THE CONTEMPORARY STORYTELLER IN CONTEXT:
A STUDY OF STORYTELLING IN MODERN SOCIETY

Patrick Ryan

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Professional storytellers and their work over the past three decades have been acknowledged as a field worthy of study by many scholars. While drawing from traditional sources and abstract concepts concerning what is traditional storytelling, contemporary storytelling practitioners' methods often focus on stories and the act of telling devoid of contexts and the evolution of storytelling in modern society. They rely on out-dated terminology and methods which folklorists have long since abandoned. Similarly, contemporary storytellers and storytelling enthusiasts neglect the past and current influences arising from literature, performance art, and new electronic media in the formation of their identities and their work.

This thesis draws upon current theories in performance, folklore, literature and cognitive science to understand some manifestations of contemporary storytelling. Literary criticism and folklore, particularly, are beginning to make extensive use of cognitive theories to develop a more useful critical language for analysis. The thesis makes use of interviews with professional and traditional storytellers, video and audio recordings of professional and traditional storytellers' performances, and a journal recording and analysing the student's own experiences as a professional storyteller.
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PREFACE

This project arose from personal and professional interests. Growing up in the United States, but living most of my adult life in England, with frequent extended visits to Northern Ireland, produced in me a cognisance concerning personal identity and concepts of home and belonging. As a full-time primary school teacher and part time, semi-professional teller for nine years, and then as a full-time professional storyteller for the past fifteen years, work experiences provided means for exploring and expressing those subjects through narrative. Narrative has been a great interest and primary focus throughout my professional life.

Having the privilege to observe and/or participate in, or even initiate, developments in storytelling and education led me to question my actions and observations, refining practices along the way. Storytelling work has required extensive regular travel in over fifteen countries to perform, lead workshops, and/or conduct research. Exposure to early developments in the North American 'storytelling revival', and participation in the rise of contemporary storytelling in Britain and Ireland, provided me a unique position to see similarities as well as vast differences. Teaching and professional storytelling were also affected by major changes in education, touching aspects of my work particularly in England, Ireland, Italy and America. What most intrigued me was the interrelation between listeners, tellers and texts, with expressions arising from this interplay suggesting universal domains while others appeared culturally specific. This dissertation is a formal step towards fulfilling the desire to explore these observations more systematically, for greater understanding of narratology generally and my own storytelling specifically.

As such, this thesis required a cross-disciplinary approach with readings in cognitive theory, folklore, literature and literary criticism, performance theory, history, and semiology. I originally intended to analyse my own and others' storytelling performances while applying certain theoretical knowledge to those analyses. This analytical process was not meant to compare performances in terms of a criticism, but to
determine cognition involved in storytelling in terms of the contexts in which it was and is embedded. I soon found it necessary to interview the tellers and rely upon a journal I kept recording my own impressions and experiences as a storyteller. These interviews were transcribed for my reference. I also found it useful to collect physical or material data that added knowledge and understanding of contexts: pamphlets, brochures, posters, leaflets, photographs, directories, newsletters, minutes, websites, props and costumes. Rather than quote from the latter and list them bibliographically, there were times I needed to refer to the actual sample.

Therefore I compiled a large and comprehensive archive for this study. Incorporating the relevant materials in this thesis, while at the same time referring to readings in various disciplines supporting my argument, was best served by placing collected data in appendix form. When I wish to support my observations by that collected data, I have directed the reader via footnotes. The two appendices divide the type of data. Appendix I presents selections supporting my thesis from the interview transcripts, analyses of video recordings of storytelling performances, and the observational journal kept during the course of my work. Appendix II presents summaries, descriptions, and/or lists of contents, or actual copies of more physical, and therefore bulkier, data. In this way I hope to facilitate any cross-referencing between my primary text and the appendices.
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Thanks are owed to the Arts and Humanities Research Board, who had faith in my proposal and provided the grant to make this study possible.

Thanks also to Doc Rowe, renowned folklorist whose archive of video and audio recordings of storytelling performances go back decades. Making these available, and sharing advice, knowledge and enthusiasm, did much to provide this project a solid base. Thanks are especially due fellow storytellers: John Campbell, Grace Hallworth, Francie Kennelly, Eddie Lenihan, Hugh Lupton, Taffy Thomas, and Duncan Williamson. They willingly and helpfully agreed to be interviewed, providing important additional data. Thanks, too, to Richard Goodwin who video recorded one of my performances, Professor Peter Hunt at University of Cardiff who provided information on one of his articles, and Dr. Flora Joy who provided me a complete list of all NAPPS/NSN articles, essays, newsletters, magazines and journals. Finally, great thanks to staff at the Learning Resource Centre of the University of Glamorgan who traced requests and provided support with efficiency and friendly encouragement.

