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The Road Goes Ever On: Estelle Jorgensen's  
Legacy in Music Education

Music Education Department

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## Ch. 09 - The Music Educator as Cultural Worker

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## Section II – Action and Quest

### Chapter 9

# The Music Educator as Cultural Worker

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### **Abstract**

Estelle Jorgensen’s *Pictures of Music Education* provides an exploration of music education through figural and literal thinking stimulated by a selection of metaphors and models. This chapter takes inspiration from Jorgensen’s approach to music education and explores how the changing idea of culture resonates with thinking about music education. It is suggested that music education and culture can be thought of together through a more politically aware stance or image of thought that music teachers can adopt: the music educator as cultural worker. By adopting this stance, the music educator enacts music and culture together, is critically informed by the changing cultural landscape, and agile enough to develop and adapt creative pedagogies in music education that offer freedoms and access to music learning.

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### **Introduction**

Estelle Jorgensen’s book *Pictures of Music Education*<sup>1</sup> is an interesting and challenging exploration of music education through different lenses offered by a selection of metaphors and models. These lenses provide a basis for both figurative and literal thinking about music education. With a thorough reading of the text you get a sense of Jorgensen’s expansive,

imaginative, dialectical ways of thinking about this important educational field. In contrast with other books on music education that seek to define and capture a more complete “theory” of music education, *Pictures of Music Education* provides a welcome alternative for the curious and creative music educator/scholar. In particular, the text invites an exploratory stance to be taken where music education concepts are not necessarily predetermined in advance.

Rather, the text unfolds by gently guiding the reader towards a journey of self-discovery about music education through the metaphorical tools and techniques offered for exploration.

This sense of curiosity and discovery in Jorgensen's *Pictures of Music Education* has sparked an intellectual passion in me to continue her invitation to search for insights about music education that I find particularly provocative and challenging. Key to this challenge is her use of metaphor and model to provoke fresh thinking and creative angles on what might be offered elsewhere as everyday taken-for-granted norms. A good example of this is in her chapter in *Pictures of Music Education* on "Home and Informality," which provides fresh insights on the well-known topic of informal teaching and learning in music education. Here, through the juxtaposition of the notion of "home" with "informality" Jorgensen leads the reader into a nuanced but critical reading of informal music education that finds solace in the relational, caring, and humane encounter between music teacher and student music learner. Similar interesting and innovative perspectives are found in other chapters.

Metaphors have an artistic character about them and offer poetic renderings of thought and alternative shades of meaning. As such, they are suited to exploratory thinking about music or music education. Music, being an ephemeral art is in many ways difficult to conceptualize and pin down and demands imaginative descriptions. Music education, too, is by no

means a clearly defined practice; it requires nuanced and diverse thinking about how people connect with and relate to music. Metaphors, like music, can summon and stimulate a sense of imaginative thinking that might otherwise not be considered in straight-forward rational thought. Like music, metaphors provide a movement towards what film theorist Vivian Sobchack calls "ear dreaming"<sup>2</sup> where a sound invites the listener to engage in imaginative play in relation to an observed visual image on the screen.

Similarly, metaphors are used by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche to stimulate thinking about culture and music when he writes about two Greek deities: the imageless art of music, Dionysus, and the image-maker, Apollo.<sup>3</sup> These ancient metaphorical forms, Nietzsche suggests, challenge our thinking about our artistic selves in ways that concur with our humanity and ways of being. Apollo provides us with an image of forms that we can create, shape, and be certain of, while Dionysus provides a more radical concept of creative energy that seeks to break free from conventional ways of thinking and art. This dialectical tension, expressed with these two metaphors in Nietzsche's earlier writing, has some similarities with Jorgensen's play between metaphors and models in her exploration of ideas about music education in *Pictures of Music Education*.

