

City Aesthetics And Typography In Terms Of The Reflections Of Visual Culture On Social Structure And City Culture: Samsun City Typography

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Abstract

From social perspective, a city is a residential area which consists of individuals who do not show similarity, and which has a nature of continuity in a relatively large populous area. As to economic criterion, a city is an economic mechanism which emerges in the process of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services so as to be able to meet the continuously changing requirements. In this economic mechanism and in this residential area which has a nature of continuity, one of the most important elements which keeps individuals together and provides interaction is effective communication. In the process of development of cities in accordance with the planning, so as to be able to respond to social expectations, one of the characteristics which must be considered is geographical location, strategic importance, historic texture, social structure, its being a cultural arts center, graphic design and consequently city typography. In the graphics designs prepared in order to realize communication between people living in the city, typography is the one mostly used.

The art of establishing fonts into a two-dimensional surface is called “typography”. That typography, as a designing element, provides a visual communication has led to the existence of it in every field of life. In city life signboards, signs which show directions and places, posters and even writings on the walls, graphities, which we meet everyday both provide visual communication language and have a negative or positive impact on city aesthetics. Human beings continuously interact with physical world in which they live, and with all of the visual elements in their surroundings. For this reason, the applications in which typography is used and is thought to have an important place in city life must be functionally analysed correctly and must be designed to provide contribution to city aesthetics.

In this study, we have aimed at taking notice of people to the place and importance of typography in various dimensions in the axis of visual culture; and in this context, Samsun city typography has been evaluated by using various examples.

Key words: *Visual culture, City aesthetics, City culture, City typography, Typography.*

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Introduction

Art practices and designs formed with today's visual culture, visual media, digital visual duplication techniques and objects of consumption can mostly be assessed as consumer aesthetic culture. In terms of social structure and city culture, physical environment as living environment is a dynamic phenomenon which contains natural, cultural, historical, social and artificial elements involving human beings and in which these phenomena interact with each other continually and inconstantly. City areas as a continually changing dynamic phenomenon are shaped with the necessities of daily life within the context of natural and artificial elements (Erdoğan, 2006: 68). A city is physically made up of individual and social living spaces. Individual living spaces are dwellings, work places, offices, etc. and social living spaces are streets, parks, squares, metro, tram, bus stops, ports, airports, culture centers, shopping malls, etc. Cities have a concrete characteristic due to being a living space and residential area. Cities as cultural places are where civilizations develop. Considering that social structure and city culture are integrated organized relationships, it can be said that there is a need for a coherent development of variables and active elements about visual culture (Soğukkuyu, Tunç, 2013: 156). City is an experimental area in terms of design. City culture, which is made up of artificial organisms, changes and evolves depending on the social structure.

Today, typographic elements are used in indoor and outdoor graphic design products of cities in order to communicate directly and swiftly with the city society. Cities have a great number of typographic designs in terms of their functions of publicity and informing. In daily uses of city places, people can form a memory of that place through signs and guidance of information, definition and identity. Typography is the visualized form of language. It does not have a self-appointed semantic existence. Typographic elements, which are reversible and readable with the society, include the basic data of the area and period they are in, associate with the environment they are in and build a visual structure that continually generates dialogue (www.arkitera.com). Within this context, city typography has important clues for information about the place and local culture.

City aesthetic is a phenomenon which is about the individual's city life and sensory and social state. Samsun has a specific identity and specific characteristics in terms of environmental features. However, in terms of city aesthetics and typography, it can be said that there are studies that can be conducted for Samsun. Today, the development of a city is assessed with nicely organized artificial accessories and city aesthetics. Well-planned and implemented typographic elements contribute to city aesthetic by preventing environmental pollution. This

study assesses Samsun city typography in terms of the reflections of visual culture on social structure and city culture.

Visual Culture

Barnard examined visual culture under 4 titles: everything visible, everything visible produced or introduced by human beings, functional or communicational purpose: design and aesthetic purpose: art (Bernard, 2002: 28). “Everything visible” should include nature and the environment. This includes every kind of being that can get in the view of human beings. “Everything visible produced or introduced by human beings” can be assessed as visual culture elements. According to the definition of “functional or communicational purpose: design”, visual culture is a product of design that is revealed with a functional and communicative purpose. “aesthetic purpose: art ” can be defined as everything visible with an aesthetic purpose. This is a view that visual culture is everything produced to include some aesthetic influences. Visual is shaped according to the meaning of aesthetic.

