

**Outlander Theatre Project:
Creating a Non-Profit Theatre Based on Presenting Politically, Socially,
and Culturally Diverse Stories**

Cameron Vance

Introduction

When devising the Outlander Theatre Project, my original goal was, “to create a non-profit theatre company focused on presenting plays/musicals/other theatrical works that politically, socially, and culturally push boundaries and present new/relevant ideas and stories to the people of Fort Worth.” I wanted to focus my efforts on this idea of creating a non-profit theatre company based on presenting diverse stories in the Fort Worth area because I had noticed the severe lack of representation throughout the theatres in the community. This goal came after the recent death of George Floyd and increased focus on the Black Lives Matter movement, and in turn the focus on the lack of representation and diversity in the theatre community not only in New York City, but here in Fort Worth, Texas. This goal also came after the American Theatre organization created a list available to the U.S. theatre community of all theatres, from Broadway to non-profit, around the country who had chosen not to make a statement supporting the efforts of inclusivity and diversity in theatre during the BLM movement* (available in the “works cited” section). Unfortunately, many theatres in the Dallas/Fort Worth area found themselves on this list as they had neglected to share their support for the diverse actors, administrators, and creative teams that worked for them and were so integral to creating theatre.

After witnessing the lack of a commitment to diversity and inclusivity prevalent in the theatres of Fort Worth, I wanted to focus my efforts on creating a non-profit theatre company that was dedicated to telling the wide range of diverse stories from diverse playwrights and perspectives that are often neglected in the Fort Worth area. As a BFA

Theatre major (emphasis in Acting) with a Business minor, my original plan was to create a feasibility study for Outlander Theatre Company in which I would investigate whether the theatre I was proposing was a viable option for the Fort Worth market. This included analyzing who the audience would be, what the financials would look like, and even what types of shows would be performed at the theatre. However, after meeting with my faculty advisor, Krista Scott, we wanted to find a way to create a tangible product, rather than simply a concept. Quickly we decided the only way to figure out if Outlander Theatre Company would be a viable theatre in the Fort Worth area was to produce an actual production. Therefore, I was going to serve as the artistic director and producer for this theatre and fulfill our goal of staging a reading of a production for the Fort Worth community. However, before we began the process of staging a production, I felt it was necessary to meet with other established non-profit theatre companies to obtain a more complete view of diversity in theatre.

INTERVIEWS

Kathleen Culebro - Amphibian Stage, Fort Worth, TX

The first interview I had conducted was with Kathleen Culebro, who currently serves as the Executive Artistic Director at Amphibian Stage in Fort Worth, TX. I reached out to Mrs. Culebro due to Amphibian Stage's commitment to producing diverse theatre in the Fort Worth area, as well as Mrs. Culebro had started the theatre here at TCU, with a similar origin to Outlander Theatre Company. Mrs. Culebro began the conversation with a focus

on building an audience for a new theatre. She said that theatres build their audiences through “quality” and “reputation.” She then went on to explain that Amphibian Stage was able to build their audience by solidifying a reputation of creating quality, thought-provoking theatre that created positive change in the community. Once the community understands the mission of the theatre and their dedication to creating positive social change, the audience will begin to form.

Mrs. Culebro then went on to directly address the present issue of diversity in the theatre community and stated, “to move forward with diversity in theatre, we must learn from our mistakes and understand our privilege.” This idea of being aware and knowledgeable of the privilege I had in this process, as a white male, was incredibly important when making decisions for the theatre moving forward. She then explained that as a newly forming theatre, it was imperative that diversity was at the foundation of the theatre, with diversity coming from building a team of diverse artists and creators for the theatre. She explained that it is potentially possible to build this diverse team later in the theatre's life, but it is much more difficult to establish retroactively; and often theatres will neglect this important issue of hiring diverse artists to tell their stories. Therefore, it was my commitment to begin Outlander Theatre Company with a foundation of diverse artists guiding the decisions of the theatre.

Finally, Mrs. Culebro stated that it was important for our theatre company to “embrace risky materials, push the boundaries, and use theatre for change.” Although every theatre company in the world can put on a production of *Mamma Mia!* to great

financial success, the show itself will not expand the worldview of the audience and would not produce a substantially positive impact on the Fort Worth community. Therefore, it was the mission for the first production of Outlander Theatre Company to push the boundaries of what theatre could look like in Fort Worth and create a positive change in the mindset of the audience who views the production.

