

Liminal Landscapes

Generative Art as a Technoshanic Instrument in the Representation of Altered States of Consciousness

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Abstract

This article proposes a theoretical and practical reflection on the capacity of generative audiovisual installations to represent and evoke altered states of consciousness, based on the artistic project Liminal Landscapes. In a historical moment marked by crises of meaning, technological alienation, and symbolic disintegration, a new sensibility emerges that seeks to resume ecstatic and spiritual experiences, now mediated by digital devices. By cross-referencing from the visionary arts, the anthropology of ritual, technoshamanism and media arts, it is argued that certain contemporary artistic creations can assume functions comparable to those of ancestral shamanic rituals, enabling the public to have immersive, introspective, and liminal experiences. The installation Liminal Landscapes develops from organic and generative processes of image and sound, symbolically focusing on the element of water as a metaphor for the unconscious, crossing, and transformation. The circular structure of the work, combined with the enveloping sound and visual dissolution, invites the viewer to enter a meditative state, breaking with linear temporality and evoking ritual practices. Based on a practical research methodology, the project analyzes how the artistic gesture can function as a mediator between the visible and the invisible, the aesthetic and the spiritual. Art, in this context, is proposed as a technoshamanic instrument and a legitimate avenue for sensitive knowledge, capable of bridging the gap between the body, technology, landscape, and consciousness.

CCS Concepts

• **Applied computing** → Media Arts; Arts and Humanities.

Keywords

Technoshamanism, Generative Art, Altered States of Consciousness, Media Arts, Liminality, Immersive Installation

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1 Introduction

Contemporary society is experiencing a paradoxical trend: while it has advanced technological resources and unprecedented global connectivity, there is a growing sense of fragmentation, anxiety, and a loss of existential meaning. The overload of stimuli characterizes this scenario, the virtualization of human relationships, and the growing alienation of the body from direct experience with the sensible world. In this context, there is an urgent need to rediscover symbolic forms of knowledge that can integrate sensoriality, intuition, spirituality, and aesthetics in meaningful experiences. Liminal Landscapes project, the starting point of this article, starts precisely from this impulse of symbolic reintegration. It is a generative audiovisual installation conceived from immersive artistic practices, where the possibility of digital art working as a mediator of altered states of consciousness is explored. Instead of reproducing only conventional technological paradigms — based on efficiency, productivity, and objectivity — an epistemological inversion is proposed here: art as a symbolic, ritualistic, and transformative instrument. The developed installation proposes a sensory and symbolic journey through sound and visual landscapes centered on the element of water. Using generative processes, manipulated video techniques, and organic sound layers, Liminal Landscapes evokes liminal experiences, such as those described by Turner [1] in the study of rites of passage. The concept of liminality is fundamental in this work, as it refers to a transitional condition between states of consciousness, social structures, or distinct perceptual realities. Inspired by contemporary technoshamanic practices [2] [5], this article explores the role of generative art as a tool that can symbolically reestablish the mediating function once associated with shamanic rituals. Just as shamans used sound, movement, and narrative to induce states of trance and spiritual reconnection, today's digital artists can explore audiovisual languages to elicit aesthetic experiences that transcend the ordinary, promoting introspection, healing, or simply broadening perception.

The article, therefore, develops from the intersection between theory and practice, between critical reflection and artistic creation. Through a practice-based research approach [6] [7], it is proposed here to understand how the artistic gesture can be more than form or content: it can be a ritual space, a symbolic landscape, or a practice of reconnection. By exploring these possibilities, Liminal Landscapes not only represents an ecstatic experience, but an active



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one — inviting the viewer to become a participant in a sensory and subjective journey.

2 Shamanism, ritual and symbolic mediation

Shamanism is one of the oldest forms of mediation between human beings and the invisible dimensions of reality. Present in various indigenous and archaic cultures, the shaman acts as an intermediary between worlds, channeling knowledge, healing, and revelations through altered states of consciousness [8]. Such states are not seen as deviations from normality, but rather as expanded modes of perception, accessed through rituals involving music, singing, dancing, sensory deprivation, the ingestion of entheogens, and visualizations. The shamanic trance, in this context, is a sacred and structured state of exception, where the body, sound, and image become instruments of passage.

