

A collage of vintage film equipment. In the foreground, a large, dark metal film reel is prominent on the right, and a smaller, reddish-orange reel is on the left. Below them is a white and black projector with the brand name 'Bauer' visible. The background is a mix of textures, including a brick wall, a window with a view of a landscape, and various film strips and reels.

Storytellers in Europe a Progress Report

Indepth Interviews

Spring 2019

Report: Storytellers in Europe – Spring 2019

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Introduction and the short version:

As part of the European network grant attained by the Federation for European Storytelling (FEST), the federation is to secure the professional development of storytellers in Europe. FEST pursues raising the quality of the storyteller in several ways: the analysis of training needs, the development of a curriculum for training, residencies and performance opportunities for young storytellers and continued professional development for established storytellers.

Strand 3 has since 2017 conducted several actions to increase the knowledge about the European storyteller of today. This document refers to the following actions: an electronic survey, document research, theoretical overview and 20 in-depth interviews with storytellers from all over Europe. This report will mainly concentrate on the in-depth interviews.

This research shows us that the storyteller in Europe today is both an entrepreneur, an artist, a performer, a trainer and a facilitator. This mix of roles is both an advantage and a challenge. The Norwegian ministry of culture published autumn 2018 a document about the status of art in Norway. The document claims that the artist is a measure for a society's changes. When a society is changing, the artist is first affected by the changes. The artist's viability is then a sign of how well a society is doing (Kulturdepartementet, 2018). In our research, we see how the storyteller handle different challenges and are able to create different strategies to survive as an artist. At the same time, we have not met ONE storyteller, who solely work as an artist and perform in different contexts. The storyteller has to use a lot of energy and time to create contexts for his or her own work. For the artform, this is a challenge, because the storyteller are not able to solely focus on developing the artform. On the other hand, this is in line with the new art theory, where the social competence is defined as a part of the aesthetics.

This means, when focusing on training, which is the main task of strand 3, one also needs to include aspects, which normally would be defined outside the artform.

The European storyteller deeply believe in their own artwork, they believe so hard in the necessity of oral storytelling in our society today, that they are willing to do it voluntarily. 30

to 40 years ago, most storytellers came from theatre praxis and defined and practiced storytelling accordingly. Today, storytellers come from a wider background, and look upon technology as an antagonist in their praxis. Storytellers talk about and claim the importance of oral storytelling as an artform that brings something to the society, which the technology cannot.

Looking at the background of storytellers in Europe, we see two strands. One is the minority, where the storyteller functions as a tradition carrier and grew up with storytelling as part of their life. They learned storytelling in their homes. The second strand, the majority discovered storytelling. This strand we can see as three generations: 1. those who discovered storytelling while working with/in theatre. 2. those who discovered storytelling through meeting the first generation and train with these. 3. those who train with the second generation of storytellers.

When it comes to repertoire, the storytellers have either a traditional material (folktales, myths etc.) or a mixed repertoire. This mix can also mean that they tell stories from different cultures. It is “a theme” that guides their choice of stories, rather than representing for instance, their own culture. In the working process towards a performance, the storytellers seem to put more time and energy in the artistic and research phase than rehearsal time. It looks like the work towards a performance is rather more a creative and “intellectual process”, than working with space, gestures etc. Yet, when asked about what competences a storyteller should have, several of the storytellers mention awareness of body and space and other aspects one would find under a performative competence.

The storytellers are working in a varied field, from hotels to libraries and schools. Some very few, maybe a couple, have specialized in only telling for adults, the rest are telling “for those who are willing to listen”. We get an impression that festivals are the top of what you can do as a storyteller, if you are telling at a festival you consider yourself as an established storyteller with quality.

The storytellers get jobs through reputation, to get this reputation you need experience and to get the experience, the storytellers (often) need to do voluntarily or unpaid work.

Strand 3 believes that the storytellers themselves have the solution for creating a better working field. We see that storytellers discover oral storytelling through experiencing other

storytellers performing. This means that FEST should focus even more on creating local arenas for storytelling. However, for this, the storytellers need help with network that can provide skills the storytellers themselves should not use energy and focus on. The networks should consist of both peers, but also producers and facilitators.

Storytellers also need “good reputation” in the sense that they need experience, especially young storyteller. This means that storytellers need steady praxis fields where they can try out, fail, and succeed. We also need steadier jobs; a minority of the storytellers have a steady job. These jobs could be in the education system, in libraries, in the health system, but also in companies of storytellers with a steady income or art support.

In the following, we will first look at the previous actions done by strand 3 and then go more in-depth of what we found through the interviews. Here and there, you will see anecdotes told by the storytellers we interviewed. Through the anecdotes, you get an insight into the praxis of oral storytelling in Europe today. So let us end this part with an anecdote from one of the storytellers:

Anecdote told by storyteller3:

For example, last week, because it happened recently, it was with this Holocaust story, and I was supposed to go the royal national theatre in Stockholm with a survivor. We had not been telling together for a month, and I noticed that her memory is gone when it comes to recent memories, her old memories are intact.

She had forgotten that we were meeting. We had to be on stage together. I had to rework the whole story, and I had to do it in a way, so I did not take the space. It was near disaster a lot of times. In addition, she had much pain, so she was on morphine, so she was high. When we go up on stage, what became clear was the contact between us. I really felt that her story and the contact between us was so vivid and organic. I had nothing but the moments, because she forgot the preparations all the time.

So, I had to dive into the moments and really be there. And it was the best I had ever done. My friend who came to listen, did not want to talk afterwards because they were so touched. You cannot fake it. And that is a strength. (Storyteller3, 2019)

The conclusion of the electronic survey

Anecdote told by storyteller7:

Another thing that I understood is that telling stories and especially to children you must face the fact that the fiction you are telling becomes a truth for the listener and you are responsible of that.

I was performing for children for a long time, a story from Arabian nights, that I loved very much. I was the teller, but I was also the character in the story. I was performing for three hundred children in the theatre. The children believed it was my story. There was no distance. It was I telling my own story, for them. There is a moment in the story it is said a prediction that “I” was going to kill a child. The character (me) was nice with that child and cut him a watermelon with a knife. And the character would trip and fall on him with the knife and kill him. Then it came to that point in the story, the boy was there, the watermelon and the knife. And “I” stumbled.

I heard then in the (real) theatre ‘audience the voice of a boy that stood up and shouted: No! It is not possible! He stopped me in the story so that I would not kill the boy in the fiction. There was a long silence. Three hundred children, totally silent.

I had to stand front stage and talk to the boy directly about truth and fiction, that this was a story. It was not me; it was the hero in the story and his destiny. Now we could continue to see what happens. And the story continued. This really helped me to understand the capacity the power but also the danger of the symbolic language. The children are there, directly in it, there is no in-between. (Storyteller7, 2019)

Autumn 2018 and spring 2019 Strand 3 conducted 20 interviews with storytellers spread all over Europe. These interviews was based on previous actions: an electronic survey, document research and theoretical overview.

The focus of the electronic survey done in 2018 was to get an overview of oral storytelling in Europe through looking at the background of the contemporary storyteller. We saw there were different traditions among the storytellers about how they were trained: where most came from what we could call informal training with many variations. The informal training seems to be a well-rooted tradition among storytellers in Europe, also for the minority who have obtained their training in a formal system. We do not know if this is the result of lack of full-time training or because it is embedded in the storytelling tradition to seek out masters and teachers that the individual teller identifies with.

The survey also revealed additional aspects that need to be addressed when securing the professional development of storytellers in Europe:

- How can the younger generation of storytellers be supported?
- How can a joint terminology within the storytelling community be created?
- How can we open up the future working market for storytellers?