Human beings have tried to realize their experiences, fears, excitements, happiness and more within a specific expression. As human beings have continued to try to express themselves, it has become important for them to solve, understand and discuss the “meanings” which are the equivalents of these expressions (Uçar, 2011:155). We can see visuals, which have a key function in human memory, almost in every moment of our lives. There are studies on developing approaches to understand visuals. These studies can be assessed within the concept of visual literacy. Tools and environments should also be included in the assessments since visuals take place on a specific surface. We are living in an age in which there are lots of visual elements. Visual culture began to be discussed systematically in the West in 1972. Later, in 1983 and 1990s, it began to be regarded as a discipline (Rampley, 2007: 12,17). In today’s world, it is necessary to visualize information, to integrate this visualized information into communication and of course to understand and interpret this information. In parallel with visual culture, visual literacy arises as a result of such needs and assessments.

There is something that needs attention while defining the visual and the cultural. As Mitchell said, “human beings cannot reach a satisfactory definition of visual culture just by adding an acquired visual experience to an acquired cultural idea (Bernard, 2002: 25). This is not a study that can be started by taking the preexisting concepts about what is visual and cultural and

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bringing them together. These words should be defined, conceptualized, developed and interpreted related with the concept of “visual culture”.

City Culture

City culture is the formation process of material and moral values produced in relation to a common ground by people living in a city within its spatial dimension (www.wikipedia.org). City culture is the commonly acquired culture by the people living in that city. After human beings began to settle permanently, they began to make common rules in cities. These rules were built on the idea of people not disturbing each other. Each city has a unique social, economic and architectural structure. There are certain rules to living in a city and in time these rules form the city culture. According to Güvenç, culture encompasses the people who form the society, the language and communication processes that keep them together, their beliefs, their traditions, their legal and administrative institutions, their production and consumption organizations (Güvenç, 1997:15). City culture is the dynamic accumulation that includes the society and experiences forming the social structure of the city as well as the art and culture activities in the city. City culture is closely associated with social structure. Social groups, social structures and occupations should be assessed not independently but with social structure.

According to another point of view, city culture is the culture of people coming from different cultures with different traditions realizing their individual rights and responsibilities and living together within the social convention specific to the city they are living in. The factors which influence city culture the most are the physical, socio-economic, cultural and historical characteristics of that city. When cities are analyzed within their historical development process, more dominant images can be seen in cities that have not lost their characteristic of being old, in other words, in cities which are well protected. Most of the time, climatic factors, natural structure, local instruments, construction techniques, socio-economic structure and cultural clues can easily be caught in these images. In these typical images, climate, use of local instruments and architectural formations are very obvious. Structures with special identities, such as palaces, churches and mosques, are most of the time original examples which represent the look of the city as the representatives of a specific age and architectural style (Çöl, 2015: 13).

City Identity

City identity is a meaningful identity which influences the city image; which carries specific characteristics in each city with different scales and comments; which is shaped with physical,

cultural, socio-economic, historical and formal factors; which is formed by city-dwellers and their ways of living; which keeps the concept of continually developing and sustainable city alive and which is the result of a great process that extends from the past to the future (Çöl, 2015: 13). City identity can also be defined as the interpretation and range of values attributed to a city by the people living in that city. For example, Paris brings to mind city of culture and Eifel Tower, İstanbul brings to mind Hagia Sophia and Blue Mosque and Samsun brings to mind Amazons and the city of Atatürk.

City identity includes all the physical and humane characteristics of the related city and causes changes in each social change and environmental formations. Thus, city identity occurs as a result of interactions between natural and artificial environmental characteristics and human behaviors and structural formations; in short, it originates, develops, changes and it is continually regenerated within a long period of time.