Victor Turner, in studying the rituals of transition in African communities, described the intermediate phase of these practices as a liminal moment: an ambiguous, unstable, and fertile condition in which the individual leaves behind their previous identity but has not yet assumed the new one [1]. This phase of symbolic suspension is marked by disorientation, transformation, and openness to mystery — and is often led by a ritual master or guide. The shaman, therefore, is the liminal agent par excellence, leading the collective through a symbolic limbo to reorganize meanings and structures.

In the contemporary world, although many of the traditional shamanic practices have been marginalized or secularized, their symbolic structures continue to resonate in new languages and contexts. The emergence of what is conventionally called technoshamanism [2], represents an effort to rearticulate these spiritual practices through digital technologies. DJs, VJs, performers, and sound artists thus become mediators of liminal aesthetic experiences, manipulating sound, image, light, and space with objectives often similar to those of ancestral rituals: to provoke shifts in perception, to induce meditative or ecstatic states, and to promote a sensitive reconnection [3] [4].

In this new scenario, ritual is no longer an exclusively religious or tribal practice, but rather an artistic language of immersion and transformation. Symbolic mediation now occurs through algorithms, projections, sensory installations, and immersive environments — devices that, as in shamanism, operate subjective and collective transitions. Thus, it is understood that art, especially that which works with time, sound, and moving image, can assume a ritualistic function by creating symbolic spaces where other forms of consciousness can emerge.

3 Visionary aesthetics and the language of ecstasy

Visionary art is an aesthetic field that seeks to represent expanded states of consciousness, mystical experiences, lucid dreams, or transcendental perceptions. Strongly associated with the use of entheogens — such as ayahuasca, psilocybin, LSD, DMT or others — this art form emerges from the attempt to translate the ineffable into recognizable, but not ordinary, images, patterns, colors, and shapes [9]. Unlike traditional representational art, which depicts the tangible world, visionary art turns inward, to the inner world and dimensions of the psyche and spirit that escape verbal language.

Artists such as Alex Grey, Martina Hoffmann, Amanda Sage, and Android Jones have become references in this field, developing visual languages marked by symmetry, sacred geometry, fractals, mandalas, intense chromatic palettes, and fusions of bodies and landscapes. These compositions aim to convey the sense of unity, dissolution of the ego, and transcendence often experienced by individuals who undergo altered states of consciousness. As Huxley points out, such states break with the perceptual structure filtered by the brain and open the individual to a reality “more real than the real”, where everything is interconnected, pulsating, and symbolic [10]. The visionary aesthetic is not limited to painting or digital illustration. It also finds expression in video mapping, interactive installations, immersive environments, and audiovisual performances, where movement, music, and multimodal synchrony amplify the ecstatic experience. These environments become true stages of perceptual transformation, where the spectator is summoned to abandon his passive position and immerse himself in a symbolic crossing. Ecstasy — understood here as the momentary suspension of the individual self toward the whole — is the sensory and spiritual goal of this artistic language. From an anthropological and phenomenological perspective, such manifestations can be viewed as continuities or contemporary reinterpretations of ancestral practices. Indigenous graphics, shamanic visions, and healing rituals with power plants have visual and functional parallels with digital visionary art. The difference lies in the support, not in the purpose: both cases involve symbols that mediate invisible realities and have an impact on the body and consciousness. This aesthetic, therefore, operates as a language of ecstasy — a visual and sensorial way of accessing, communicating, and sharing that which is beyond the visible and the verbal.

4 Generative art as a symbolic process

Generative art is distinguished by its mode of creation: instead of relying exclusively on the artist’s direct gesture, it resorts to autonomous systems, algorithms, or processes to produce the work. In this context, the artist acts as a creator of rules, parameters, and conditions, allowing the machine, code, or dynamic system to generate the form [11].