The conclusion of the document research

Anecdote told by storyteller10:

The first that came to mind, was when I was in a temporarily home for families. I was with a women's group. The session with the children was over, and I told them a folktale, a chain tale about a hen that were plucking seeds from the ground at the foot of the gate so long that one day the gate fell down, and then the mad chain of events goes on, the crow plucks out her feathers, the willow tree throws down his branches full of leaves etc.... This story opened up the women so much, they started to talk about the story, but immediately and parallelly, talked about themselves as well. They had a very difficult life and some of them had a husband in prison, and you know ... (Storyteller10, 2019)

The document research was done autumn 2019. Here we looked at course descriptions and curricula existing on storytelling in Europe. The results on the document research was:

- There is hardly any fulltime study in storytelling in Europe
- There is a lack of the use of the term "oral" in the title of the courses
- From the outside the content of the courses seem not to differ, despite that it seems like the different trainings aim at different target groups.
- None of the trainings are on a higher level than bachelor.
- It seems like the formal educations are more contextualized than the informal training. The informal training are more focused on the personal development of the individual participant, except for training aimed at teachers.
- The informal trainings are "not clear" on the learning outcomes of the trainings regarding competences, skills and knowledges.
- Most courses are focused on the practical way of learning, performing and using storytelling.

- Regarding working requirements – one thing is common: the participants have to be present in other storyteller's performances.
- The curricula do hardly mention topics like entrepreneurship and marketing and use digital media
- Evaluation and exams are highly weighted on performing

The conclusion of the theoretical overview

Anecdote told by storyteller11:

For instance, with Gilgamesh, the whole way through, it is a very sparse text. But it is a very dense text. And once you tell that story and you are in that world you see what lies between the lines. So, in Gilgamesh, the business of Ishtar shouting at Gilgamesh and Enkidu .. They have killed this divine bull and she is really angry. And Enkidu throws the bull's hindleg at her ... I suddenly saw it from his perspective, he is being shouted at by this extremely powerful goddess, who challenges everything about them. And they are challenging everything about her. It is sort of a real moment of 'not' meeting. He just grabs hold of this piece of meat and throws it at her. And it splatters her white robe with blood and I found Ishtar was saying 'From this time forward, this (blood) will be a sign of a woman's power over man'. To me it is the absolute peak of an unresolved tension. And that just came in that moment.

But later on, in the same story, there is this great joke, about the poisonous sea, the waters of death, one drop of which will destroy you... Gilgamesh has to cross this water with immense labour, he carefully crosses it has his humbling adventure with his ancestors, and then on the way back, as he decides to return, they come to the beach, and the wife of Utnapishtim who does not have a name, (which is a tragedy, because she is a wonderful character) she says: 'you need to bathe, and Gilgamesh says, 'I can't go into that water', and she says, 'yes, you can'. 'But it's poisonous!' 'No. No, No, ' she says, 'that is just... what we tell people... '

That is not in the text, but when I got to that moment, a long time ago, having told nearly two hours of story, that joke appeared and everybody laughed, and it was the joke that was needed to release all the tension that had built up. And in that moment, I felt, 'yes, somebody 5000 years ago made this same joke at this same moment'.

That is the magical side of a story, you find yourself saying something and you realize that the drama, the tragedy, the shock, the horror, the beauty... whatever it is, is in the story. It is in there, because hundreds of other people have found it. And you find it again. And you just join with all the other storytellers who have been in that world before. So, you are not making it up, it is revealing itself – that it is what storytelling is. (Storyteller11, 2018)

Luis Correia Carmelo did a theoretical research in 2018 and some of the conclusion was:

Some of the factors responsible for the stimulation of oral storytelling and, in particular, for its professionalization in the final decades of the 20th century, are closely linked to a change of paradigm in theatre practices. On the one hand, these factors have enabled a progressive affirmation of oral storytelling in the context of the performing arts, possible due to a tendency towards the narrativity of some theatre proposals. On the other hand, many oral storytellers come from this universe, equipped with the techniques and experience of the theatre, and revealing a vocation that fits into the lifestyles of a freelance artistic and professional activity. .../.../...

The scope of contemporary oral storytelling practices makes essential the construction of a common and all-encompassing theoretical edifice, with analysis models and a critical language able to, on the one hand, consider its specific characteristics within performing arts and, on the other, take on board its diversity of contexts, agents and ways it can be done (Carmelo, 2018).

The in-depth – interviews

The oral storytelling has rather a bleak future the way I see it. The storytellers of today feel they have the right to change and alter the stories to make it more commercially viable as some of them say. By doing that, they are actually losing the story, because they do not know what they cut out of the story, just to make it easier to hear. (storyteller 1)

Strand 3 conducted 20 interviews with storytellers in Europe. Most of the interviews were done face to face online through the platform ZOOM, some face to face in a RL meeting and one was written down by the informant herself. One storyteller declined to be interviewed. The storytellers represented the following countries: Austria, England, Estonia, Finland, France (2) Germany (2), Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Wales. The interviewers were done by Luis Correia Carmelo (2) Mimesis Heidi Dahlsveen (15) and Ragnhild Alette Mørch (3). The choice of storytellers

was based on having a representative group regarding experiences as storytellers and a group representing different backgrounds.

The interviews followed the same interview guide made by the members of strand 3. The interview guide would help strand 3 into a deeper understand of how it is to be a storyteller in Europe today. The interviews would also guide us in forming a start on a curriculum for master in oral storytelling. The interview guide was semi- structured and the interviews was based on a social – constructive idea, where the interviewer and the interviewed together formed the material in a common understanding of oral storytelling. In this report, the informants are called storytellers.

The interviews showed that there is a slightly division between storytellers who sees themselves as traditional carriers and the others who sees themselves as contemporary artists. This small difference can add terms for how to interpret the interviews and how to apply them into further work.

Vision and manifest

We wanted to see how European oral storytellers are positioning themselves in the art form, and asked them about why we should tell stories orally in Europe today. Our storytellers highlight “the human quality” in oral storytelling as an important justification for why one is telling stories orally in our contemporary time:

I really want to remind us that – in a way – we humans are still sitting around a campfire where we are sharing stories, meeting and connecting. .../... Hopefully storytelling can sneak something into the society that is softening or make people see something from another perspective. (storyteller 9)

One storyteller says that to listen in a community makes the listener becoming a part of something bigger. While another storyteller claims that oral storytelling is almost the only

performance art where everyone can experience art in a community that are not too expensive or too advanced.

Many of the storytellers emphasizes the oral communications associated with “being human”, that we must make sure that we can communicate with each other orally: “Teachers at the universities tells me that they go now, not into a lecture room of noisy students, they go into a silent room where people are all engaged on their devices (storyteller 6).”

The storytellers look upon oral storytelling as a meeting where the focus is on the imagination and the ability to create inner images:

.../... we respond to narratives and we generate narratives and we have created an enormous amount of media for distributing those narratives; film, radio, newspapers, books, novels, ballet, theatre... many, many different ways of telling stories. .../... Because it is a verbal art, people’s imagination is fully engaged. It is not like theatre: there, though the imagination of empathy is involved, the audience are still watching what is happening outside of themselves on the stage .../.../... (storyteller 11)

Another storyteller says:

One of the reasons I would say is to make sense of things. To me it is also about keeping the inner space, in your head, in your body, to keep it alive. Quite often we are receivers of stories, but with oral storytelling, what is specific to me, is that you create your own images. That concerns both a traditional tale and a personal story. (storyteller 3)

This storyteller underlines that this happens with both traditional and personal stories, while others emphasize the importance of the symbols provided by traditional stories:

We are growing up in a very boxed world. A world that does not allow variations of thinking, behaving and feeling. But our nature cannot live in these boxes. The folktales really carry this, the folktales embrace the complexity of the world in the simplest symbols. They can easily be digested by people from 2000 years ago to people coming 2000 years after us. (storyteller 5)

Another storyteller also looks upon the symbol language as essential, but seen from a different perspective:

The difficulty is this symbolic world in which you enter, is very far from the audience of today. If you take away the 10% who are addicted to stories and storytelling, the rest of the audience needs to be introduced to this symbolic language. This is our work; we spend a lot of time to seduce people so they get an interest in the symbolic world, symbolic language in which we want to go with the oral stories, in the images, with this openness. So, we spend a lot of energy doing something else, we try to attract people back into the symbolic world, which I think is really needed today. (storyteller 7)

Certain skills are also emphasized, especially related to listening. Listening is seen as an essential part of the communication and is connected with imagination and inner images and symbolic language. Some storytellers emphasize that listening as crucial for children and one storyteller can tell about good experience related to telling for children with special needs. Another stressed the importance of also telling for the elderly, as we live longer.