It is interesting that Nietzsche, the artistic philosopher, continued his metaphorical use of Dionysus in his writing

over time. He developed this metaphor as a working exemplar of a way of being human—a philosophy of life—where what matters is not the marking of identity but the dynamic and imagined qualities of becoming. “. . . becoming as an invention, willing, self-denial, overcoming of oneself; no subject but an action, a positing, creative, no causes and effects.”<sup>4</sup> Here the use of metaphor becomes something more transformational, something forward seeking and attentive to what could become possible rather than something trapped in tradition or convention.

The becoming-orientated concept of Dionysus is what Elizabeth St. Pierre and Laurel Richardson call a “working metaphor,”<sup>5</sup> and also has links with Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s generative “image of thought.”<sup>6</sup> These thinking devices focus not only on points of comparison between different perspectives, they work to stimulate and change taken-for-granted meanings and uses of language. The idea of an image of thought is to provoke new ways of thinking that move towards a “becoming.” Rather than the old Cartesian style of thinking, common in Western philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari offer a new image of thought that thinks differently, the rhizome grass—a biological image that generates a philosophy of becoming, a complex movement of growth “that becomes at any moment of its own entry.”<sup>7</sup>

Jorgensen employs a garden and growth metaphor and model in *Pictures of Music Education*.<sup>8</sup> Thinking about music

education as growth emphasizes the idea that music educators must be attuned and responsive to their students and that their teaching will be different for each person, depending on their individual and developmental needs. A key concern for the teacher is the consideration and balance of natural growth of a student’s musical learning in time, which may be at odds with cultural expectations. This growth may at any time be altered and change through relational and cultural circumstances.

Culture is an abstract and changing concept that has a great deal of purchase in music education. The influence of ethnomusicology in particular has brought the idea of culture into the forefront of concern as music educators have had to grapple with the reality of alternative paradigms of music and music transmission. The idea of culture in music not only applies to ethnicity and ethnic differences but also to more arbitrary differences in musical genres and practices in society, including the musical cultures and practices of children. However in education, music is often thought of and described technically, through specific terms like “harmony,” “pitch,” or “rhythm,” and these measurable musical-design concepts are commonly thought to be separate from what is thought of as “culture.” In music education, technical renderings of music are commonly transferred into concepts and practices of musical training that treat music through a very technically orientated mind-set. Ethnomusicologist John Blacking was well aware of this and suggested that we consider a more human concept of music,

which views “some aspects of social life as products of musical thought.”<sup>9</sup>

The tendency in music education in recent years has been to consider culture in a categorical sense. Often this has been through respectful intentions, particularly in the sense of “cultural diversity” where music educators seek to honor different cultural traditions, practices, or musical communities and include people from those traditions in a richer and more diverse music education experience. While these endeavors are certainly beneficial and inclusive in themselves, thinking about music and culture can still be somewhat trapped in fixed disciplinary notions of musical analysis on the one hand or semiotic cultural meaning on the other, without any means to cross over from one disciplinary paradigm to the other or ability to conceptually shift to a new paradigm. This calls for a different approach. What if music and culture, as important and fundamental music education guiding concepts, could be thought of not as static terms of analysis or as “categories,”<sup>10</sup> but more as Nietzschean processes of becoming? Could such a move help music teachers and learners in their endeavors to make music education more relevant and connected to different experiences in life? Taking inspiration from Jorgensen’s use of metaphor in music education thinking, the following discussion explores the ideas of music and culture as changing and intertwined concepts. I first follow a trace of thinking about music and culture as a becoming through Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Guattari. Then, I move to explore how the

idea of culture has changed over time. Finally, this leads me to the notion of the “music educator as cultural worker,” where the music educator employs cultural change directly through musical action.

## *Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Guattari: Music and Culture*

Music is Nietzsche’s window into culture, through which he is able to see culture as a unity of tendencies, urges, and forces that pre-empt the structures and codes of language. Music enables him to look beyond language—to the conditions of culture and cultural work. In writing about Nietzsche’s theory of culture, Pierre Klossowski<sup>11</sup> says: “Only now it has dawned on humanity that music is a semiological language of affects.” The very tones that form language are life-building cultural articulations. By exploring culture through the lens of music, Nietzsche finds a connection and synergy between culture as nature and culture as human work. This is because music, once removed from the symbols and codes of language, is transparently what it is—the human projection of sound and a medium that “stirs” our natural tendencies and urges.