It is an art that incorporates unpredictability, variability, and flow as its structuring principles, shifting the notion of authorship to an expanded and collaborative field between humans and machines. From a symbolic perspective, this mode of creation is akin to natural and spiritual processes, in which total control is relinquished in favor of attentive listening to emerging forces. Just as the shaman surrenders to trance to receive visions and messages that he cannot anticipate, the generative artist surrenders some of the creative control to the system, trusting that something new and meaningful can emerge from the relationship between intention and chance. This ritualized surrender, mediated by technology, is a symbolic act of ego displacement and openness to the unexpected. In immersive installations, generative art gains additional symbolic power. When sound, image, and movement are generated or modified in real-time, the aesthetic experience becomes alive, pulsating, and almost organic. This condition is capable of causing changes in the perception of time, inducing meditative states, and dissolving the boundaries between spectator and work. As Candy and

Edmonds argue, artistic practices based on algorithmic generation can function as instruments of deep phenomenological experience [6], challenging classical categories of representation.

In *Liminal Landscapes*, the use of video, inspired in generative processes of nature and sound manipulations creates a sensory environment that is constantly in a state of transformation. Water — a central element of the installation — is subjected to visual distortions that simulate streams of consciousness, blurring the boundaries between figure and background, between object and perception. These flows do not follow a linear narrative, but a rhythmic and symbolic logic, suggesting inner movements of the psyche. Sound, in turn, is composed of layers that oscillate between the natural and the abstract, between the audible and the sensed, reinforcing the idea that the symbolic can emerge from repetition, modulation, and immersion. By making room for the unpredictable and the flow, it refers to ritual practices and the dynamics of the unconscious mind. As a symbolic technology, it allows the viewer to access non-ordinary states of attention and sensitivity, creating a bridge between the visible and the invisible, between the conscious and the archetypal. In this sense, its function is not only to represent the world, but to open cracks in ordinary reality, evoking possibilities for inner transformation.

5 The liminal landscapes installation

The installation *Liminal Landscapes* was conceived as a result of a practical research process in the field of media arts. It is a generative audiovisual work, designed to function as an immersive, symbolic, and meditative sensory space, representing or evoking altered states of consciousness. Inspired by ancestral rituals, psychedelic experiences, technoshamanic practices, and visionary art forms, the installation seeks to create an aesthetic that transcends the viewer's everyday experience, guiding them into a sensitive landscape of introspection (Figure 1). The structure of the piece is based on a suspended circular projection, on which five videos are shown in a continuous loop, each representing a distinct phase of a symbolic journey: (1) initial confusion, (2) submersion, (3) crossing, (4) revelation, and (5) return. These moments are not presented narratively, but rather as sensory atmospheres that overlap and dialogue with one another. The fluidity of the transition between them suggests a cyclical experience, as the title of the work itself indicates: a liminal space, between worlds, between states, between consciousnesses. Visually, the installation features images of water, including rivers, oceans, drops, puddles, and liquid surfaces, captured on video. These materials were digitally manipulated through distortion techniques, overlapping layers, blur effects, and modulation of light and color, creating visual compositions that oscillate between the real and the abstract. Water, in this context, works as a metaphor for the unconscious, for the psychic flow, for the symbolic crossing. Its plasticity refers to the perceptual instability typical of ecstatic states, in which time, identity, and materiality seem to dissolve [12].

In terms of sound, the installation uses a multichannel system with headphones and ambient speakers. The soundscape is composed of a combination of field recordings (sounds of water and wind), ritualistic elements (didgeridoo), and electronic soundscapes.

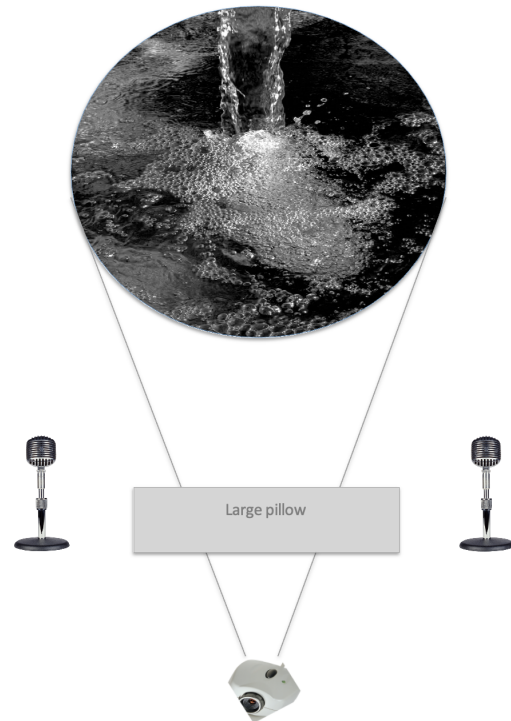


Figure 1: Initial model of the exhibition space. Source: Authors

The sound was created to induce a meditative state, with variations in frequency and intensity that accompany the visual flows. As Rouget observes, sound plays a fundamental role in inducing trance states and perceptual alterations, especially when organized repetitively and hypnotically [13].