The storytellers use technology as a calibrator for oral storytelling. The way we understand the storytellers' answers, is that oral storytelling is associated with qualities that cannot be found through technology, the storytellers use words and expressions like *meeting face to face, human, free imagination, listening to each other* while explaining oral storytelling. Another element that can be read through the answers is the social situation in Europe today. The oral storytelling will curb the social and stigmatizing changes the society experiences. For storytellers oral storytelling is a necessity in the society, without this artform, human beings will lose something essential in their way of interacting with others.

Background

Anecdote told by storyteller20:

When it did not go well... I was giving a workshop for teachers who had returned to teaching after a long absence. I told one of those stories where a queen wants to kill two children because they aren't hers and stand in the way of her own daughter inheriting.

She kills them and buries them. A tree grows from the grave, she chops down the tree, a seed falls and someone one swallows it and the children are reborn.

All the teachers in the workshop had just come back to teaching after having children. So, when the children in the story were murdered, I lost every one of teachers, because they were thinking of their own children, and they were thinking of a woman killing babies. I could not get the teachers back. I chose the wrong story.

Sometimes something happens in the news, and I realise it connects with a tale I am telling. Sometimes that is helpful and sometimes it completely changes the story so that the story no longer means what it had meant the day before.

There was a story I liked a lot, a variation of The Companion. At the end of the story, we discover the companion is the ghost of the father of the central character, the father who died in the beginning. When I went to schools, I would say, there is a story I like to tell, it is a story about bereavement, will it disturb any children in the class? Of course, there would always be a child who had lost someone. Eventually I stopped asking the question. I just told the story. I got no complaints or adverse reactions. (Storyteller20, 2018)

When we asked for the first encounter with oral storytelling, the storytellers defined this moment differently, as one of the informants says; there is a moment of conscious and a moment of childhood. Several storytellers mention their childhood, where storytelling was sort of the “normal” activity. One of the storytellers tells that his training as a storyteller started when he was a child:

When I was three years old, my grandfather took me on his knees and told me a story. I had to tell it back to him. He would say: No, that is not the way it was. He would tell it again, and I had to retell it until he was happy. I had to tell the story exactly as he told it to me. This went on for seven years, not only my grandfather, but my granduncles, grandaunts. And elderly neighbours from round about. All of them had stories they told to me.

When I was ten years old, I was allowed to tell a story outside the house for the very first time. After that it was expected that I gathered stories and retold them. I am still doing that, and I have been doing that for 82 years or so. (Storyteller1, 2019; Storyteller11, 2018; Storyteller11, 2018)

Except for meeting storytelling as children, we can see that there are three generations of storytellers in our interviews. First, you have the generation who “discovered” storytelling as an artform without a previous encounter with storytellers; generally, these storytellers come from the theatre:

My background is theatre, Ecole Jaques Lecoq, and my first encounter with storytelling is through Peter Brook, coming back from Africa. Where they were doing what Brook was calling “carpet show”. They were playing the characters and telling an African tale called: “The bone”. That was a big shock because that was exactly what I wanted to do.

So, I did what Peter Brook had done, in my company with a few actors and a musician.

I chose three folktales and we started some carpet shows.

At that time, I met Bruno de La Salle. He had started his idea of being a storyteller, he was alone. When he saw my company perform, he said, this is not storytelling, this is theatre. If you want to know what storytelling is, let us work together. Therefore, my company and me we joined him and we created the Clio, which was Bruno de La Salle’s company, and we worked together for seven years, doing these long epics that lasted the whole nights for the French Radio and the Avignon festival. (Storyteller7, 2019)

In many ways this generation gave an idea on what a storyteller could be, there was very few for these storytellers to compare themselves with:

I started storytelling, really, in 1981. But the first time I encountered the phrase ‘Storytelling’ and the idea of a ‘Storyteller’, was in 1978. That was through a book of stories from Haiti collected by Diane Wolkstein called “The Magic Orange Tree,” (given to me by one of my mentors, PL Travers, the author of Mary Poppins). What really struck me about that book were the descriptions of the storytellers, old women, children, young men... everyone, telling stories on the verandah at night. It was at the moment there that I realized that “Storytelling” could exist. Up to that moment I had really never conceived of a “Storyteller”. The idea was completely new. It was the first time I recognized something called storytelling ... (Storyteller11, 2018)

Many of our storyteller, who we can call first generation of storyteller came from the world of theatre and launched storytelling into their communities:

When we returned to Ireland, I wondered whether there might be an audience for stories in Dublin? I knew there was an audience for live traditional music. But I had never heard of stories being included. But I had a sense that the two were connected. It was summertime. Dublin was the European city of culture, and there was a little bit of money going around. We went to the office and they gave us a small amount of money for posters. We programmed four weeks of concerts each Saturday evening, with anybody I could think of; anybody I thought who might be able to tell a story. It was to be music and stories together. The title of the November with the title “So what is the Story?”. At that time in Dublin, instead of saying ‘hello’, people would say “what’s the story?”. Then they would know what we were talking about. We booked a music venue, and I remember saying to the barmen: Whatever you do, be quiet, you cannot serve drinks when the telling is going on, because people will not listen. Word got around and people came, there were queues, people came and there was not a word out of them listening to the stories, but as soon as the music would start, they would begin talking and chatting. That was a wakeup call. There was an audience and there was an interest. So that is how it really started. November became the time that we would focus on the stories, which is a good time, because it is before Christmas. In the olden times, the tradition says, in Ireland, that storytelling would take place from November to May. (Storyteller6, 2019)

The second generation of storytellers discovered storytelling through other storytellers:

It was when I first met António Fontinha (Portuguese Storyteller). Then I knew about storytelling as an artistic practice, a professional activity and above all as a tool I could use in my work as a librarian. But I had always experienced storytelling: at home there were always people telling stories, specially my grandmother. (Storyteller17, 2019)

The second generation also trained with the first generation of storytellers, and in that sense a foundation for a specific view and discourse of oral storytelling was placed:

Well, I’m autodidactic, I learned for myself, and like I told it, sentence by sentence, word by word. And then I came to Ben Haggarty and not only – I had no more stories to tell, because I could tell the stories only in German, and English people don’t understand German very well, so I had to translate the whole stories. Here it was, for me, like the Seven-League Boots. So, I learned not to translate a story, but to go with the feelings and with my inner film. To tell this, and to try to find other words to

describe something, because I don't have the word in English. So, I learned to feel the stories more than to tell them word by word. (Storyteller18, 2019)

The second generation of storytellers seems to come from a broader background than the first generation of storytellers, like education and library, in addition to theatre. There is also a third generation of storytellers who trained with the second generation of storyteller. In one way, one can see that storytelling has been more institutionalized in the third generation of storytellers:

In Hannover I did a training with Jana Raille, it was a little bit over one year every month for four days. But she is not doing this in that way anymore. .././.. After that I met Kristin [Wardetzky] and we were telling stories in the same place and afterwards she said "you should come to Berlin". And I went to Berlin so I also did the training at the UdK. Before that, I also did a week training with Suse [Weisse] and I was always looking for training, I was in Remscheid, I was always looking for some training when I started different ideas. (Storyteller15, 2019)

Among our storytellers, we also find those who are "outside" or define themselves as outside "this modern institutional of oral storytelling":

As mentioned before, I grew up in living tradition. Those people who were my examples, were naturally gifted storytellers. Nobody had learnt how to tell a story. I think that some of them do not even know how good they are. They are just what they are. But with trainings there is always the danger of levelling or sort of standardization.

