or two, and I think he was known for a little bet on the gee-gees as well. He was saying about his granddad taking him down into a field, birdwatching. *It broke my heart when I saw what they'd done to it round there... My childhood's gone from there, and I feel sad about that.* That was another farm, where we used to take our jug and get a jug full of milk. *As we were moving from point A to point B, we sort of gathered in little groups as we moved along, and this is when we were doing all the reminiscing.* I think that started him birdwatching.

4 Churchyard SE 97980261 The Rogers are buried somewhere just over here.

At a guess it's 1954 and everyone	We spend a long time looking
turned out to cut the churchyard.	for the wall with the arch,
	but never find it.

He said about being in the choir, and there were two ladies, and they were both named Daisy. And they said he was out of key. That he couldn't sing for nuts. Anyway, he sang and it was perfect. There's a story behind this. They decided to rebuild the nave ... so they took it down to rebuild it, and the tower they shored up ... Unfortunately, the shoring gave way, and they let the tower drop. ... We didn't get another tower till 1958. ... See the arch in the photograph. They left the arch ready for the rebuilding of the new tower. Ah, there's the arch, behind the rebuilt tower. No wonder we couldn't find it. And these things I remember here...

5 'Tin Tab' SE 97880257 I thought the village wasn't so bad after all.

It's a beef pie supper in the 'Tin Tab'. I was expecting a corrugated iron
hall.

What does tab stand for? *Tabernacle*. Oh, I thought it was some Lincolnshire word for 'Hall'. We refer to it as tin tab, although there was one particular vicar who would not let you say such a thing. It was a church hall, and that was it. *But it was still the tin tab to us*. Tin tab, even though it's made of brick. Did you have dances in there? Dances, youth clubs, you name it, it was in there. It was the hub of the village, really, and still is to a certain extent. Beetle drives, a six for a wing, the school nativity, prize givings, my mum running a badminton club. Margaret and John Shaw, Jill Shadlock, Val Raspin, Roger Wilk, Karl, me brother... and the Mrs Harpham, Chudley, Havercroft, Miller, Balchin and Nurse Harrison, who'd delivered half the village.

6 Beckside SE 97980247 Other people's stories started to fill the performance itself.

The landscape of our earliest years...	Walking around 'as' Mike, I am struck
Where to catch sticklebacks ... or	by how much the river, the 'Beck',
stone loaches camouflaged against	is central to this childhood landscape.
the limey bottom of the stream.	The loch was perhaps the centre of mine.

It used to be an old stone bridge. And we used to crawl through there, and out the other side. And a friend was coming through, underneath with me, and she lost her shoe, and she never got it back. That's where Mike was doing his paddle. It surprised us, because we went round one way, and he must have shot round the other way, and we didn't even know he'd got his welly boots, did we? And by the time we got there, there he was, splashing about in the water. It was lovely. We all stood and laughed, didn't we? Being Mike, I've had my wellies on from the start, which is wrong. Inferring too much from a documentational photo. That'll teach me. Sticklebacks in a nylon net from Mrs Massey's were easy enough. Funny how she had them in, them and marbles, just on the day we needed them.

7 Pottage's Beck SE 97790266 Those places have a certain kind of power for you.

The square mile is a place of play,	I have no idea where Mike stood. I don't
imagination, experiment... finding the	know whether this is even the right
best place for doing things... creating	place. It's now an inbetween space. I am
worlds under our own control...	sure if Mike were here he'd sit in
fantasy landscapes... secret places	this tyre. We used to use the inner tubes
...	from these as rubber rings. Brilliant.

We'll go this way then. This is the way Mike came. Not only did we play in the Beck, we did most of our courting there. *It's altered considerably down there now. There used to be a carrot-washing shed ... and*

there were lots of trees around, it was quite a nice little area. He stopped here, because the old bridge was along here, and now it's been pulled down. ... The old one was still there when Mike came. Just opposite where we lived, there was a quarry. ... This was the place where we went to make our dens. It was probably 30 foot deep it was. And then in the winter it used to flood. People threw all sorts of rubbish in it, and I remember we got a bedstead, and several drums, and tied the drums to the bedstead, and made this raft. We went out on the water with it, and I couldn't even swim. There was a cottage, just ruins, near Manchester House, and we used to play there. There was a kind of big, semi-derelict field at the back of our garden and there was an old air-raid shelter in it, and we used to go in there. Igloos of bracken and later the ticks sucking our blood, like vampires. Secret places where we can struggle to the North Pole, climb the mountains of Wales, dance a Navaho dance on a wet afternoon...

8 Roadbeck SE 97650264 *As many as you could carry, like this.*

...here lorries cornered, lurched,	On my own tour, I point to the wrong
wobbled and spilled their bounty.	field. Only later will I learn that the
... In this field, Franklin's Fair made	field is now the site of new houses.
its annual visit.	

My dad had a shop and the bananas used to come in a banana box ... and his friend and he took one of these boxes and tried to put it in the beck, and they said it would make a good submarine. The railings on this side have altered ... On that

side, they're still original. There is a sense of the sensory relationship to place ... It's really quite shocking to have your sensory relationship to the environment repointed in that way. He did remember a lorry tipping its load at this corner, and it was a lorry of oranges, so we all got oranges.