City Aesthetic

Aesthetic is derived from Greek words “aisthesis” and “aisthetikos” which mean perception and sensation and is defined as the apprehension of the beautiful through sensation, emotion and perception; beauty and the influence of beauty on the mind and feelings of human beings and things related to the perception of the beautiful. In Greek aesthetic, “beauty” is the character of any existing object/being and it is generally defined as the own internal order of the being or the harmonious group of various beings (Erdoğan, 2006: 73). Aesthetic includes not only the beautiful in art, that is not only the art philosophy, but also the beautiful in nature. Thus, it is the teaching of perceptions used in the assessment of both natural and artificial elements (Bozkurt, 2000).

City aesthetic is first of all a phenomenon that refers to a person’s city life, sensory and social state. “if city aesthetic brings to mind only decorating a city and designing the visual dimension, this is against the basis of a healthy understanding. People begin to attract attention to beauties in environments they feel safe and secure and city aesthetic can develop with an approach and integrative understanding that foresees the life in the street as clean, comfortable, civilized and in good relations” (Erzen, 2006: 124). It is not possible to talk about aesthetics if there is no unity in the environment, art and design object and if the parts are not bound to each other or suitable for each other organically. Environmental aesthetic is an element that influences human psychology due to stimulants coming from the environment. Environmental aesthetic, which is

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the determinant of human attitudes and behaviors, can influence behaviors specific to place. Within the context of environmental psychology, the reactions of a person with the environment he is in also depend on the visually perceived physical structure (aesthetic quality) of the place/area (Tomak, 2015: 67). As an integrity of systems, cities are areas which are extremely complicated, very difficult or impossible to control, which have cultural diversity and which include natural and artificial elements within (Erdoğan, 2006:73). All cities are expected to have a character that serves a specific purpose and to include specific aesthetic values based on this identity.

City-dwellers perceive city aesthetic at both upper scale and lower scale. In general, what is perceived within the context of city view and city silhouette is the “macro aesthetic” values which are viewed as a whole from the outside. The values which are perceived within the environment people live in are “micro aesthetic” values and they are more directly related with colors, texture, light and material. There are patterns in cities which bring solution to lots of uses. Besides, there are also some structural, psychological, ecological, behavioral, geomorphological, visual and schematic patterns in cities. When these patterns are compatible with each other and when they are correctly analyzed, we can have correct environments and cities (Erdogan, 2006: 77).

Typography

Typography is the visual form of a written thought. The choice of the components of this visual form may dramatically influence the readability of the thought and the reader’s feelings because of the number and variety of the existing type faces. Typography is one of the most influential elements on the character and emotional quality of a design. It can cause a neutral effect or it can move the passion (Ambrose, Harris, 2014: 6). Typography has only one purpose and it is transferring data through writing. No argument or reason can cause typography to deviate from this purpose. A printed work that cannot be read becomes a product with no purpose. Typography is an expression of technology, accuracy and good organization rather than graphic design (Armstrong, 78).

City Typography

In planned development of cities and for cities to respond to social expectations, geographical location, strategic importance, historic pattern, the state of being a center of art and culture, graphic design and thus city typography have become points to take into consideration. With

industrial revolution, cities have begun to expand continually due to reasons such as overpopulation, physical expansion and increase in business areas. Multi layered social structure living in a city and the cultural structure of a city are in interaction. In this sense, communication becomes important. It can be said that visual communication can effectively be provided with typography, which is the design of typeface on surface. Typography is mostly found in graphic design products which are prepared to realize communication with the society living in city (Soğukkuyu, Tunç, 2013: 153). The fact that typography provides visual communication as a design element has caused it to take part in every area of life. In city life, signs of official and private institutions, signs of directions and places, posters, billboards, manholes, rackets, banners, warning signs and even graffitis, have positive or negative influences on city aesthetic as well as enabling visual communication language. Today, rather than being a concept associated with only art, aesthetic has become a characteristic which is needed and questioned in every area of human life (www.iibdergisi.com). Human beings are in a continuous interaction with the physical environment they live in and with the natural, artificial, cultural, historical, social and visual elements in this environment. Thus, it is important to analyze all the practices including typography, which has an important place for all the human beings sharing the same atmosphere in city life, correctly in terms of aesthetic and function and to design these in a way that they will contribute to city aesthetic.