But then - how to become a good storyteller? People have asked me often this question. My answer is: look and listen to the good tellers. Find out, what it is that makes people listen. Observe what it is that people listen to, is it the person or the story or is there something else going on. I like the medieval principle of masters and their teaching – first 7 years of apprentice time, then 7 years of journeyman's time and then another 7 years and finally, you understand how much there is still to learn. :0))

(Storyteller12, 2018)

When studying the background of the European storyteller we can see that it has evolved a system, that has led to "schools". These schools have led to a discourse and an idea about what oral storytelling should and should not be.

Employment

Anecdote told by storyteller19:

The second time was in a French bank. And at places like that, there's always a table where the chief mogul sits with the secretary, right? Companies always have this table for the top dog along with the secretary. And they refused from the very start – I told the story, and after three minutes, he got up, went over to the stereo and turned on the music, saying that they wanted to dance now, they were done with listening. And I stood my ground and kept telling the story through to the end. Then the musician wanted to get out his violin but I told him, 'You can keep it in the case, the two of us are going home,' and the event organiser gave us our pay and said, 'Yes, you go on home, they've already spent the whole evening smoking out back with the service personnel and are pretty wasted by now;' so they gave us our cash and said we could leave. The whole performance was over in five minutes. *[Laughs]* But luckily, that kind of thing happens very, very rarely, moments like that.... (Storyteller19, 2019)

One of the topics we asked the storytellers about was work and here we see the entrepreneurship in full-blown. Storytellers in Europe today are very much depending on creating their own work. Yet, on the other hand, there is a tendency that storytellers define "themselves as storyteller" based on performing at storytelling festivals. To be invited to an international festival becomes the definition of the quality of a storyteller.

The storytellers have a varied working field:

So... I have to work, like most of the other storytellers, with a complete mixed bag. I have to be able to tell stories in schools, in theatres, in folk clubs, in festivals, in literature festivals, in museums, in heritage, occasionally for private individuals. And I supplement all of that with teaching. Any corporate work I do, I would also file under teaching, because I'm normally being brought in to introduce storytelling to business people or work teams. But I don't actually do much corporate work because I keep being asked to do it for companies whose ethics I don't like. I just say 'no', most of the time. I did once say 'yes' to a major global company because I needed the money. But it left a bad taste in my mouth, so afterwards I offered two days free training to young storytellers in Bristol... (Storyteller11, 2018)

Some very few of our storytellers has a steady job as a storyteller, most of them are performers, producers, facilitators, artistic leaders etc.:

One of the contexts is as a producer of Storydox, otherwise as a teller I both do this Holocaust stories, a lot are in schools, but also in Churches and organizations for old people. Last week we were at Dramaten, the royal national theatre. So, it can vary a lot what kind of stages this is at. We do a lot of storytelling raids (berattarrazzia), like storytelling in schools. And I also quite a lot of horror stories for youths. Otherwise it could be other types of events. Like a company is doing something and they want to highlight it in a way or a someone has a party and they want a storyteller as a present. (Storyteller4, 2019)

There seem to be some system concerning employment. First, to acquire jobs, the storytellers need a network. Only one of our storytellers has an agent. The storytellers get jobs through networking; either it is a public network like in France:

There are two main possibilities, one is to go the festival Avignon in France, there you hire a place and you perform every day for a whole month. You invite professionals to come, they see the show, and perhaps they buy it. You can do the same in Paris. That is the major way of promoting a performance.

Otherwise you perform in festivals. In France, very often, when you have the money to make a new show, the moment you do the show, you invite people who can potentially buy it. (Storyteller7, 2019; Storyteller7, 2019)

Alternatively, it is a network the storyteller themselves has built up: “And now I have many things regularly, organizers who book me every year or twice a year. But I am really home in my area, not like you who travel around the world, also because of the languages. But I have a really good network in Thüringen. (Storyteller15, 2019)

The young storytellers also realize the importance of network for getting jobs:

First of all, I started a group of storytellers. We call ourselves StorySquad, so we are four girls and we started up in January 2018, so we are still super fresh and we started the group because we wanted to make group stories. And then we attended the young storytellers (FEST) and that is when we actually started, because after this, the get together with young European storytellers, we were invited to the folktale festival in

Kea in Greece. And then we made a duo, me and Suzanne a performance about the Ashlad. We got really massive feedback from this, both from the storytellers there, they said it was something they had never seen before. And also, the medias at home, a lot of newspapers wanted to talk to us. After this, we started “Hva snakker du om?” which is like a night for students (at the university) where you can come and have a beer and hear different stories. Every night has a different topic. It was really popular. We also do group stories with all four of us. We do duo stories with two of us. And single stories with one of us. We want to cover the whole range with folktales and myths and personal stories. We want to do everything. (Storyteller16, 2018; Storyteller3, 2019)

When storytellers get jobs, they either sells projects/performances or competences. The second thing the storyteller needs, according to interviews, is a good reputation or a name, which also could mean that they need experience. To get this experience, they have to facilitate their own arrangements either it is festivals, cafes or the like. This means that the storytellers also become producers or/and artistic leaders. Also, some of the storytellers goes into the more voluntarily work, to get the experience they need: “And for example, yesterday, I did voluntary storytelling for homeless people who wanted to have a feeling of Christmas celebration. These were 80 – 90 people getting shelter in a temporary home. (Storyteller10, 2019)” For this storyteller the voluntarily work led to a grant:

One year ago, or more, I received a 3-year scholarship from the Hungarian Academy of Arts, so I started teaching storytelling for primary school and kindergarten teachers, as well as librarians, this is one pillar in the scholarship program. This program focuses on that part of the countryside where I come from, in the North-Eastern corner of Hungary, so most of the work will be done there. It is the poorest part of Hungary and compared to Budapest, there is a much lower variety of programs available there. (Storyteller10, 2019)

Among our storytellers, the focus is not a lack of work, there is a lack of audiences:

I’m on a mission. And from the very beginning, my mindset has always been that we have to first and foremost create an audience for storytelling. I have always, from the very beginning, worked with other people. In conversation I often say ‘we’, so it is either the Company of Storytellers or the Crick Crack Club, I’m referencing. I don’t feel I work alone. I’m part of a larger entity. (Storyteller11, 2018)

There is also a lack of specializing among storytellers, except for two who mainly performs for adults.

The storytellers do a lot of different work that demands different skills outside what one would expect from other art forms. This is both a plus and challenge. The challenge is that it takes time and energy from what the storyteller really wants to do: to perform. On the other hand, it makes the storyteller skilled in a reality that probably many other kinds of artists also have to face.

With the focus on climate changes, which might reduce the ability to travel, there is a need to strengthen the storyteller's ability to work locally.