Nietzsche’s theory of culture is connected with nature. What is natural in music is a way to an improved culture. Here, the Greek word for nature, *physis*, is pivotal in Nietzsche’s understanding of culture. *Physis*, as nature, can be thought of as a “bursting of a blossom into bloom,”<sup>12</sup> the coming-forth and disclosing of nature.

Like the way a flower blooms forth, we can say other things in nature “bloom,” including human cultural work. Nietzsche, thus, defined culture as an “improved or transfigured *physis*.”<sup>13</sup> The human being is the being whose nature is to cultivate and improve (be educated) and, as social beings, project work that aids the creation of a socially enhanced culture. Improvement is a key educational notion. To “improve” means to get better and to increase one’s facility, or natural capacity. Culture as “transfigured *physis*,” in the sense appropriated here, then, means “changed” or “transformed” individual and collective human *natures*. This provides an interesting perspective on how a music educator might begin to work with natural growth.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari extend and expand the Nietzschean theme of music and cultural work. Their key musical image is the “Refrain,”<sup>14</sup> a way of thinking not only about music but cultural “blooming” or growth in a generative musical sense. To these authors, the refrain consists of three main aspects: a beginning melodic creative thread that is taken up; the territorial world gathered up by sonorous “indexes”; and an improvisatory line of flight that opens up newer territories. These three aspects can be observed in the way music potentially unfolds by both design and chance. “The refrain has all three aspects, it makes them simultaneous or mixes them: sometimes, sometimes, sometimes.”<sup>15</sup> “One ventures from home on the thread of a tune,”<sup>16</sup> where new spaces and new experiences open up and new environments and

meanings are gathered into the significance of each unfolding “natural” event.

Deleuze and Guattari’s musical refrains are creative passages of the movement of becoming in art and, through this new image, of cultural work. The passage of movement can be seen more as “rhizomatic” than “arborescent,”<sup>17</sup> a bursting of movement from one territory to another newer one or the erosion of an established territory, each event or place of passage drawing in matters of expression different from the other. Within the passage of change, a music educator’s cultural work will look to enable the transformation of territories of learning. This is the “labor of the refrain.”<sup>18</sup> The formation of the refrain however can be both pleasant and unpleasant. This also means the prospect of dangers, music gone bad, “a note that pursues you.”<sup>19</sup> The prospects of all possibilities are there, but the cultural work of the music educator discerns and evaluates the artistic direction of the event in question.

### *The Idea of Culture*<sup>20</sup>

Where do we locate the notion of music education as cultural work in relation to our familiar yet changing conceptions and assumptions of culture? “Culture” is derived from the Latin root *colere* that means a variety of things including cultivating, inhabiting, worshipping, and protecting.<sup>21</sup> And as Nietzsche affirmed, the idea of culture was derived from nature. The earthly work of “cultivating”— tending

to crops or tilling the soil—was extended to the nature of the human being and the educative work that could be done to develop a “fine” human nature. The concept of culture, however, finds an odd area of middle ground between the work of nature and the refined promise of human ideas. This is what Terry Eagleton’s suggests when he says, culture is a “rebuff to both naturalism and idealism”: on one hand the conquering of the natural through the dominion of ideas; on the other, the recognition that even high art and human agency is derived from the biology of nature itself.<sup>22</sup>

The early use of culture as a cultivating concept was expanded somewhat in the late 18th century (Germany, France, England) to become a “generalization of the spirit” that informed a “whole way of life” of a people.<sup>23</sup> The development of the culture concept in this way can be seen as a response to a variety of “modern” historical developments, perhaps most of all, the rapid processes of industrialization and urbanization of the 19th and 20th centuries. These changing circumstances led people to reconsider their predicaments and environments in relation to how life had changed for them. Within the political contexts of these alienating movements, the idea of “culture as process” transmuted to become “culture as entity.”