9 Manchester House SE 97760254 Would you mind if I stood outside your house and took some photos?

We know them all: Hopalong Cassidy; the Cisco Kid and Pancho; the Lone Ranger and Tonto ...Here I learned all the languages of play: Exaggeration and irrelevance, fiction and lying.	A man is building a new wall, so the 'horse' that Mike rode has gone. I remember only being allowed to watch nature programmes on tv. And Dr Who. Maybe I exaggerate. I'd have known how to be a Dalek, though. Exterminate!
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He told a story of how they played Cowboys and Indians. And he had a toy gun ... And the police were following us round. We didn't realize we shouldn't have a gun, whether it's a toy or not. I didn't realize either. I remember him pulling his gun out. I try to explain to the man who now lives at Manchester House what it is that I am doing.

10 'Bubbling Tom' SE 97390258 *Well, I haven't heard that one.*

It's 1958 and it's here that I learned to tell the difference ...	We think we've found the spring called Bubbling Tom. But we're just slightly
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off the mark. Or are we?

Coming back from what we think is Bubbling Tom, we meet four young, local boys. One of them, out of the blue, asks if we've heard of Bubbling Tom, and whether we know why it's called that.

A: 'Cos someone called Tom drowned there, because there was all these bubbles when he drowned.

Dee: When did he drown in it? Do you know when that was?

A: I don't know.

Dee: A long time ago?

A: A very long time ago.

Dee: So who told you that story? How did you find that out?

A: My mum told me.

Dee: Your mum told you. Who do you think told her?

A: I think it was my mum's grandma.

And some people seem everywhere here, women in particular... Grandma Pearson ... Nana Shaw ... Me mam. My grandfather was born in the Falklands. ... When my great great great granddad went out, he dressed his wife up as a boy, because she wasn't allowed to go. He was in the army, and he wasn't allowed to take his wife, so she went dressed as a boy to get over. One of the boys also tells us that there's three Bubbling Toms. There's still a lot of controversy over it though, Bubbling Tom. I think you're going to be disappointed. With what? With Bubbling Tom. Is it going to Bubble? That's

Bubbling Tom. Oh, that's Bubbling Tom. What we think is the real Bubbling Tom is on private land, the other side of Grange Farm... I mean, you can actually see it gushing out of the ground. It's said, if you drank the water from there, you would always come back to Hibaldstow. To be quite honest, I went up there yesterday with my granddaughter, and I couldn't see anything bubbling at all, I couldn't see a spring. I've never seen a spring there. *Well, when we went that time with Mike, there was just a little movement, but not a bubble as such.* And it's not been settled yet? No, and it never will be, I don't think. *Everyone started to say, this is it, this isn't it; that's how it ended. Nobody got to the end of the story.* It strikes me as fantastically ironic that a performance drawing very much on local knowledge ends with that knowledge being the site of contest. Why is it called Tom, though?

Going Through The Archive

I did not see Bubbling Tom. I was not there then. But having been somewhere since, I now do have a feel of (some) Bubbling Tom, of its texture, of where it went to and where it came from, of its history and people, of its affect and its purpose. Of course, this Bubbling Tom that I experienced is perhaps far removed from Pearson's Bubbling Tom, but is that not so for all spectators?²

In the place of this performance, and in its place, I had various guides to take me on Pearson's guided walk – including myself. Whilst Pearson was not physically there, he arguably was still there, as a trace, as a ghost guide, with these other guides tracing

his various traces, as well as the traces of their own ghosts, and others from Hibaldstow's past.

As might be expected in a site-specific performance, the anchor for these guides, at all times, was not so much what Pearson said, but where Pearson said it. First come the places: the grid references, the crosses, the photographs, the landmarks, the bends in the road, the bridge, the beck, then he came here. And only then, from these places, the actions that unfolded within them. The space speaks Pearson, just as Pearson had perhaps previously spoken the place. But space is not owned and so, paradoxically in a site-specific performance, it also speaks others, speaks differently, and is spoken otherwise. It is never only Pearson's actions, memories, events, that are recited. There are always more. Pearson's guided tour was remembered, written over, added to, forgotten, extended, transformed, recontextualized, reinvented, as space and place were shared, contested, and, for the 'outsider', borrowed. The square mile of his Hibaldstow is transposed with my own square mile of Kilchrenan. And yet, perhaps surprisingly, given the geographical and temporal distance, the weaves of our square miles often seem distinctly related. Whilst the differences in time and place cannot be ignored, neither can those moments of recognitions, overlaps, reverberations, shared sensoria. As Pearson discovered, our interactions with place (alongside our various experiences of childhood) are often not as individual as we might imagine. He did this here. I did this here. This reminds me of what I did there. We did that too. I did nothing like that, but I did do this instead... (Or perhaps it is the activity and effects of nostalgia that we share.)

Whilst Pearson's Bubbling Tom was a temporal, live performance, its passing does not mean that it is gone, that it is over and done with, that it is not still alive. For in its (literal and metaphorical) place remain deep pulsating resonances, heart beats, which

are not difficult to hear. This time I have got my ears firmly pressed to the ground and nothing is passing me by.

These places continue not only to commemorate but also to animate. We work them so that their silencing is not forgetting and their disappearance is not amnesia. Memory preserved, over generations.

(Pearson and Shanks 2001: 159)

So I was there, although where there was remains a site for creative interpretation.³

NOTES

¹ Marked, Arnolfini, Bristol 2002. The symposium was recorded by the Live Arts Development Agency, London.

² In a performance which, through its very mode, encourages personal reflection, this might be even more so. Participating/spectating at Pearson's Bubbling Tom were his schoolteacher, his mum, and his childhood friends, all of whom were also directly addressed within the stories recited. Their different relationships and histories with the performer, the place, and the stories surely render varied the experience.

³ Of course, I can never be from there, and as such I experience the 'tension between what [I] know, what [I] can find out, and what [I] can never know' (Pearson and Shanks 2001: 146).

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