Repertoire and creative process

Anecdote told by storyteller18:

I hate to go to birthdays, to be invited to them as a storyteller, officially invited. It's a gig. And for me, it's very hard, I hate (hating is too much...) For me it's very hard, because maybe the birthday kid says, 'Come and tell stories.' Well, I don't know how the guests think. Last year I had a performance and the birthday celebrant invited me to come and she said, well it's my birthday, but my husband, he loves Heinrich Heine. Please, can you tell a little bit from Heinrich Heine?' So, I really tried to bring it together, to bring both together, to tell some stories for her, about maybe brave women **and** to tell Heinrich Heine. Well of course Heinrich Heine loves women, but he always is at a distance to woman, yeah? He worships her, he wins her, but there's no **real** heart's love. So, I tried to bring it together and for me, it was a wonderful performance because I'd tell a story for her and I'd tell Heine and how they were woven together, I could realise, ah – Here, all the men were: 'Well, yeah, good! Great, I like it!' and with the other story, all the women were like, 'Yes! Yeah, that's living, that's life!' And it was good. It was great to see, ('women are from Venus and men are from Mars') to see both, and to find a way in the moment where both respect the other gender.
(Storyteller18, 2019)

Storytellers are always on the look for stories; it is like a habit that comes with the trade. They are listening and reading and both actions serves as sources for their materials. In addition, most of our storytellers are using their own life as a resource for their repertoire. The

storytellers do not think so much on the sources; they are rather thinking about themes, this means that they often do not concentrate their material around on source, for instance one specific folktale collection, but rather around one theme, like death. This might be based on demand: “Often it is like a commission and look for stories of that I want to do. (Storyteller3, 2019)”

Most of the storytellers are both local and global as we can see through their repertoire. Yet, there are some few who primarily use their own background: “The Estonian Folklore Archives. Collections of folk stories. The stories from my own family. People with their stories. Life around us. (Storyteller12, 2018)” Most of our storytellers use a mix in their repertoire; it is either a mix of cultures or a mix of traditional and personal:

It is partly Finnish traditional and mythological material, like Kalevala and the heritage connected to Kalevala. In Finland we have really good archives of Kalevala and folklore and folktales, recorded and written down over the years. Another big part is my own life, experiences of my own life. I use both for my performances. (Storyteller2, 2019)

Among the younger generations of storytellers, we see that internet plays a big part in their search for stories:

But I also use the internet a lot. I have to say that internet has helped my repertoire a lot, especially folktales from African and American- Indian tradition. And of course, storytelling performances, I get a lot of my stories from listening. It is important to be a part of this oral travelling tradition, oral travel stories. (Storyteller5, 2019)

One of the very experienced storytellers also underlines the internet as a research source that has increasingly turned better and better:

The internet has become particularly good for Greek myth and increasingly for Irish and Norwegian myths. A lot of good people have been putting up cross references, so it has been easier to find obscure bits of prayers or sentences. So that is really fun. And I make obsessive piles of books and huge digital documents on my laptop. (Storyteller11, 2018)

When it comes to the process of working with the story, we can divide it into a creative/research and rehearsal period. For the creative/research period, there seems to be some common actions the storytellers do to prepare the story or a program for a performance:

- Telling – the storytellers start quickly to tell the story, either to themselves, or to some close to them, to try out and test the story
- Intertextuality – the storytellers try to find as many variations of the story as possible to build up their own version
- Different ways of breaking the story down
- They focus on the inner images
- They focus on using their own language, their own words.

There is only one storyteller who claims that one should be true the “original source”.

How much work and time the storytellers use on one story or one program depends on how the story goes, how they found the story and for what context they are going to tell the story. One storyteller says that he for example has used over twenty years with one epic, still working on it. Most of the storytellers prepare a story as a solo work; there are some few examples where the storyteller work with a story in a network, but then mostly to test it out.

In our interviews, there seems to be much more weight on the creative/research period, than the rehearsal period. Some do not rehearse at all. One of our storytellers has taken the tradition from the theatre into the process with a storytelling performance:

I worked as a theatre company that means for me, I always work with a group of artists around the performance, or there is someone else with me on the stage like a musician, very often. That means a theatrical form, at once you have two persons, you look at the space, at the sound and the costume. I always look at the question of style. What style does the story require to be on the stage? There are laws of the theatre on the stage, the space, the light, the sound, the intensity, the dramaturgy, all these I have been helped by people. I use dramaturge, sometimes stage director. Quite often I use people of the movement. That was my education from Lecoq. I really like when people look at the bodies and help me moving. For example, I remember working with a choreographer and she said to me: You never use diagonals. And I said: What? No, you always stand

in front, so now you are going to work on diagonals, and show your back to the audience. That was a revolution for a storyteller. I really liked that. (Storyteller7, 2019)

This is, according to our interviews, a rarity. It seems like most of the storytellers has built up a performing repertoire of gestures and movements, a scenic bio, which they use when they perform.

One of questions, concerning the material was, *how do you deal with stereotypical imagery and motifs?* Most of the storytellers are aware of this. One of the storytellers says that this was the reason for “for why I stayed away from these (traditional bmrk. Dahlsveen) stories for a long time. (Storyteller9, 2019).” In this question, we see how most storytellers use their own moral compass in working with the story:

If a story is offensive to me, I do not tell it. If a story has moments that are offensive to me, I try to change them. So ... Orpheus is one of my favourite stories, but in the original, when Eurydice dies, Orpheus spends the rest of his life pursuing young boys. Up to that point Orpheus is a character for whom we feel great sympathy. As soon as he pursues young boys he loses our sympathy, and nothing he does after that will win us back. I think the rest of the story is so wonderful and moving and human, so I dropped that section. That behaviour was accepted in the time when the story was first told, but is no longer appropriate.

In another story, from Chaucer, a knight rapes a woman. As a punishment, the knight is given the task to find out what women want most. Today, if he rapes a woman he is lost to the audience. It does not matter if he learns and grows during the rest of the story. The audience will never sympathise with him. So, I changed the story so that he humiliates a woman in front of a crowd. He still does a shocking, awful thing, but not as awful as a rape.

I tried to find an action that has the equivalent social standing in our society now as the rape did in 1400.

If a story is offensive, if it offends me, I will probably not tell it. But if there are only elements that are offensive, then I try to change them so that part of the story serves the same function as it did in the past, but through different means. (Storyteller20, 2018)

Yet, the storytellers are aware that their own opinion might differ from the opinion of the audience:

It is a very delicate question. Before telling a story, I am not only thinking about the symbolic level, but also what are people going to hear on a more basic level. What is going to happen here and now? Sometimes I use myself as a door to some problematic moments of the story. Or I take distance. I try not to change it, but I try to make possible or acceptable or meaningful. Sometimes it works. I have stories that I still do not tell because they are too problematic in the world of today. I am attracted but I do not know how to deal with it, for example if I take Bluebeard that I am fascinated by, I still do not know how to deal with this man killing these women, I do not know. I do not know how to tell it, perhaps one day I have a flash and I will understand something, where I feel I can get the audience to feel what is behind, not the stereotype, then I will try to do it. Still there are stories, like the Companion, a classic for me now, at the end, when the man whips the woman; it is very problematic for a lot of women. I had a lot of talks around it, but I still tell it. But it is problematic, so my way to handle it is to let people understand that it is problematic to do that. It is not just in the story, it is something I do not understand myself. Sometimes it works, sometimes less. It is an important search and not just to drop it. But try to deepen it. (Storyteller7, 2019)

On the creative/research level, the storytellers put a lot of work to build a story, a process that covers ethical and aesthetical elements. When it comes to the rehearsal, they do not seem to plan so much the performance for instance concerning voice and gestures, here they seem to trust their own developed style. This might also be due to the performance setting and that storytellers perform once in one setting/space, before they move to a new space. To plan a performance might then be an obstacle in their flexibility.