Serge Seiden - Mosaic Theatre Company, Washington, D.C.

The second interview I conducted was with Serge Seiden, who currently serves as the Managing Director and Producer for the Mosaic Theatre Company in Washington, D.C. While talking to Mr. Seiden, we primarily focused our conversation on the distinction between diversity, equity, inclusion, and access, with significant attention on inclusion and access. He defined “inclusion” and “access” through their relation to the idea of “power equity.” Mr. Seiden stated that “power equity” is allowing for shared power between every artist in the theatre. Although there may be diverse actors, creative teams, and administration in the theatre, often they are not being given the ability to make decisions in the same way as their white male counterparts. He went on to explain that although there may be diversity in the production, “inclusion” and “access” are only possible when, “diversity is at the table making decisions.” Therefore, there must be a focus, not only for Outlander Theatre Company, but for every theatre around the nation to put a focus on “power equity” and allowing every artist in the production to have the ability to make decisions and have their voice heard.

PROCESS

Pipeline- Dominique Morisseau

After concluding the interviews with Kathleen Culebro and Serge Seiden, Outlander Theatre Project was committed to creating a foundation of diverse artists, creating challenging and thought-provoking theatre, and putting a focus on the idea of “power equity.” At this point in the process, Ashley Parks had committed to directing the first production of Outlander Theatre Company. Ashley Parks is a Bachelor of Arts Theatre Major at Texas Christian University and a trusted leader in the department, a Gauthier Apprentice, the TCU English Senior Scholar, as well as the co-director for *For Bo*, also being produced through Theatre TCU. After multiple conversations with Ashley and my faculty advisory team, we decided that the first production of Outlander Theatre Company was to be a staged reading of *Pipeline* by acclaimed playwright, Dominique Morisseau. *Pipeline* tells the story of an inner-city public high school teacher, Nya, who is dedicated to giving her son, Omar, the opportunities that she was never given. However, after a controversial incident at his upstate private school, Nya has to confront issues of race, systemic oppression, and privilege in the American educational system.

With a challenging subject matter and direct correlation to the high school and college education system in the U.S., we believed staging a reading of *Pipeline* would be an incredible inaugural production for Outlander Theatre Company. The production was also

composed of a small cast, with only two to three actors on stage at a given time, allowing for the reading to comply with Covid-19 protocols in place during the time of the performance. *Pipeline* also allowed for environmental staging of the production, as the setting of the play was in a classroom. Therefore, we were originally planning on staging the reading in a lecture hall in the Sid Richardson building on the campus of TCU. This allowed for minimal set pieces and a more immersive and intimate experience of *Pipeline* for the audience.

However, on January 5th, 2021, Concord Theatricals, who holds the producing rights to the play, reached out stating that, “due to restrictions on this title,” they were not able to grant Outlander Theatre Company the rights to produce a reading. This came after a recent announcement that some of Dominique Morriseau’s work was set to transfer to Broadway in the near future, restricting the rights to many of her plays. Sadly, this denial had come months after the original application was submitted to produce the reading, forcing Outlander Theatre Company to look for and license a new production with a reduced time frame. This meant that Ashley and I had to work quickly to find a new production with a story relevant to our community, allowed for Covid-19 restrictions, and could be done in the time frame available. Ashley and I worked together to find a title that would speak to the present moment while honoring our mission and quickly we found a production that met and exceeded the goals we had set out for the first production of Outlander Theatre Company.

***Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* - Anna Deavere Smith**

Twilight: Los Angeles 1992, written by Anna Deavere Smith, is a work of “documentary theatre” in which Smith uses verbatim interviews of those people who experienced the Los Angeles riots to explore the devastating impact of the event. The play unapologetically examines the lives and thoughts of its subjects to offer insight into the social, political, and economic issues that arose during the emergence of the Rodney King verdict. With its direct parallel to the George Floyd case and the events over the summer of 2020, we believed that Smith’s play would be incredibly powerful for audiences thirty years after the Rodney King trial, showing that we are still fighting for representation and justice for the BIPOC citizens of the U.S. *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* also proved to be a great choice for a reading with its small cast, originally produced by Anna Deavere Smith as a one woman show that uses monologues to convey the story. Monologues allowed for social distancing in a live venue and allowed us to follow the strict Covid-19 regulations we were navigating to produce the reading.