The fonts designed have been used to provide written communication between people for centuries. They have existed in printed material such as newspaper, magazine and book and media which make up the visual structure of the environment we live in such as signboard and poster. Today, it can be seen that letters are perceived as elements which increase the power of visual communication beyond these anxieties (<https://earsiv.anadolu.edu.tr>). In our daily life, we see lots of visual messages such as informative or personal expressions on signboards in city centers, billboards, posters, road signs, traffic signs, car plates, mass transportation and other tools. These messages attract our attention in varying degrees based on our mood, needs, interests and even likings at that moment. On the contrary, maybe we do not see some. Some cannot fulfill their communicative functions because they are old or worn-out, in short, because their readability has decreased with other influences. The readability of typographic elements is important in terms of the transmission of the message. City typography has been in a continuous development since city centers have begun to form because of the need to communicate and inform. In the daily use of urban places, human beings form a memory of the place through signs and guidances of information, definition and identification. Typography is the visualized

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form of language. It does not have a self-appointed semantic existence. It evolves with the society. Typographic elements include the basic data of the area and period they are in, associate with the environment they are in and build a visual structure that continually generates dialogue (www.arkitera.com). Within this context, city typography has important clues for information about the place and local culture (www.arkitera.com).

Typography, which includes various functions in the city such as communication and publicity and takes place in graphic design products, comes to the forefront as a visual element. Besides brand advertisement and advertising activities, other graphic design products in the city also reflect the cityculture. Graphic design products in the city also vary in terms of districts. In line with the visual records obtained, the variations of typeface in the signs or shopwindows of brands and institutions that place importance on visual communication and design are minimized (Uçar, 2004: 1 36). In our country, it can be said that especially outdoor sign boards are full of misuse and deformed fonts. Considering the open and understandable informing function of graphic design, it can be said that the typography used should be plain, readable and understandable.

Samsun City Typography In Terms Of Visual Culture

City is a complicated structure in terms of economic, social and cultural aspects. In time, it expands each day in terms of humans and sites and goes from simple to complex. City is a settlement unit full of a great number of visual data that reflect the social structure and thus city culture. These visual data are thought to contribute to the development of a person's feelings of taking pleasure and aesthetic, forming a city memory besides their functionality (Soğukkuyu, Tunç, 2013: 169). Typography used in outdoor and indoor areas of city is thought to vary depending on city culture and social structure. Cities, which are artificially formed by human beings, are changed and developed by human beings again. In graphical design products in outdoor and indoor areas of city, typography is used to communicate fast and directly with the people of the city.

Individuals who live in cities vary in terms of interests, values, beliefs, art and ways of living. It is thought that the individuals' levels of like vary thus. As well as the typography used in graphical design products in forming communication, the physical structure (color, form, material) forming the texture of the city and the cultural characteristics of the individuals that form the social structure are also important (Soğukkuyu, Tunç, 2013: 169). City includes nonstop warning patterns in terms of its functions of advertisement and informing. The

messages these patterns include are transmitted to society with typography.

Samsun is a big city that has recently changed and developed fast. In general, it is a city that has expanded along the beach rather than circularly in terms of its structure and location. As in all cities, Samsun has a unique identity and characteristics. Besides visual culture elements used in the transmission of concrete and non-concrete cultural heredity, typography is also used as written expression. Billboards, sign boards of official or private institutions, sign boards of places such as shops, restaurants, cafes and kiosks, sign boards used at work places, educational institutions, sport areas, entertainment centers and residences, guidance and information signs, manholes, trashes and street signs, all of the writings used in outdoor or indoor areas can be assessed as typographic elements that have social communication and information role. Typography in the graphical design products used in outdoor and indoor areas of the city are an important indicator in terms of reflecting the cultural and social structure of the city. It is thought that considering the city culture and social structure characteristics during the design stage of typography will contribute to the integration of design with the city (Soğukkuyu, Tunç, 2013: 169). In city designs made for the publicity of city functions of graphic design and typography are important. The writings on the sign boards of official institutions can give pre-information about the socio-cultural structure of the city (Figure :1).



Figure: 1. Samsun Metropolitan Municipality City typography example.