Performance setting

Anecdote told by storyteller 14:

Once I was in a very small village. There were just ten people, all adults. And I did my storytelling. I felt, oh so few people, it is not going so well. But then in the end ... the story ended with a song ... All of a sudden, I could see in the eyes of the people ... after the song, one of them ... They were all elderly ladies, she said: I know a song similar to that and she began singing. Then another one said: I know a story that is similar to yours and she told a story. And it became like a circle of singing women, all of them began telling stories ... And I felt wonderful. (Storyteller14, 2018)

Storytellers perform in different kinds of settings. When they enter the space, where they are going to perform, the feeling and the connection with the story and the audience is central:

What I usually do is that I get a kind of feeling from the audience. Then I start telling and when I am telling it is as if I am seeing the story, it is acted around me. I tell according to that, so the words might not be in the same position each time I tell. It is the same story, but not the same words. If I am in the middle of the program, I can suddenly change the scene, and I will change the scene. (Storyteller1, 2019)

Some of the storytellers prepare the performance setting down to details, like visiting the locations to see how they can use the “stage” actively in the performance a week before and the like. The clothing is part of this preparation. The storytellers are very conscious about how they present themselves. Some use occasionally specific costumes:

It depends on the program. For example, on Sunday, I told in a castle, and I wore a medieval costume because I thought it suited very well, and I felt very good in that. Sometimes I tell as I am, and sometimes ... it depends on the audience, if it is adults or if it is children. I had a program with a local legend, about the “Morgenröte”, the aurora. In that program I wore something lightly orange, so according to the story. So, I tried to match with my program. (Storyteller14, 2018)

For the most time, the storyteller does not use specific costumes, but they are aware of what they wear:

I took my mother-in-law to see a storyteller who played five different instruments very well throughout during the performance. He also sang and told stories beautifully. At the end she said:

‘He was very scruffy wasn’t he? He could have made an effort.’

Ever since then, I have thought, if people have paid to come and see me, then the first impression ... even though it does not mean a lot to me, it means a lot to some members of the audience. I do not want to lose them the moment I walk straight out on stage. So, I try to dress more formally than I would offstage. But I don’t wear costume. I don’t dress in a way that indicates the culture of the story. At festivals I try to be able to stand

out from a distance. Brighter shirts create a focus in the open or in a big tent.
(Storyteller20, 2018)

The focus in the space, the place where the storytellers performs, should be non - distractive:

In general, I am concern with visibility (if people can see me comfortably and if a can see them), I try to be at a good spot in the space (ex. Not having the door close to me so people would not enter or leave and distract us), have my back protected... I try to have the fewer elements of distraction as possible. (Storyteller8, 2019)

Well, when I go into a space, usually there's already a stage there, so the situation is already set up. I just make sure that I have a calm background, that when you are facing forward, nothing terribly wild is hanging around on the wall behind me. The chairs are usually also already set up. If not, then I just see to it that the people will be facing a calm background wall. Or if there's a wall of windows, I arrange it so that I'm looking out the windows and the people are facing the wall, not toward the windows.
(Storyteller19, 2019)

The sound is of importance and generally, the storytellers want to see their audience and want to be seen:

The first concern is the sound. And will I be able to have a commanding point of focus. So, how big is the stage? How far away is the front row? How far away is the back row? What is the temperature, what is the light? Everything is there. The ideal is that the storyteller - who is going to hold the centre of attention - can operate as freely as possible from that position without having to fight against either inappropriate scenery, or an inappropriate echo or acoustic or a concern that perhaps the audience is freezing cold and uncomfortable.

Interestingly, where one can create the performance space, meaning having some choice in where you move the chairs, almost every storyteller I know moves the front row. And it is to find a position where they feel they can sense the audience –not be too close to dominate or not to be too far away so they feel they are straining to reaching them. And it is quite striking how many storytellers that have a chance to move the front row, do move it. Even sometimes just by five or six inches. And I do not know if that is really going to effect the audience, but it makes them feel that they own the space and can command it. It is quite striking – I think the positioning may relate to the storyteller's height! We do a lot of work in village halls, and when you start from zero and have a

choice about where you are going to stand, each storyteller will really have a subtly different preference.

For me, the thing that I like least, is to have a door or an entrance behind me or to the side, because the audience see what I haven't seen first. So suddenly I don't know what is going on in the room and might lose command. If you are on stage and somebody comes in late, and you are 'in character', the character cannot see the person coming in the door. If you happen to be in narrator mode, it's easier, you can step aside and invite them to sit down. But this can be quite disruptive if it is a door or an entrance, or window behind the storyteller. Quite often, if I have the option, I will reorientate the space, and it probably has something to do with the door.

But fundamentally it is the sound that is most important for me. How loud am I going to have to be, if I go quiet, will the back row hear? (Storyteller11, 2018)

Sound and eye – contact are dominant factors, yet, as some of the storytellers underline, the different spaces, demand different skills. Working in a theatre demands skills in light and sound and usually the storyteller do not have these skills themselves and need to work with technicians.

Other areas/artists

Anecdote told by storyteller12:

It starts from a point where the situation didn't flow at all.

I went to a faraway corner of Estonia to tell stories in a school. It is late autumn, early morning, dark and dirt and rain. 4 hours of driving. I arrive to this little school, a bit late, I hear the bell ringing. The teacher sees me to the door of the hall, pushes me inside - and disappears. And there I am with 40 kids raving inside. Some of them quite angry, even hitting others, they are hitting back. Someone is shouting, another child shouting to stop the shouting, some just having a loud talk. And I entering, saying hello. Nobody cares who am I, why standing here. Standing and thinking: 4 hours of hard driving and now this....

I felt so sorry for myself. If I had more time, I would have sworn that it would be the last telling in a school. But I had not time for that. I needed to survive. So, I started talking as to myself, quietly: „Oh my, why did I come here, no one here to listen to the stories or fairy tales. But why they do not want to hear the stories? Maybe nobody has

ever told them a story...” I noticed some children started to look who was mumbling there. Came closer and I continued, a bit more loudly.

„If I had a school or if I were a principle I would not have teachers at all.”

Now I saw more and more children turning to listen – wow, a school without teachers!!! And so, one after another they arrived.

I continued, more loudly: „Yes I only had storytellers in my school. And can you guess what would be the home work at my school?” Some more children coming closer ...

„Children should retell those stories at their homes.”

At this point I understood that everything can still fail because I saw the question on their faces – but who will listen to these stories? And I added, quickly:

„No-no, darlings, not every child can go to this school, but only the children whose parents make a written promise to listen every single evening the home work of their children. And they have to tell stories at their turn as well. It will be the rule that every evening, from 7 to 9 parents listen to their children, have discussions, tell stories. They even have to sign a paper to respect this rule. Like this!”

There was silence in the big hall, everybody listened. Then I asked:

„What do you think could I manage to create a school like this? This dream, will it come true?” And there again, they were shouting: „No, no, no way, it will not work out!”

Again – so close of failing, a double failure, probably my last story telling ... but then I noticed a little boy who was saying something different – at least it seemed to me.

I hushed the others quiet and asked the boy: „I did not quite hear what did you say. Please, repeat it!” He repeated: „If you really want it, your dream will come true.”

All the others turned around to look with a big surprise their school mate. „You see, children, it is like this in real life as well. There are people who say Yes! and others who say No! There are people who take away the hope and there are others who feed the hopes. Can you tell me, why it is easier to tell No that to tell Yes?”