The viewer's experience is projected as non-linear, individual, and subjective. The work does not provide explicit instructions or narratives; instead, it offers a hanging space where each visitor can design their own indoor experience. This intentionality aligns with the ritual function of sacred spaces, where silence and mystery are essential conditions for the emergence of the symbolic. Thus, *Liminal Landscapes* does not seek to "explain" altered states, but rather to suggest them, to provoke their emergence from carefully orchestrated sensory stimuli (Figures 2 and 3).

The work was conceived in a digital environment, with video editing and sound design. The creative process involved several phases: field research in natural environments, audiovisual capture, experimentation with digital manipulation techniques, multichannel composition, and exhibition tests in dark environments. Each step was documented and reflected in the context of an artistic practice as an investigation [7], allowing the creation of the installation to also serve as a process of knowledge acquisition. In the end, *Liminal Landscapes* presents itself as a "sensitive portal" — a space where the viewer can cross symbolic thresholds, not only contemplating images but also experiencing them with the body, with the ear, and with the breath. The installation challenges the

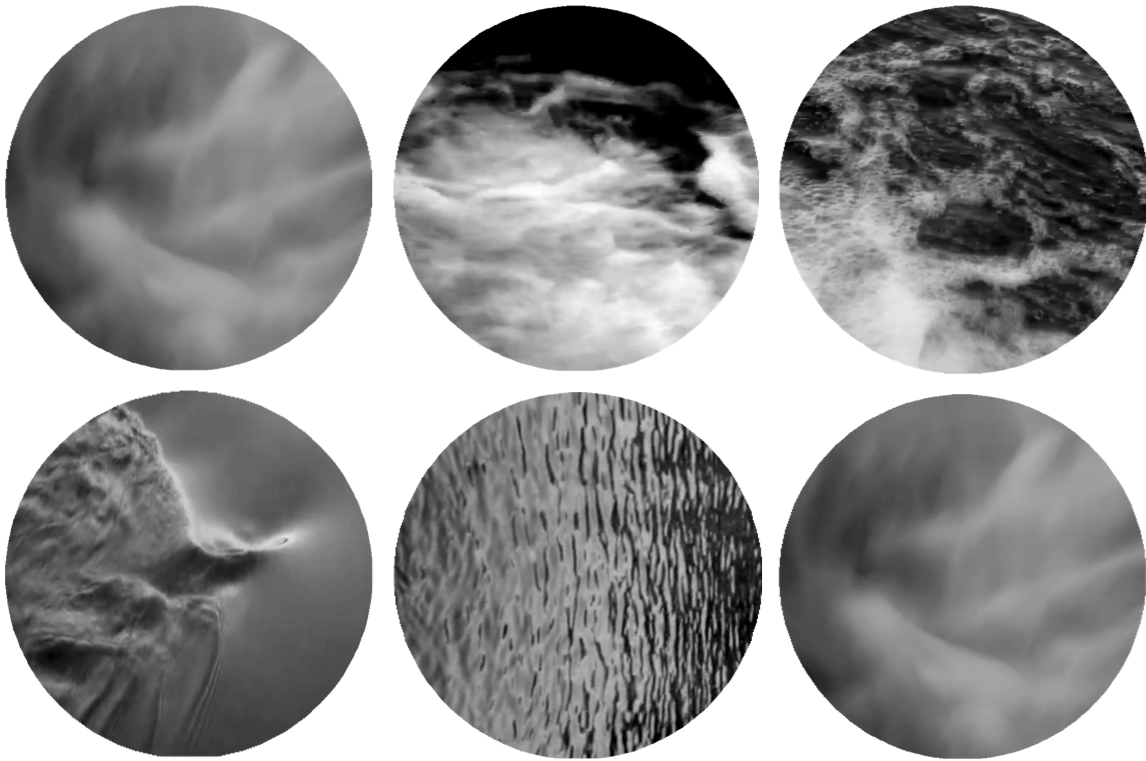


Figure 2: Liminal Landscapes: Stills from motion. Source: Authors

distinction between art and spirituality, technology and rite, aesthetics and transformative experience. It invites us to full presence, to inner silence, to crossing.