Perhaps the clearest signal of an altered idea of culture came from the humanist subject of anthropology. As a new discipline of the modern age, anthropology

increasingly sought to theorize a scientific explanation of human culture as the identification of specific practices that made some sort of collective sense. Anthropology was born as a circumstance of modernity to explore the human condition in an environment of alienation and homelessness, on the one hand, and progress, development and colonization, on the other.

Edward Tylor’s formulation of culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society,”<sup>24</sup> permeated the belief that different elements of social life make up a complex whole. The idea of culture as a universal totality carried the implicit assumption of a hierarchical ordering of racial superiority. Within this ethnocentric paradigm, those people with “scientific knowledge” investigated the complex network of “primitive” practices of the “other” in order to formulate some sort of collective notion of humanity. This theoretical approach also enabled Tylor to invent a picture of cultural evolution of progressive stages that typified modernist assumptions of advancement and time.

In a similar way, culture developed a newer artistic meaning. The idea of culture represented art in the highest sense: high culture equated with high art. The objectification of culture and an emerging hierarchical sense of art were invariably connected. Tylor’s theory of culture as a complex whole was influenced by

nationalistic and artistic senses of the term that permeated 19th century German Romanticism. The emphasis on the “informing spirit of a whole way of life,”<sup>25</sup> most evident in the specifically cultural activities of art, music, opera, and intellectual work, linked artistic practices of all kinds and culture in this sense. The Romantic emphasis on culture as specific works of high art stratified the everyday conception of music: the distinction between superior music (the great canon of composers; nationalistic music narratives) and inferior everyday music (the popular and “other”).

Another shift in thinking came with Franz Boas<sup>26</sup> whose inclusion of cultural relativism in the theoretical mix, emphasized the plurality of cultures, and thus diminished the overt ethnocentric stigma found in Tylor’s ideas. Yet, as Carla Pasquinielli<sup>27</sup> argues, cultural relativism does not free itself completely from ethnocentrism. Within the pluralistic conception of different, local cultural identities is an internalized ethnocentrism implicit in the structure of cultural relativism itself. Within the perspective of cultural relativism, the idea of the “complex whole” is now transferred to each specific cultural identity. Culture remains a tool for constructing the “other,” only now within the precinct of multiple others. Pasquinielli notes: “in this way, every culture becomes the projection of the strong paradigms of the modern idea of reason.”<sup>28</sup>

As Eagleton observes, Culture (capitalized—universal) is now pitted

against cultures (lowercase—plural) in a variety of ways.<sup>29</sup> The modernist assumptions of Culture is best exemplified by the notion of “high art,” which, as “above politics,” is seen as the higher realm of artistic beauty, the genius, or the virtuoso. This is the sphere of refined art and music where a finely cultivated, educated, and artistic individual represents progressive culture in the highest sense. Along with the increasing acceptance of cultural pluralism, the high art territory once claimed as superior has, to some extent, undergone deterritorialization. In music, pluralistic values now dominate a complex landscape of identity formation in music.

These changes can also be found within the precinct of the notion of “ethnic” cultures. Ethnic cultural identity most commonly refers to the shared practices or ethos of a group with a shared ethnicity. Thus we have Italian culture, Samoan culture, Aboriginal culture. Fixed notions of ethnic identity can however obscure complex realities of identity and difference. This is particularly noticeable in Aotearoa-New Zealand where we have the practice of biculturalism that signifies the political relationship between a collective Maori people and the colonizing European settlers. Biculturalism has been a useful strategy of resistance for Maori and a benchmark for Maori political positioning. It has reduced the diffusion and recurrence of colonial hegemony that can occur in multicultural policies. This political landscape requires careful and sensitive insight and responsiveness in music



education contexts.