The monologues, based on real interviews of those surrounding and affected by the Rodney King trial, also required a diverse cast, including actors with diverse ethnicities, cultures, and political ideations. With our commitment to creating a foundation of diverse artists for Outlander Theatre Company, this production not only allowed for, but required diverse artists to take control of their narrative told in the play and gave them the opportunity to tell a powerful, poignant story.

After choosing *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* as the inaugural production of Outlander Theatre Company due to its relevant story, small cast size, and diverse casting requirements, Alejandro Saucedo joined the production as the assistant director and editor for the reading. After multiple conversations with Ashley and Alejandro, as well as multiple conversations with the actors themselves, we finalized our casting of the production and were positioned to move into rehearsals.

However, on January 29th, 2021, we made the difficult decision to move the reading of *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* from a live reading to a virtual reading due to the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions. Although we were dedicated to performing the reading live, the spaces available for the reading were very limited and would allow for minimal seating for the audience. When Mr. Seiden from Mosaic Theatre Company brought up accessibility of a performance, he also stated that the plays being produced must also be available and accessible to audiences to achieve a truly positive change in the community. However, with limited seating and performance restrictions due to Covid-19, we decided to make the reading a virtual reading to comply with Covid-19 guidelines, but also to ultimately allow more people to be able to witness the production. By moving the production online, we were also granted greater creative freedom on the production as physical spaces, sets, and space requirements were no longer an obstacle. Although a difficult decision, by moving the reading of *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* online, we were able to abide by Covid-19 safety protocols, provide greater accessibility to audience members, and exert a greater amount of creative control over the final production.

Rehearsals

Rehearsals were the most stream-lined part of the production process. We conducted the rehearsal process over a five-week period every Sunday on Zoom. We used these rehearsals to work with each individual actor and their specific monologues, with each of the six actors performing between eight and twelve monologues each. These rehearsals were primarily utilized to solidify the blocking, how the actors move and interact with one another, of each of the monologues and create a flow between the monologues to tell the overall story. With fifty-nine monologues comprising *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992*, it was important as a creative team to inform the actors of how each of the monologues connected to the one before and after. By introducing a firm rehearsal process, we were not only able to communicate the vision of the production to the actors, but we were able to modify and focus on the flow of the entirety of the production in its new virtual form.

Producing

During the rehearsal process, I was most accurately able to understand my role of Producer, whereby it was my responsibility to organize, communicate, and most importantly support. This included organizing the legal rights, production/streaming rights, resource requirements, as well as scheduling of rehearsals and meetings. From the communication side of producing, I was in charge of scheduling, coordination with the publisher, streaming service, and creative team, as well as advertising to audiences,

including social media posts, emails, and even posters* (can be found in the “media” section).

However, the most important duty as producer was that of support. This support went back to my interview with Mr. Seiden of the Mosaic Theatre Company and our discussion of “power equity.” I put a focus on the idea of allowing for shared power in the theatre, and in this process, it was my duty as producer to support and bolster the decisions of Ashley Parks and Alejandro Saucedo as the director and assistant director. I was not in charge of the production creatively, but rather it was my job to support the creative decisions of Ashley and Alejandro and make those decisions feasible.

A specific example of the importance of taking a support role as a producer came during the final week of the rehearsal process of *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992*. During this rehearsal, Ashley Parks was working with actress Alanna Stern on her monologue about political activist Gina Rae. During this rehearsal, Ashley Parks was looking for a specific emotion from Alanna and explained this emotion as similar to, as a Black woman in America, they walk down the street and a certain person may stare at them due to their skin color and gender, and they have to keep their head held high and walk past them with a silent power. Her depiction of this emotion made me realize in that moment the privilege I had as a white male, not only this process, but in society as a whole. This specific encounter is not something I have ever experienced or will ever experience. In this moment I realized the importance of not only having Ashley and Alejandro as diverse artists leading this

production, but also that it is my duty and responsibility to support the decisions and ideas they are making for the production.

