

Excerpt from Interview with Slovenian actor Blaž Šef; Interview was made as part of research for an article titled:

## Language as Distinctive Trait Between the Actor and the Storyteller

By: Ana Duša, Maribor Public Library, Maribor, 2018. Copy left.

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I feel the difference between theatre actors and storytellers lies mostly in that as an actor, you can handle the situation perfectly well even if you master only a limited set of “thoughts” and words suitable for one of the roles, be it classical or post-dramatic theatre.

As a storyteller, however, you are laid bare before the audience instantaneously in two aspects in particular – in how you master the syntax, that is the specific language of your story, which generally comprises the vocabulary, content relations, adding or taking away of the material, depending on how the audience interacts with you. Your most vulnerable part is the one which is protected by the classical stage limits. You find yourself continuously improvising, you need to maintain constant contact with your audience whether it is the eye-contact or at least sensing their reactions. Unlike classical drama theatre, you never radically depart from an already set form where in each repeat performance you complete (punch)lines of other co-actors from within, or revive them through emotions, gestures, mise-en-scene. And of course, in storytelling you are mostly alone on stage. There is no one to rob you of your energy and focus with their bad performance -and no one to complement you, or set you on fire. That is to say, you accept full responsibility for directing, dramaturgy and acting; for the atmosphere, the development, and your physical presence on stage.

The second key thing in theatre is that by using various, even artificial manners of acting, you may occasionally hide your acting insecurities or even a purely personal problem you might have with conveying words that do not meet your ideology, ethics, emotional world, etc., a problem you get when you cannot fully grasp your text or in a way agree with it. Storytelling gives you a much more archetypal uttering point, similar to the role of a clown or a court jester. By clown I refer to the most thorough meaning of the word; a clown that is loyal to their original mission, besides the circus image, be it the street or even a theatre stage. Clowns are a non-existing medium if they resort to self-censorship, if they castrate themselves to become entertainers, if they do not cut into taboos, upset the crowd, or simply cause deep wonder or frustration.

The clown may still use their trademarks from popular culture, such as cheap laughs, standalone jokes, juggling tricks, acrobatics, physical theatre, and other such elements. However, all this must only help the audience get entangled in the story and enable the performer to distill their most basic presence, their here and now. This is exactly the reason why I, as the spectator, hold highest regard for storytellers who are able to surpass the dual nature of the story- and the -teller in key moments, when sudden twists or cadenzas of tension take place, when “life lectures” or post scriptums occur. Their story becomes personal and monolith. In theatre it tends to express itself in a far more disperse and less focused way, not simply because there are many more people onstage. Sometimes, as an actor, you just reside within your very clear-cut function and that is possibly your best contribution to the performance, whereas a storyteller cannot avoid their deeply personal, metaphysical responsibility, even in somewhat more easy-going or comical stories.

It is not a matter of identification with the actor in the role of, say, Chebutikyn in Chekhov's Three Sisters. It is a matter of utmost and unhindered trust in the omniscience of a storyteller and their guidance in the dynamic landscape of a story.