6 Water symbology and flows of the unconscious

The choice of water as the central element of the installation *Liminal Landscapes* is not merely aesthetic or technical – it is symbolic. Since the most ancient mythologies, water has been associated with birth, purification, crossing, transformation, and the unconscious. It appears as a universal symbol in the rites of passage, in the archetypal dreams, and in the spiritual narratives of different cultures [12]. Representing the flow of life and the depth of the psyche, water is the ideal vehicle to express that which escapes verbal language: emotions, ancestral memories, visionary states. In Jungian psychoanalysis, water is strongly linked to the collective unconscious. It is in the symbolic depths of the waters that the archetypes, the primordial images of humanity, reside – those that recur in different forms in myths, dreams, and artistic manifestations [14]. By using digitally manipulated images of rivers, oceans, droplets, and liquid surfaces, the installation invites the viewer to dive – literally and metaphorically – into this fluid and symbolic territory. The movement of the water, sometimes soft, sometimes turbulent, reflects the internal dynamism of the unconscious in flux.

Visually, the work employs distortions, overlays, and blurs to simulate the perceptual instability characteristic of altered states of consciousness. Just as the surface of water reflects and distorts reality, the installation invites contemplation of images that do not adhere, that escape definition, and that refer to the oneiric and the archetypal. The visual fluidity is accompanied by undulating and atmospheric sounds that reinforce the feeling of displacement and crossing – as if the viewer were being led by an inner river, towards unexplored areas of their consciousness. In this way, water becomes the symbolic and sensorial axis of the work. It is a means and a metaphor; an image and a presence. It acts as a mirror of the invisible, a channel of passage between realities, and an archetypal language of the unspeakable. In *Liminal Landscapes*, it is not just the element represented—it is the agent of experience.

7 Public reception and final reflection

The installation *Liminal Landscapes* was presented to the public in May 2025 at the generation cultural space, in Braga, Portugal, as part of a group exhibition dedicated to digital and immersive arts (Figures 4 and 5). Despite sharing the exhibition space with other works, the piece managed to capture the attention of several visitors, who were deeply impacted by the proposed sensory experience. The testimonies collected throughout the exhibition point to an emotional and introspective reception, often associated with the feeling of “disconnection from the outside world” and immersion in an expanded subjective time.