This was the lesson of power equity that Mr. Seiden was expressing, that every person in the production, from the creative team to the actors, had specific lived experiences and relationships to the characters they were directing and portraying, and they needed the ability to make creative decisions for those characters and themselves. As the producer and artistic director of Outlander Theatre Company, it was my duty to invite every person working on *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* to have a spot at the table to make decisions and have their voices heard and supported in the production.

OBSTACLES

Legal Requirements

Although the rehearsal process was relatively smooth and streamlined, this did not mean that there were not many obstacles that we faced while mounting the production. The first of these obstacles being the mandated legal requirements of Outlander Theatre Company for this reading. Originally, we had to navigate Concord Theatricals' denial of the rights for a production of *Pipeline* by Dominique Morisseau, forcing us to choose a different play for the reading in a much-shortened time frame. With regards to moving our production of *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* to an online format, we were also required to obtain

subsequent streaming rights from the publisher granting us the ability to stream the reading. These streaming requirements forced us to change the dates of the performances and fill out extra tax documents. There were also limitations and requirements for streaming the production, including where we could and could not stream the production and what could and could not be included in the final recording.

Covid-19

Surprisingly the presence of Covid-19 on the production was a relatively minor obstacle. The only obstacle we ran into with Covid-19 was the unavailability of a physical space in which to produce the reading. This forced us to move our rehearsals and final performance to Zoom.

Despite the daunting task of creating theatre in an online setting amid a pandemic, we chose to see this obstacle as an opportunity that would allow us greater creative control over the final product. This enabled us to include videos, music, and certain virtual editing effects that were not available, nor feasible, to utilize in a live theatrical setting.

Actor Requirements

One of the primary aspects of the production of *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* that we put a large focus on were the requirements of the actors. In her original notes, Anna Deavere Smith recommends “colorblind” and “genderblind” casting of the actors. The reason for this “colorblind” and “genderblind” casting was to have the actors be able to “step into the

shoes” of a person different from them, whether that be politically, religiously, or even ethnically. However, for this specific production and the story we wanted to present, we did not think it was appropriate to cast actors in ethnicities that were not their own. The ethnicity of each of the characters is important to their story and how they viewed the Rodney King trial and we made a commitment to the ethnicity requirements of each of the characters. This meant that we were not going to produce this reading of *Twilight; Los Angeles 1992* unless the characters were cast using actors of the same ethnicity.

These actor requirements also included specific accents prevalent in the monologues, including Korean and Panamanian accents. There was a specific instance in which we had an open conversation with one of the actors before we cast them to find out what they were comfortable with and what they found appropriate for the characters and production. Ashley and I wanted to speak with this actor about the characters we were looking at them to portray, as this actor was Asian-American, and we realized that nobody on the creative team identified as Asian-American. Therefore, it was not our place to decide what was appropriate or not when it came to the characters they would portray, as well as the accents required of these characters. However, we were able to have an open conversation about the reading and the character requirements of the play, in which they were able to have a direct say in the creative direction of their monologues. It was extremely important in these moments to understand the different experiences we all have and the importance of listening and understanding the experiences of every person who worked on this production.

Technology

The final obstacle we ran into was technology. The most prevalent of these technological obstacles was a hardware malfunction that occurred during the uploading of the production to the streaming service. While the upload was in process, our editor's computer crashed, taking with it the entirety of our production. This was a major crisis as we were only able to stream the production at two specific times for audiences that had already ordered tickets. However, we were very fortunate to have created a backup of the recording of *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* and were able to stream each act on separate days, as the time available to us only allowed for us to upload a singular act per day. The moral of the story in regard to technology is to always have a backup.