And now those children were ready to listen. Sometimes a story teller could even pay for the audience like this. And that is how this morning turned out to be a very good morning in my life, about 7-8 years ago. (Storyteller12, 2018)

Many of the storytellers perform together with other storytellers, occasionally storytellers do work with people from other areas like dancers, painters etc.:

Yes. I worked with a couple of girls who played the fiddle. I have worked with a painter, an artist who paints the things as it happens. I have worked with an Indian dance troupe who danced the story of Mahabharata. They asked if I knew a Celtic story that parallels a story from Mahabharata. I was telling the Celtic versions of Mahabharata. I was telling in the front and they were dancing behind me. I like trying different things. I think one should always try different things, and if it does not work, one should move to something else. (Storyteller1, 2019)

One of the storytellers points out an interesting thought concerning working in different contexts:

I have worked with objects, a lot, mainly in museums and art galleries and to a degree in heritage sites like castles and famous homes. I often work closely with an object or a sculpture or a statue and, in drawing attention to an aspect of the object which is a part of a story, or when working with paintings in galleries, I sometimes feel that I can be working directly with the artist or maker even though they are no longer alive. I have to really understand how to marry my story with what they have given. So, I adapt a lot. On the whole, I prefer to adapt to the artist, rather than force the artist to adapt to me. Because in that adaption I find myself doing something I would not have done otherwise. That keeps things fresh. There is a lot of learning which comes from yielding. ...I know how to change my words very easily, how to create a whole new scene if necessary or how to cut the story, or shorten it, I can do all that very swiftly ...

That is my job. I like to respond to what the other person is giving, or what is being offered by the object. (Storyteller11, 2018)

Almost without exception, storytellers work with either music or musicians. We can see in the tradition that there is a connection between music and storytelling, you have for instance the bards, and many traditional stories has a song or a rhyme inside the story. There is even quite a lot of stories with the theme: musicality, like stories about musicians or stories about music.

Some of the storytellers are also themselves musicians:

I play music myself. Today I play “hackbrett” and flute and I also have a musician that plays the zither and we play together. Sometimes she plays on her own and I do the telling, and then we play together. So, it is a mixture. But it is more exhausting for me, because I am not a musician. I am ok, but I am not a professional. It is exhausting for me to do that, but people like it and I also like it the more I do it. (Storyteller14, 2018)

However, it is crucial that the musicians one work with understand or are willing to understand oral storytelling:

My main experience is with music. I had during my 30 years as a storyteller, four or five musicians as really serious partners. I always worked with them on an equal base. We would select the material together; it would be a joint attitude towards the material. We worked the text and the music as a whole, from the choice to the form. In the duos that has been most successful, it has always been a tandem work, choosing everything, the style, the sound, the instruments, the music, and the words. The musicians have always to say something about your telling, they are extremely accurate. They do not want to play the music if they do not like the story. It is a very good partnership. A good musician who is interested in storytelling is an extraordinary partner for me. It has been like this and it is still today. (Storyteller7, 2019)

Music is a natural part of storytelling; it is often a theme in festivals. Yet, there are quite a lot of different ways of working with oral storytelling/music. This would be an interesting research topic for the future.

Training and education

Anecdote told by storyteller9:

A woman from Afghanistan who had been in Netherlands for four years. I asked a group to tell a moment in their life that really made them happy. And she said, ah it is nothing, it is really nothing. I asked her to still tell that moment if that was OK with her. And she told about when she was working in a place where they remake clothes. She remade a shirt for a man. The man came back, put it on, and a big happy smile appeared on his face. It was a perfect fit. That made also me happy, because after she told it she did feel that she shared something precious with us. (Storyteller9, 2019)

In the electronic survey, we saw that a big part of the income for storytellers was to run workshop and train others. In the in-depth – interviews we see that not all of the storytellers are interested in doing training with others or they try to limit this as much as possible.

Of those who train others, there is a lot focus on newcomers and people who can use storytelling as an applied tool:

Yes, enough. I train on summer courses for teachers, on courses demanded by parent's associations, on colleges courses for young people and at the university, teaching librarians.

In my company I also do training. I tutor people who wants to prepare repertoire (ex. have worked with a Chemistry teacher who wanted to prepare repertoire to use in the class; I have worked with a woman with cancer who wanted to prepare a story to tell about it), for parents and grandparents who wants to develop a little bit their storytelling competences, for people who want to develop their writing, for traditional poets "bertsolaris" who wants the develop their narrative skills, for people who want to start work professionally on oral storytelling... (Storyteller8, 2019)

Some of the storytellers have regularity teaching jobs they do like in a drama school or for librarians.

As it is a lot who do training and courses for newcomers, this reflect what they think should be the outcome of their training:

- Making the participants realizing they have a story
- Strengthen them so they dare to tell
- Discover their own voice
- Creating a safe space
- Believe in the power of a story and storytelling
- Storytelling techniques

One of the storytellers explains why he has only been training newcomers up to recently:

For years I have been teaching a beginner's storytelling course, but until recently, I have never felt I had much more to offer. Now I think I might have something to say that is not just replicating what people taught me when I began. (Storyteller20, 2018)

Two the more experienced storytellers train other storytellers and says this about their training:

I think there is a need of awareness that you are going to be the one who speaks in front of the audience. You could in one way say it is a pompous situation. Why would I speak to people? If you want to speak, to tell stories, it is not just because you love stories, it is also because you want to transmit something. You want to share something. So, there is an awareness of the audience that means of the community, of the culture, of the world. This awareness is something really important for me. That means that you have to raise independence, curiosity, truth, honesty.

There is something in the position of the person that I find extremely important. When I was working with my Labo, I was very often raising the question of sincerity. How can you reach, first inside yourself, and then in the performance, a sincerity? Not all the skills that you are going to develop are going to mask this sincerity. But are really going to make it larger, so you can share it. Some people can do it on a very small audience; some people can do it with a big audience. This awareness of your own limits, your skills, what you have to learn more, and what you have instinctively understood. It is tricky to share these questions, because it is not something you can teach people, it is to raise their awareness of what they need for this incredible position of a storyteller to be in front of an audience.

I think I am more the type of raising questions than teaching.

I am always searching to understand in oneself this really strange or peculiar position of choosing to be a storyteller. (Storyteller7, 2019)

For me, it is essential to discover how to make a contact between the imagination and the words which ‘translate’ that imagination. So, all the work I do is on this moment of translation. First, I need to really experience the story world – which is not just in the head – and then try to communicate it economically and effectively. A long time ago, Abbi Patrix, pointed out something very good, which has helped me. “I can see everything, but I cannot say everything.” So, this thing that *selects* – which I would call, if you like, the dramaturg - that is ‘The Storyteller’. It is the decision maker, it is deep inside.

So, the first work is to be able to enter the story world. You have to learn how to do that. It can be taught, but you have to experience it and find out for yourself how to do that. Then you have to be able to assess what the audience need to hear, because you are becoming this bridge, this mediator. Therefore, for each audience, it is something slightly different that you choose to tell. You can see it all, but maybe you not going to tell them about this bit, you are going to tell them about that bit. So, the speed of decision-making is for me where the storyteller’s compositional skill really lies.

But you see, I am an advocate of the school of storytelling which says that is an oral art and it is fundamentally the art of pre-literature. So, I am very much a student of Walter Ong's 'Oracy and Literacy', which puts forward the observation that the idea of the repetition of exact words only comes with the advent of literacy – it challenges the idea of set text. So, I am not really concerned with the idea of finding a perfect text that you can then do things with. For me, what is important is finding the moment, what is necessary then. So, I am a high-level improviser, unless I have told a story a hundred times, in which case some of it contains repetition, but ,for most of my big stories, there is no point in learning a surface text.

So, the absolutely primary skills that I try to teach people are to do with understanding how language works and understanding how to choose what you are going to communicate from the story world.

I am really interested in composition.