Many thanks go to close friends providing advice and encouragement. Liz Weir, Karen Tovell, and Dovie Thomason-Sickles provided much more than sounding boards for ideas and emotional support for finishing the work. Unexpected challenges halfway through the project literally nearly killed off this study and its student. They rallied supportive friends from around the world. There are too many to thank individually. Even so, gratitude requires special mention of Jane Tucker, Chris Pitt, Sheena Masson, Penny Robinson and Ian Atkinson, Chas Brinley, Sonia Ritter, Helen East, Kate
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION: CONTEXTS AND DEFINITIONS.

Part I. A History (and ‘Pre-history’) of Contemporary Storytelling

*The Need for a Critical Language for Storytelling*

The lack of a workable, critical language in contemporary storytelling arises partly because in the past cultural critics ignored storytelling, or took it and its meaning for granted. No language was established to quantify and qualify its development, neither was its history consistently considered or portrayed. Perhaps this was because of its ubiquitous nature, or because rare reports mostly describe it as the activity of women, children, and the elderly: being an activity of the marginalised, storytelling was considered unworthy of serious study (Anderson, 2000; Warner, 1994; Bryant, 1905).

The few scholarly publications remarking upon storytelling were mostly technical manuals, still the most common written discourse *about* storytelling. ‘One problem with how-to techniques is that they treat storytelling as a product. Whether situational, conscious cultural, or platform storytellers, storytelling is a process’ (Birch, 1998, 312). Storytelling as product, as Birch makes clear, is not a satisfactory state for any art form. Any cultural criticisms of storytelling in the past, usually literary or psychological, have focused on *stories* as artifacts to analyse, objects to be manipulated and/or products to sell. Sociological, cognitive and psycholinguistic studies do consider storytelling as a process, but thus far have looked solely at informal, anecdotal and/or conversational oral narrative. Even then, they treat narrative as an artifact exhibiting or leading to an understanding of specific concerns, such as grammatical structures, mental schemata, or expressions of class structures and so on.

Simon Heywood’s study observed that many aspects of contemporary storytelling appear to have no relation to any context, and therefore ‘new’ or ‘sprung out of thin air’, even unusual or odd. Heywood’s initial reaction to contemporary storytelling reflected this, and he posits such reactions are common among arts officers, cultural critics and some audiences (Heywood 2000, 114-6). Negative or resistant attitudes towards
contemporary storytelling result from the peculiar start/stop nature of its development, and disassociation from wider related contexts. The lack of an accurate historiography of storytelling, and reliance upon a selective, mythologised, Romantic view of storytelling, more stereotypical than real, compound the problem. As the folklorist Clodagh Brennan Harvey observed in an interview:

I think a lot of people have a hard time thinking about storytelling. They actually don’t know how to think about storytelling because they come from literary backgrounds or media which have different kinds of representation. They impose certain ideas on it but they don’t actually know what they are talking about.

(Ryan, 1995, 19)

Those long involved in contemporary storytelling observe a constant ‘reinvention of the wheel’, with energies repeatedly involved in definitions and the development of practical skills. Storytelling has long been associated with women and children, and with working or peasant classes. As such, serious study of it has been neglected, with storytelling existing ‘underground’ and outside mainstream cultural reviews; therefore, few chances of continuity existed for establishing the subject’s terms and history. ‘For the art to grow and thrive, it needs a clearer and more specific language that recognizes the history, complexity, and vitality of these strands’ (Birch, 1998, 317). These ‘strands’ are the various forms narrative takes, oral and otherwise, which many contemporary storytellers choose to ignore, argue with, or proscribe through definition. This presents storytelling on a hierarchy rather than a continuum, another aspect that sets it outside current academic discussion of arts, culture, society and cognitive sciences. A clear, helpful critical language requires elimination of false dichotomies and a holistic, cross-disciplinary approach developing accurate understanding of the art’s history and past and current contexts.