In city institutions, areas reserved for design should be turned into a design that is economical and a design that gives its message in the most effective way possible. For example, the font and typeface of a writing used to express a rule, an obligation that should be followed in a city in the clearest way is a subject that should be put emphasis on for each individual in the city to understand because font and typefaces such as serif, sans-serif, regular and bold are important for the writing to be read from a sufficient distance. Since the writing of “Samsun Municipality Service Building” in Figure 2 should be read from a specific distance, it was written with a

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readable non-serif font.



Figure: 2. The writing of Samsun Municipality Service Building.

It is undeniable that under the quality of service standards of institutions there lies corporate identity guides in terms of visibility. When it is considered in terms of typography, a great number of institutions include standard typefaces that can be used in areas from signboards to internal correspondences. The fonts determined can contribute to the corporate identity due to their standard uses. Indoor areas of a city are indoor and confined public spaces which are among architectural structures. Among indoor areas of a city, there are cultural places, hospitals, airports, stations, educational institutions, indoor malls, etc. These places are confined areas for the public which the society can make use of in accordance with their wishes and needs. These come to the forefront as historical or contemporary places and as being integrated with the city culture and they form the city identity. The writings used in the interior area of a shop can increase the awareness of contemporary places (Figure: 3).



Figure: 3. LC Waikiki interior writing example.

For typography to deliver a message, it is important to use typography in indoor and outdoor areas of a city, to be in interaction with the society and to reflect the structure and culture of the people of the city. Staying away from complexity in typographic applications in indoor and outdoor places, placing importance on spaces, placing typography on a single color background bring commercial products in a place to the forefront. When the typographic elements of especially malls are analyzed, it can be seen that the aims of firms are to attract the attention of

consumers in streets and to attract them indoors. People in a city are faced with advertisement products in streets, malls, indoor and outdoor places, light panels, billboards, means of transport, shop windows, as well as newspapers, magazines and television in daily life.

Field of view is mostly complicated in a city. While walking in a street, people can come across one or more objects or people at the same time. This situation can prevent an individual from seeing his environment as a whole. However, the individual can perceive an area in a city that interests him as a whole. His destination is determined, he does not pay attention to the objects floating around him, he just focuses on his point of perception. In city centers, there are usually shops, places of eating and drinking and shopping places in the ground floors of buildings in the streets. It is important for typographic applications to be perceived and read easily by people and to attract attention in these areas which have limited viewpoint. It is important for design areas to be economical and to deliver their messages in the most effective way possible. For example, the font and typeface of a writing used to express a general rule that should be followed in a city in a way that is easy to read and that can be understood by everybody is a subject that should be put emphasis on for each individual in the city to understand. This is because font and typefaces such as serif, sans-serif, regular and bold are important for the writing to be read from a sufficient distance. Streets are places where individuals come together, work and lead their lives despite their social and cultural differences (Ügeöz, 2003:31). There are individuals with different cultures within a city. Thus, typography in signboards should be simple and understandable.

In our daily lives, we come across a great number of visual messages in the city center such as billboards, posters, road signs, traffic signs, car plates and informative or personal expressions on means of transport and other vehicles. These messages attract our attention in varying degrees in accordance with our moods, needs, interests and even likes at that moment. However, maybe some do not even attract our attention and some cannot fulfill their functions since they are old or wornout or in other words since their readability is lessened with other effects. For example, when walking in a street, a manhole we see can attract our attention to a different dimension or the street sign we look at while looking for an address can influence us positively or negatively. Typography on a manhole of Samsun Metropolitan Municipality SASKI or a street signboard both serve as a visual message and give an idea about the city culture and typography (Figure: 4).

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Figure: 4. Typography on a manhole of Samsun Metropolitan Municipality SASKI.

Some informative applications in the city may wear out in time, they may go bad and cause environmental pollution. They should be maintained and repaired in terms of their positive reflections on city culture and aesthetics. Otherwise, typographic designs used can harm the city identity. As in all cities, one can come across typography that can cause negative effects in Samsun city center (Figure: 5).



Figure: 5. Negative effects of street typography in Samsun city center.