A more recent change has been observed in the life of the idea of culture, notably from the increasingly introspective discipline of anthropology itself. A turning point can perhaps be found in the ideas of Clifford Geertz for whom culture consists of “webs of significance.”<sup>30</sup> Culture, here, is seen as “text,” a system of signs constructed in the moment of their interpretation. Although not completely immune from the ethnocentrism of earlier conceptions, Geertz’s idea of culture affirms the more relational aspects of meaning that come with signification. Further, James Clifford and George Marcus seek to completely dissolve the ethnocentric hang-ups of the past by focusing primarily on the subjective “I” of the narrator, thus affirming the paradoxical “true fiction” of a cultural narrative.<sup>31</sup>

In the complex matrix of forces that make up what Peters calls “cultural postmodernity,”<sup>32</sup> the idea of culture becomes embroiled in both global differentiation and homogenization. Multiple varieties of usages of cultures abound: fashion culture, school culture, business culture, street culture, popular culture, consumer culture, and plenty more besides. Any different identity is able to appropriate the idea of culture. At the same time, Peters notes, the economic processes of commodification and the emerging “global culture” elicit homogeneous cultural forces of repetition and control.<sup>33</sup> Most pervasively, what is termed “knowledge culture,” is the infiltration of

epistemological frames of thinking and commodified mediating technologies into everyday life most commonly through digital media but also subversively in neoliberal educational pedagogies and curricula.

## *Alternative Thinking about Music Education*

It is clear from this brief critical review of the idea of culture that its meaning is by no means fixed but is constantly in a flux of change and becoming. It is interesting then to consider thinking about how different conceptions of culture are reflected in music education. The view of culture as a “whole way of life” is attached to the view that music education should be based on one kind of technical music learning system: western tonality and rhythm and famous or technically demanding high-art music pieces. Akin to this view is the well-known separation of high Culture from low culture and the associated idea that music education should strive for high culture training goals that stand apart from the rest of society. This view and practice is still strong in present-day music education and is perhaps part of the problem with music education’s increasing separation from mainstream school and university curricula, which tend towards more economic and presumably “vocational” subjects.

The problem here is not with the specific training in tonality or rhythm. These things are of course useful and important

for musicians to learn. Musicians, particularly instrumental musicians, spend long hours practicing and refining their instrumental and musicianship skills—this becomes a very personal and passionate endeavor for them. However, within the intensity of their craft development, they can miss out on learning about or developing the perceptive capacity towards the cultural, political, or ethical relevance of their actions. Under such circumstances it is quite possible that listeners and audiences can sometimes appreciate the cultural threads and relevance of musical performances more than the musicians themselves. The issue here lies in the separation of musical craftsmanship from music's cultural and communicative value and a narrow conception of musical training.

While the view of culture as a whole way of life has its shortcomings, cultural relativism can also result in a silo-type approach to music education which can also serve to reinforce more dominant discursive positions on “what counts” in music education practice. This issue has been played out with the acceptance and implementation of popular and ethnic musics in music education curricula. Problems occur when musical genres are developed educationally through alternative practices that create an either/or ethos within a learning program, which in turn can become subject to appropriation and unethical favoritism.

The more recent fragmentation of the idea of culture brings with it a complex situation where high art and cultural

relativist notions still hold some purchase in music education. These notions are situated within a cultural environment that is increasingly commodified and individualized through the marketization of music and education and the increasing access and informality offered by digital music education forms on the internet. These complex cultural discourses present dangerous and difficult orientation choices for music educators as they struggle to decide what kind of music learning program best fits the diverse needs of their students.