I am also interested, at a later stage of course, in the clarity of storytelling. So, the economy of language has to move to the economy of movement and the clarity of movement. So, you have clarity in the spoken word, and clarity in the body, in the speaking body.

I am interested in the mimetic. In the mime aspect of choosing to fully realize a character or just suggest them, both of which involve acting skills, and I am not a good actor... What we want ... It is difficult, because what we want is ... something from acting and something from poetry. But what we don't want is bad actors and bad poets – we want good storytellers! A very good actor can show too much in a character, and then the audience starts to watch the performance outside rather than listening to the story inside. How to show enough? It is to do with economy, what can be shown quickly or sketched briefly and then we move on. So, for me, the training of a storyteller is fundamentally in the speed of composition and decision making, both in terms of the words that come out and then in measuring the displacement and movement on the stage – all found, more or less, in the moment .

I am very interested in the idea of a storyteller as a ghost in the story world – as a medium. I am also interested in the geography of a stage – the superimposition of a world on that stage and bringing a story world into a room. (Storyteller11, 2018)

Based on the interviews one could say that very few storytellers train experienced storytellers beyond the newcomer courses. Might this have something to do with that storytellers are not specialized within their storytelling work? The fact that there are so few storytellers that train

experienced storytellers might be a challenge when it comes to creating a master, because who will teach in that master.

Competences

Anecdote told by storytellers8:

Once I went to perform at a library and this kid was visibly anxious and he started to shout: - “Look at me, look at me! Why are you not looking at me?”. I was quite upset - especially because I had this certitude that this aspect of my work (looking at the audience) was impeccable – and I was going to answer him in a bad mood but then I saw such pain and distress in his face that something moved me and I asked him: - “Do you want me to look at you? I will try, ok? Do you help me? Do you warn me when I don’t do it?”. So, after that we were always working at a metanarrative level, which everybody was focus on, observing my play with this one kid. I even changed repertoire (I started to tell stories about these excluded children who have no place in the world...). At the end of the performance the teacher explained to me the kid had this syndrome I do not remember exactly. She said she had never seen him focused on something for so long (50 minutes). So, the fact that I started to “say” to him “I am looking at you” changed everything, and touched everybody in a special way. Everybody was moved by the experience. Everybody was together on that. I felt this was a good experience. (Storyteller8, 2019)

We asked the storytellers about what kind of competences the storyteller needed for the future. We have summoned the replies into the competence headings as formulated by Veva Gerard. These competence areas serve to see what kind of competences are expected of a storyteller to day and for the future:

- Research
 - Have a expertise field
 - Know traditional material – makes you a richer storyteller
 - Know what is happening with you as a storyteller

- Craftmanship
 - Not losing the focus on the story (belongs also under performance)
 - Love for language, know several languages and understand how it connects people
 - Study the awareness of the body and voice
- Artistic
 - Not make a performance into a personal show
 - Having the courage to become a storyteller and tell a story in a certain way
 - take risks as a storyteller
 - stay creative, independent and free
 - Have self-knowledge – why are you a storyteller and what is your mission
 - Developing the skills of image – making, use traditional material to encourage imagination
 - Make a difference
 - Be authentic and do not copy
 - Have a passion
 - Have a personality
 - Engage with the world
 - Be poetic and literate
- Performance
 - Not losing the focus on the story (belongs also craftsmanship)
 - Connect and communicate with the audience
 - Understand the atmosphere of the audience
 - Understand different contexts for storytelling, what kind of story these needs
 - Be flexible and Have a flexible repertoire
 - Meet the audience where they are
 - Love the story you are performing
 - Have good performing skills
 - The general pattern is : economy, clarity, entertainment and intelligence
- Applied storytelling
 - Invite others to become storytellers through your telling

- Training
 - Be aware of all the possible training situations
- Entrepreneurship
 - Making traditional stories relevant for contemporary time – people do not know that oral storytelling exists
 - Make storytelling important
 - Be able to administrate the profession, marketing and managing
 - Embrace the new technology
 - Be able to plan in long terms, understand time and timing
 - Find new areas and audiences
 - Be able to work most of your time

When we are placing what our storytellers said under the areas, we see that the storytellers focus on these main areas: artistic, performance and entrepreneurship. This led us to understand that the storytellers are describing their own reality and what they are missing in their own praxis. Under the theme “repertoire and creative process”, we saw that the storytellers describing their own praxis put more energy in the research/artistic process contra the rehearsal process. Here we see that the response is more even between the areas, but the research process is not in focus. They might think that the competence of research is so embedded in being a storyteller that they do not need to mention it.

Conclusion

Anecdote told by storyteller13:

Many years ago, I was in Damascus to tell stories. It was really challenging because it was a week where I had to teach and everything was different from what I expected. My performance started at eight and then there was another storyteller from Egypt Sherine al Ansary. Then right after the end my plane would leave, in the middle of the night.

I thought, I will tell in English and it is going to be strange for people. I was told that in the audience there was a lot of diplomats and people like that, so I thought rich stuck up people are not going to be a very good audience.

Then it was the exact opposite, people asked a lot of questions, and I told the Lindworm, which I know that Scandinavian people think is a Scandinavian story, Austrian people think it is an Austrian story. In my version of that story, the lindworm gets a bride and she is found dead the next morning. I tell that the king of the neighbouring starts a war to avenge her death. And that's it. But then somebody from the audience asked: Who won the war?

It was something I had never asked myself. Something I had never thought about. And in that moment and in that place, where there ... at that time, when I had heard about censorship and stuff like that ... And I do not know where the answer came from, it was really like ... it just came to me ... without much hesitation .., there was a moment of silence, and then I said: "It was like it is in every war. Many people died in both sides. Everybody lost something."

And then I continued the story. And up today I do not know where that answer came from. It was a gift of the moment. (Storyteller13, 2018)

The reason for why one can place skills and knowledge under "so few" competence areas, might also has to do with the lack of a joint terminology. The theoretical frame of the discourse in oral storytelling is still searching to define itself, and for that reason, we need more research in the field. Correia wrote in his research that the "professionalization in the final decades of the 20th century, are closely linked to a change of paradigm in theatre practices. (Carmelo, 2018)" And maybe oral storytelling in Europe is struggling by being in a limbo between different theoretical discourses, like theatre, literature and folkloristic.

Storytellers in Europe strongly believe in the need for listening to stories told orally, they see themselves as a part of a solution for a better society. Yet, storytellers are struggling in reaching out and be a part of the society in a bigger perspective than the one and one performance they execute in their praxis.

Strand 3 believe that the storytellers themselves have the solution for creating a better working field. We see that storytellers discover oral storytelling through experiencing other

storytellers performing. This means that FEST should focus even more on creating local arenas for storytelling. However, for this, the storytellers need help with network that can provide skills the storytellers themselves should not use energy and focus on. The networks should consist of both peers, but also producers and facilitators.

Storytellers also need “good reputation” in the sense that they need experience, especially young storyteller. This means that storytellers need steady praxis fields where they can try out, fail, and succeed. We also need steadier jobs; a minority of the storytellers have a steady job. These jobs could be in the education system, in libraries, in the health system, but also in companies of storytellers. We might need more ensembles of storytellers.

We should also encourage storytellers to specialize, because in this way we can provide teachers that can educate beyond the newcomer training.

As written before, music is a natural part of storytelling. Yet, there are quite a lot of different ways of working with oral storytelling/music. This would be an interesting research topic for the future.

Storytellers are daring people, because they work within a field very few knows about. How can we exploit this competence in becoming more visible in the society?

Mimesis Heidi Dahlsveen May 2019

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Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union



'This project has been funded with support
from the European Commission. This publication
reflects the views only of the author, and the
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which may be made of the information contained
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