City streets generally reflect the nature, culture, likes and lifes styles of people living there. Past meets the present and traditional life meets modern life in Samsun streets. Streets are full of the traces of people from different cultures and different social structures. There have been developments in the city structure with the universities causing a more effective social life. Young population has increased rapidly and the city has gained a more dynamic and more lively appearance. A great number of social places have opened for the young population and differences have begun to be seen in advertisements and means of visual communication in places where the young population is dense. Different trends attract attention in the signboards, wall writings and visual materials of the places young people frequently go to. These signboards may cause positive or negative effects on city aesthetic or typography in terms of visual culture (Figure: 6).



Figure: 6. Examples of different typography in Samsun.

It can be said that it is possible to read city culture by typographic elements while assessing writings embedded inside the texture of a city. Since the existence of cities, the tradition of typography has existed in the living spaces of human beings. In daily usage of city, the individual forms a memory of that place with the guidance of information, definitions and identities through signs (www.arkitera.com). Typographic elements build a visual structure which include the basic data of the area and the period they are in, which associate the palce with the environment it belongs to and which produce continual dialogue. When considered thus, typography can carry important clues for information about the place and local culture.

Significant studies have been conducted about city typography. For example, British designer Peter Dawson aims to turn city travelers wandering ignorant of their environment into typography detectives with his newly published book "The Field Guide to Typography: Typefaces in the City Landscape". In his book, Dawson attracts attention to strange, beautiful, ugly, old, new, in short every type of, more than 152 typefaces that we can come across in our city life. All typefaces from Helvetica at New York subway to Franklin Gothic in MoMA's logo seem like hidden elements that leave small touches in our daily lives (www.arcitera.com). The writing at New York subway and the one used at Samsun rail system have been prepared with the same purpose (Figure: 7). Different fonts such as Helvetica, Times New Roman, Arial, Myriad have been used in city texture of Samsun.



Figure: 7. The writing examples at New York subway and the used at Samsun rail system.

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Recently, three dimensional writing designs with the city's name have begun to be made and used in the outdoor areas and cultural places of cities with touristic purposes. It can be said that these designs contribute to city aesthetic and typography (Figure: 8).



Figure: 8. Amsterdam and typographic work examples designed to Samsun.

A city's development and modernity is assessed with natural and artificial accessories being organized in a way that will look nice to the eye and with city aesthetic. Typography is used in signboards, wall writings, graffiti, graphic products and architectural elements. It is necessary to avoid the use of complicated and disorganized signboards that can cause environmental pollution.

Conclusion

Typography is the visual form of a written thought. The fact that typography provides visual communication as a design element has caused it to exist in every area of life. Typography, which includes various functions in the city such as communication and publicity, comes to the forefront as a visual element. Typography has only one purpose and it is transmitting data through writing. A printed work that cannot be read becomes a product without a purpose. Typography in the graphical design products used in outdoor and indoor areas of the city are an important indicator in terms of reflecting the cultural and social structure of the city. It is thought that considering the city culture and social structure characteristics during the design stage of typography will contribute to the integration of design with the city. Writings that we come across in city life such as signboards, signs that indicate direction and place, posters and even wall writings have positive or negative effects on city aesthetics as well as providing visual communication language.

Cities are defined as places of architecture and design products which are made by human beings, which serve to human beings or which are served and which are shaped sometimes by natural conditions and sometimes by wide scaled plannings (Mercin, 2013: 3). In planned development and transformation of cities and for cities to respond to social expectations,

geographical location, strategic importance, typographic applications, social structure and culture-art are important elements. As in all cities, Samsun has a unique identity and characteristics. Besides visual culture elements used in the transmission of concrete and non-concrete cultural heredity, typography is also used as written expression.

Billboards, sign boards of official or private institutions, sign boards of places such as shops, restaurants, cafes and kiosks, sign boards used at work places, educational institutions, sport areas, entertainment centers and residences, guidance and information signs, manholes, trashes and street signs, all of the writings used in outdoor or indoor areas can be assessed as typographic elements that have social communication and information role. Thus, all the applications which include typography that has an important place in city life should be analyzed correctly in terms of aesthetic and function and they should be desined in a way that they will contribute to city aesthetics.

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