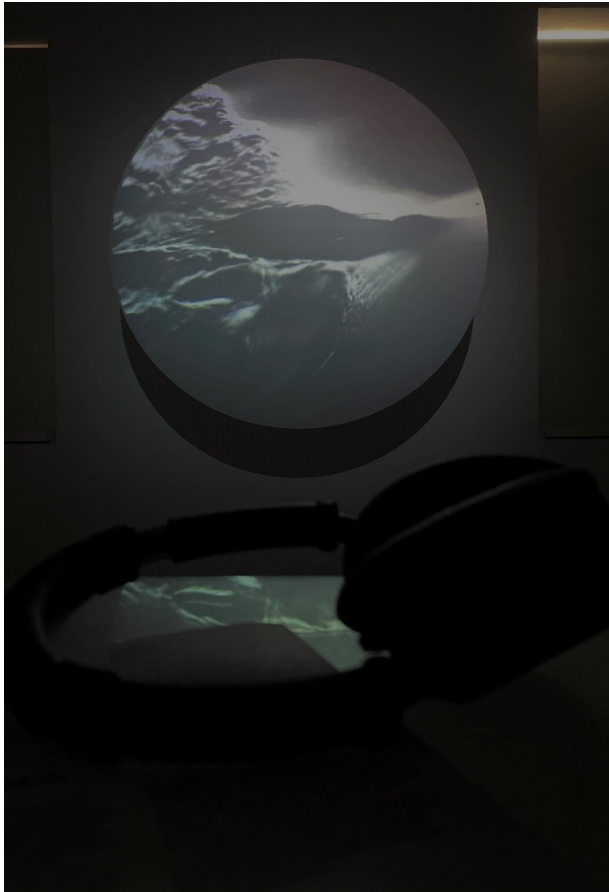


Figure 3: Gnrati3n exhibition: Liminal Landscapes. Source: Authors

Some visitors reported feelings of calm, lightness, contemplation, and even transcendence. Most reported that the combination of sound and image evoked meditative states, facilitating access to memories, bodily sensations, and unexpected mental images. Many interpreted water as a symbol of renewal and healing, and expressed surprise at the intensity of the experience in an artistic space. Others, with greater familiarity with spiritual or psychedelic practices, recognized in the installation a structure similar to that of crossing rituals, comparing it to ayahuasca ceremonies or deep meditation sessions. However, limitations were also pointed out. The shared exhibition space, the absence of complete acoustic insulation, and the constant foot traffic interfered with the full enjoyment of the experience. Some visitors mentioned that they would like to stay longer in the installation, or to experience it in a space dedicated exclusively to immersion, with conditions closer to a ritual environment.

From a reflective perspective, the public reception of the work confirms the central hypothesis of this article: immersive aesthetic experiences, when carefully constructed with attention to sound, image, and rhythm, can serve as symbolic mediators of altered states of consciousness. *Liminal Landscapes* does not provide answers or

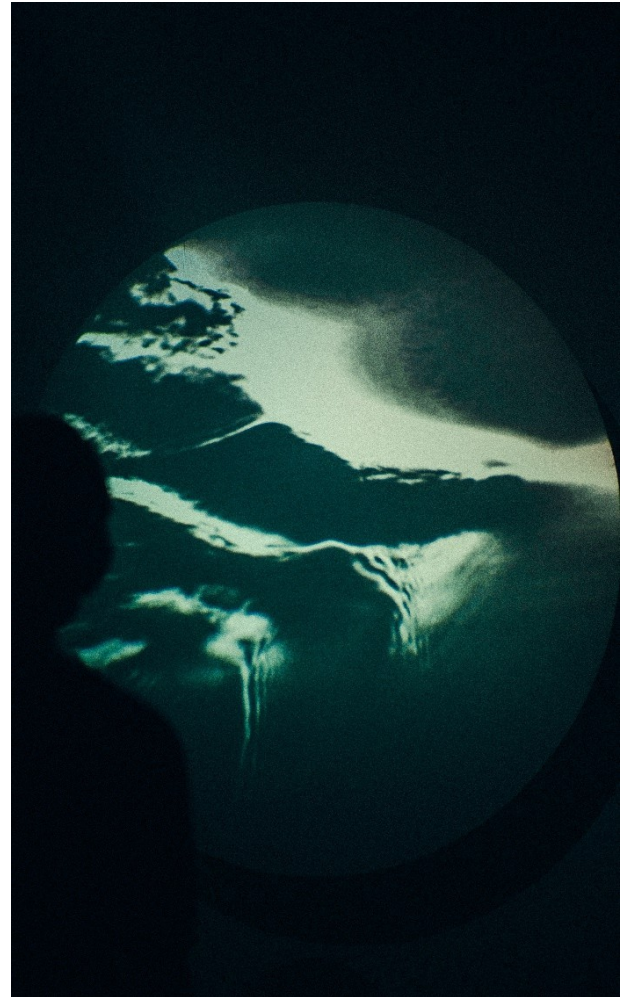


Figure 4: Gnrati3n exhibition: Liminal Landscapes. Source: Gnrati3n.

closed narratives; it proposes a space of openness, of inner listening, of silent crossing. The work thus assumes a technoshamanic function – not in the literal sense of ancestral ritual, but as a contemporary evocation of a symbolic and spiritual practice mediated by artistic technologies. The presence of the spectator is essential for the activation of this crossing. Without it, the work remains latent. With it, it becomes a rite. In this gesture shared between artist, work, and visitor, the transformative potential of digital art as an aesthetic and spiritual practice is revealed. In a world saturated with stimuli and lacking in meaning, works such as *Liminal Landscapes* point to possible paths of symbolic reconnection and reencounter with mystery.

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Figure 5: Gnration exhibition: Liminal Landscapes. Source: Gnration.

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