## *Conclusion*

The complexity of the idea of culture in the present day carries with it a serious challenge for music educators to consider. How should they position their thinking and practice within such diversity and fragmentation in music culture? One possibility is to take Nietzsche's thinking on board and consider the problems, issues, and challenges of music and culture together as an active and politically-aware stance. Such a stance, or image of thought, which I call the “music educator as cultural worker,” sees music and culture together as a natural human mode of action. This notion is close to the “public pedagogy” concept offered by Henri Giroux that assumes a critical connection between educators, artists, and cultural workers in a way that employs artistic practices to generate freedoms within restraining and oppressive cultural and political contexts.<sup>34</sup> The music educator as cultural worker seeks to build musical knowledge and skills using

all the established tools and musicianship techniques they can muster and is also cognizant of the cultural, political, and ethical dimension that is synchronically real and evident in any kind of musical action—be it listening, performing, composing, improvising, or teaching and learning. Such a stance requires a sensitivity to the changing nature of cultural politics, the role of music as an expressive mode of communication and being, and an agile, open, and critical disposition that is ready to adapt and create new pedagogical approaches in music education.

I began with Jorgensen’s strategy of metaphor and developed this further through an exploration of the becoming of an image of thought: music education as cultural work. This took me to a journey of thought through Nietzsche’s ideas of culture through the lens of music, Deleuze and Guattari’s labor of the refrain, and the becoming of the idea of culture in recent history. The complexity and dissolution of the idea of culture in the present day highlights the need for music educators to be more attuned than ever to the cultural work that they might implement in their pedagogical practices.

Jorgensen’s development of the factory and production metaphors/models of music education in *Pictures of Music Education* concur with the political view that music education is in danger of being subsumed by processes of commodification and economic perspectives of culture. In such circumstances, the need for a cultural work image of thought is even more relevant and pressing. Where curriculum control is maintained in such a way that music education is neglected, students are denied access and the opportunity to participate in musical experiences that might otherwise assist them in their learning. Students should be allowed the freedom to express creative and imagined individual and social identities through music and other cultural forms. A cultural work image of music education would seek to utilize the performative and creative-compositional nature of music to create these opportunities to allow for these cultural freedoms to blossom and grow.

Music is a natural force that has withstood centuries of human civilization and evolution. There is a natural power or a “labor” in the generative quality of music that is potentially transformational and life-affirming. But music educators, as cultural workers, need to develop a sense of discernment about the directions and effects of their musical actions to ensure they embody the natural freedoms, openness, and potential of music as a cultural force.

## Notes

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- 13 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*, trans. Daniel Breazeale (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), 123.
- 14 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 312.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid., 311.
- 17 Ibid., 328.
- 18 Ibid., 302.
- 19 Ibid., 350.
- 20 For an earlier discussion of music education and culture see David Lines, "The Melody of the Event: Nietzsche, Heidegger and Music Education as Cultural Work", (PhD thesis, University of Auckland, 2004).
- 21 Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2.

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- 22 Ibid., 4.
- 23 Raymond Williams, *Culture* (London: Fontana, 1981), 10.
- 24 Edward Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (New York,:Harper, 1951/orig. 1871), 3.
- 25 Raymond Williams, *Culture*, 11.
- 26 Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man* (New York: MacMillan, 1938).
- 27 Carla Pasquinielli, "The Concept of Culture between Modernity and Postmodernity," in *Grasping the Changing World: Anthropological Concepts in the Postmodern Era*, ed. V. Hubinger (New York: Routledge, 1996), 58.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, 4.
- 30 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.
- 31 James Clifford and George Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 19.
- 32 Michael Peters, *Cultural Postmodernity in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Biculturalism, Multiculturalism, and Transculturalism*, Lecture 2 of 3 Lecture Series (University of Auckland, 2000).
- 33 Ibid., 9.
- 34 Henri Giroux, *Impure Acts: The Practical Politics of Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

## About the Author

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## ***Project Links***

This chapter comes from a book titled *The Road Goes Ever On: Estelle Jorgensen's Legacy in Music Education*. The philosophical essays contained within focus on themes that have intrigued Estelle Jorgensen whose forty years of scholarship have strongly influenced music education research and practice: the transformation of music education in public schools; feminist and LGBTQ voices; mentoring; the unfinished search for new ways of seeing, hearing, and doing; multiple and intersecting musical identities; the tension between tradition and change; and activist practice in music education.

The complete book can be found at the following link: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/jorgensen/>