Contemporary storytelling, as the identifiable, conscious form participants perceive today, appears to be about twenty-five to thirty years old. This is because contemporary

1 Appendix II. 1.1. – 1.9., Samples of Proposal, Minutes, and Articles from Society for Storytelling proceedings debating traditional storytelling
storytelling on a sizeable scale is a recent phenomenon compared to earlier storytelling movements, though not in comparison to other current practices in popular and vernacular culture. From the viewpoint of storytelling participants, their art and activities have impacted upon these wider practices. Looked at objectively contemporary storytelling’s influence on popular and vernacular, and also ‘high’, culture remains minimal. Where there has been ‘overlap’, for example a greater emphasis on narrative in critical commentary or producer focus, this is as likely from aesthetic developments themselves as from contemporary storytelling activities upon it. Indeed, it could be argued equally that contemporary storytelling arises out of these other movements and is, as it were, another symptom of the zeitgeist.

Simon Heywood and others trace antecedents and influences back one hundred-sixty years (Heywood, 1998). Heywood does not quantify these activities, merely describes them from the standpoint of folkloristic theories; it is possible quantifiable data is not available. Sarah Cone Bryant does mention telling stories in theatres and public halls to adult audiences numbering in the hundreds. (Bryant, 1905, xv-xvi, 108) She and other librarian and educational storytellers of the period mention festivals of storytelling at library conferences. (Sawyer, 1962; Alvey, 1974; Baker, 1977) Alvey and Whisnant outlined the development of storytelling in modern urban society in North America, as part of either children’s education and library service (Alvey, 1974), or popular folk culture over the past century and a half. (Alvey, 1974; Whisnant, 1983)

Perhaps an accurate quantitative study of storytelling in the first half of the twentieth century is impossible, though descriptions hint at activity substantial enough to equal that going on today. Statistics were not gathered at the time of these activities, as is the practice with contemporary storytelling events, either because they were ubiquitous, or mostly in the domain of women and therefore, in both instances, unworthy of comment. Or, equally possible, it was then not common to gather such data. What is definitely true is that lack of a common critical language over that long period meant there was neither motivation nor impetus to quantify the storytelling, nor connect consciously that stream of development to current trends.
Joseph Sobol has recorded professional storytelling development over the past thirty years in North America (Sobol, 1999). Veronika Gorag has defined the appearance of professional, contemporary storytellers in France and several of their colleagues report on similar developments in other nations (Görög-Karady 1990; Rohrich 1990; MacDonald 1999). These and others do struggle with the creation and use of a common critical language. Even so, there remains a tendency to rely on older, outmoded concepts of storytelling such as those derived from Romantic literature and/or Freudian or Jungian psychology, particularly the collected works of Joseph Campbell. There is a need to incorporate more terminology from recent economic and social historiography as well as from cognitive psychology, neuroscience and information technology to provide a truer understanding of contemporary storytelling, placed in a context that is concrete and a major contributing factor to the art form.

The most influential, and well-detailed, popular study describing storytelling is Anne Pellowski's *World of Storytelling* (Pellowski 1977). This presents sentiments still commonly expressed by contemporary storytellers, especially when making hierarchical distinctions between contemporary storytelling for public performance as compared to functional storytelling in situations with specific purposes, educational or otherwise. For an example of this, refer to Ben Haggarty's *Seek Out the Voice of the Critic* (Haggarty 1996); Haggarty proposes two streams of storytelling, the 'courtly' and the 'hearthside'. Pellowski herself admits her approach is that of an author and librarian, not a folklorist, attempting to bridge gaps of understanding between folkloristic scholarship on traditional storytelling and attitudes of modern enthusiasts and professionals taking part in the art. Her work is informative and useful. However, emphasis in one section on what she terms 'the bardic' form of storytelling has been appropriated by some contemporary storytellers to make distinctions that in the long term could prove detrimental to the development of future storytelling. This is particularly so when combined with selective definitions of other philosophies on storytelling.
Folkloristic, Romantic and Nationalistic Influences

These and other studies predicate their storytelling histories on assumptions based on European eighteenth and nineteenth century views about storytelling, storytellers and folk traditions. Folklore studies evolved out of Antiquarianism, both movements of the Enlightenment and Romanticism.

Folklore collectors of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries worked diligently to preserve many of the world's tribal and regional folktale stocks in print, even as those stocks themselves drastically declined or disappeared from living tradition.