PRODUCTION SAMPLE

Twilight: Los Angeles 1992

“War Zone”

Judith Tur

Ground Reporter - *LA News Service*

Performed by Arielle Roberts

[Click Here](#)

ANALYSIS

Building a Foundation

When looking back on the production, the primary focus of Outlander Theatre Company went back to Kathleen Culebro's idea of building a foundation of diversity for the theatre. This foundation does not mean hiring one actor or creative member of color, but that actual diversity in the theatre and the production meant having a diverse creative team, diverse actors, diverse administrative team, and a diverse board for when the theatre moves forward. Every person on the team must also then have equitable power in which they are all given the opportunity to make decisions and have their voices heard. This equitable power is the distinction of actual inclusion and delineates the distinction between diversity, equity, and inclusion. Inclusion in the theatre is giving every person in the theatre and production an equal voice and giving them a spot at the table to make decisions. This power equity also delineates the tokenism of diverse actors, creative teams, and administration in the theatre from achieving actual inclusion, allowing us to build a true diverse foundation for Outlander Theatre Company.

Statistics

Before summarizing the future of Outlander Theatre Company, it is also important to understand the lack of diversity in theatres and among their administration in today's society. According to Asian American Performers Action Coalition, of the 2017-2018 season of the 18 largest New York City non-profit theatres, 84.6% of the productions were helmed

by white directors. Of these productions, 79.1% of the playwrights represented were white, and of the plays produced by BIPOC writers, 100% of all shows written by these BIPOC writers and/or written about the BIPOC experience were helmed by white directors. Of those people who acted in these productions, 61.5% of roles went to white actors, 23.2% went to Black actors, 6.9% to Asian American actors, 6.1% to Latinx actors, 2% to Middle Eastern actors, and finally there was no presentation of Indigenous actors in any of these theatres. Finally, of the administration in these theatres, 100% of the artistic directors that were choosing these stories and hiring these actors were white. (AAPAC)

Moving Forward with Outlander Theatre Company

I realized that, as the artistic director of Outlander Theatre Company, statistically I was another white male creating and molding the stories of the theatre company to fit my idea of what diversity meant going forward in the theatre. Towards the beginning of this process, I had many conversations with my supervising professor deciding if it was alright for me, a straight white male, to focus my project on creating a diverse theatre company, even though I myself could not relate to this specific experience. However, we decided that if I had not chosen to focus my efforts and the privilege I had in this process to create diverse theatre, then I was being a passive bystander in the present fight for diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in theatres today.

However, in a University project setting, my serving as the artistic director for Outlander Theatre Company was acceptable, but if I were to move forward with Outlander

Theatre Company, I would step down as the artistic director. If I remained in the role, it would be a form of “theatrical gatekeeping.” Diverse artists should be the ones creating the narrative of the theatre and choosing which stories should be told, and I simply do not have the knowledge or experiences to tell these stories correctly. The artistic director is in charge of choosing what stories to tell, who should be hired, and deciding what narrative the theatre is choosing to tell, and as a white male who has the privilege to not have had many of the experiences that many BIPOC artists encounter on an everyday basis, I should not be the one creating their narrative. I should not be the person who is determining which BIPOC stories are told and who is hired to tell them.

However, this does not mean that I would be leaving the Outlander Theatre Company or not supporting the stories being told through the theatre. Theatres with already established white artistic directors should strive to be telling these diverse stories with diverse actors and creative teams. However, as we continue to focus on creating a diverse foundation for Outlander Theatre Company, it is more appropriate for a diverse artist with the proper knowledge and experience to control the artistic narrative and narrative for BIPOC artists for the theatre moving forward. This would mean that I would likely move into a different administrative role such as the executive director, managing director, or serve on the board of the theatre. However, from my interviews with Kathleen Culebro and Serge Seiden, coupled with my experience working with Ashley, Alejandro, and the cast of *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992*, I realized that moving forward I should step down

as the artistic director and grant this opportunity to an artist with the proper experiences and knowledge to best serve Outlander Theatre Company and its mission.

Producing Diverse Theatre

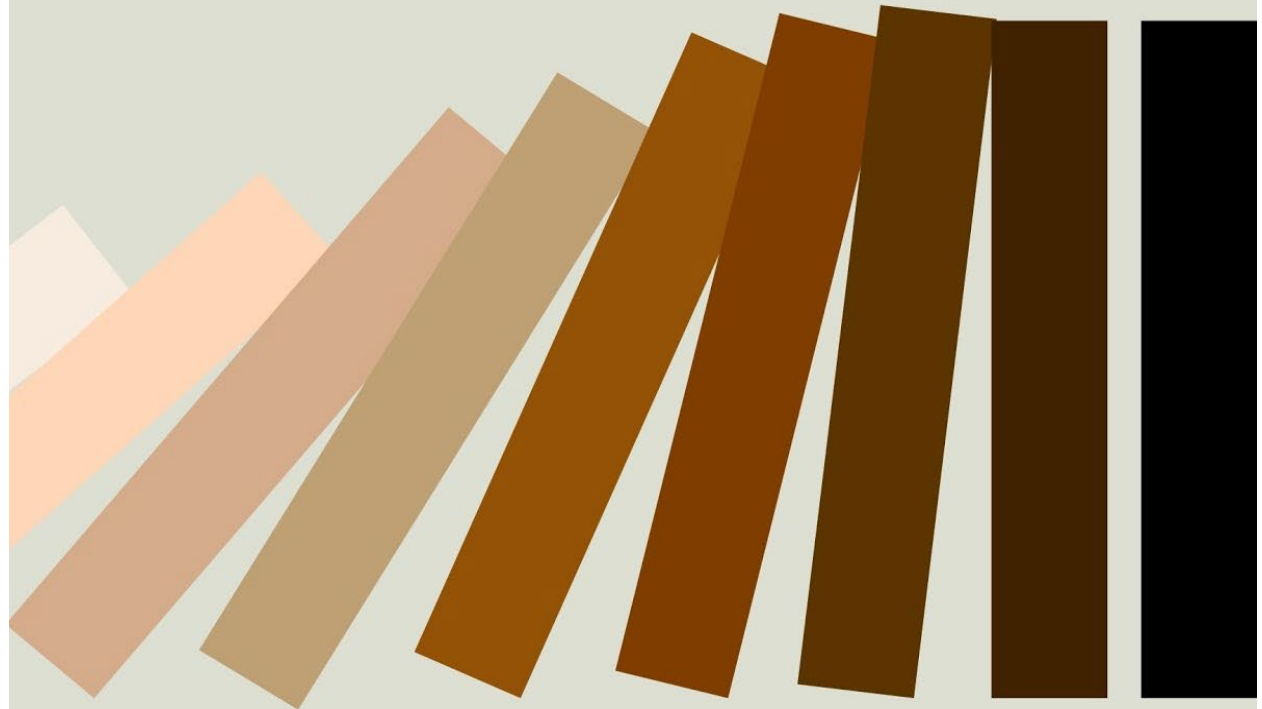
In conclusion, the choice for theatres to produce diverse theatre is a good step moving forward, but it is only the first step. It is imperative that we have diverse voices guiding the conversations in the theatre and leading these stories. There are so many of these diverse voices that are constantly fighting for the opportunity to be heard in this predominantly white theatre community, here at Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, and beyond. In order to allow more of these artists to tell their stories, we must focus providing opportunities for diverse theatre students right here at Texas Christian University.

The perception is that going into the theatre as a profession is not the most lucrative and the tuition for Texas Christian University is extravagantly high, often limiting many diverse artists from being able to attend this university with the hopes of pursuing their passion of theatre. It is imperative that Texas Christian University and the John V. Roach Honors College focus their efforts on providing opportunities, scholarships, and grants for these diverse theatre artists and allow them the same opportunities, experiences, and privilege that I have had being able to attend this University. Real diversity in theatre is not simply hiring a few diverse actors, creative teams, and administration, but rather it is about changing the system. In order to change the system, we must allow these artists to have

access to the same opportunities and experiences their white, privileged counterparts have had and granting these artists the chance to shape the narrative of diversity in theatre moving forward.

MEDIA

TWILIGHT: Los Angeles, 1992



by ANNA DEAVERE SMITH

20 + 21
MAR
2:30 PM

DIRECTION
ASHLEY PARKS

PRODUCER
CAMERON VANCE

ASST. DIRECTION
ALEJANDRO SAUCEDO

**OUT
LAN
DER**
theatre co.

TICKETS: <https://www.showtix4u.com/events/twilightreading>

TWILIGHT: Los Angeles, 1992



BRAYDEN RAQUEÑO



ARIELLE ROBERTS



ALEJANDRO SAUCEDO



NIJEL SMITH



ALANNA STERN



JOE RHOADS



ASHLEY PARKS



CAMERON VANCE

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