(Sobol 1999, 10)

This presumption that tribal or regional folklore needed or was desired to be preserved, based on Romantic ideology, is true in some cases while mistaken in others. Where mistaken, stocks of folktales either did not die out, or did but another stock replaced them, with storytelling acts and events continuing. Alternatively 'traditional oral folk' stock was never there to begin with but actually originated out of, and was always part of, a literary tradition, or an undulating symbiotic oral-literary tradition.

Nevertheless, keen desires to preserve folktales in print resulted from the end of the nineteenth century until the sixties, of making librarians the chief public custodians of that part of our cultural inheritance, a duty they performed in good faith. But as the dominant technology by which we store, process, and experience cultural information shifted from print to electronic media, this situation was bound to change.

(Sobol 1999, 10)

Changes in dominant technologies affect individuals' cognition, as well as sociocultural practices, to all of which contemporary storytelling responds. Yet much philosophy behind contemporary storytelling continues to rely upon shallow, stereotyped, inaccurate past histories to define what stories are and storytelling is. Usually little recognition is given by contemporary storytelling participants to wider, modern contexts influence and create their storytelling, and if this happens it is more often than not a negative response to things modern motivating them. Storytelling is
seen solely as a positive response to today's challenges. Nowhere have I found, in literature on or by contemporary storytelling, the possibility that it is a symptom of a greater malaise in society.

Again, this makes development of a useful critical language difficult, placing contemporary storytelling in a precarious situation if one has no verbal means to assess both its positive and negative points, and any in between. While its practices arise out of current contexts, if the most conscious motivation of participants is rooted in past, out-dated definitions, contemporary storytelling will become more disenfranchised from, and less relevant to, the mainstream, even if now it appears to be strong and more widely spread than in the past. Already there are those, who presumably would be natural allies, disconnected from contemporary storytelling. If in some instances storytelling is an expression of negative factors in human nature and society and, if these are not identified, criticised and corrected, then any positive potential for storytelling in these realms is endangered.

Kay Stone correctly pointed out in studies of current storytelling that many contemporary storytellers came from modern urban backgrounds, mostly possessing professional librarian or teacher qualifications (Stone 1986, 1997). The beliefs and practices arising from such backgrounds inform contemporary storytelling. These include Romantic beliefs, but also nationalistic ones and attitudes concerning class, political aspirations, and social practices. The rise and philosophy of modern nationalism, and nation states based upon linguistic and ethnic ties, was very much tied to the same cultural and social movements forming the roots of Romanticism. So, too, do many liberal and humanistic attitudes informing, consciously or not, contemporary storytelling participants' beliefs and actions, specifically freedom of expression, the importance of the individual and individual feelings, and material and social aspirations.

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2 Appendix I 1.1-1.3. Transcripts of one conference and two interviews, demonstrating folklorists' antipathy to contemporary storytelling.
Heywood's and Sobol's studies emphasise this in their notions of revivalism. They assert this is actually revivalism of the individual and society with storytelling as a means to it, rather than a revival of storytelling and stories as an end in themselves. Not all contemporary storytelling participants have perceived these distinctions, and the general public certainly still view folklore and folktale as something that are 'lost', notionally a good thing 'to preserve' and, ultimately, to use to 'teach' children so as to make them literate but also socially and culturally human.

This expands in a cosmopolitan, multi-cultural modern society to include nationalistic attitudes regarding stories being representative of certain cultures and cultural groups. The educational process is extended to adults, usually described by contemporary tellers as change or transformation, and addressed to such issues as combating racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. Such attitudes evolved out of earlier, Romantic views about narrative and humanity as a whole.

The influence of the Romantics, but of the Brothers Grimm above all, was instrumental in inspiring the collection of folklore on a vast scale and on an international level.

(O'Giollain 1991, 44)

The concept of 'reviving' or 'resurrecting' ancient cultures (nations) suppressed by larger, centralised militaristically aggressive societies was very much a model for the idea of 'lost' and 'dying' cultures as well as oppressed social groups that needed 'recording' or 'saving' and 're-establishment'. The idea of 'educating' the young and society at large through narratives and past traditions is one of long standing, predating Romanticism but given special emphasis by this movement.

Inherent in these movements, therefore, is the idea that storytelling is dead or dying and traditional stories are lost.

Folklore is predicated on the death of tradition. Since the word first appeared it has carried an aura which has been a burden to the study of popular culture. 'Folklore' appeared as it was disappearing, it was

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3 Appendix II. 2.1 – 2.5. Sample of abstracts from presentations at storytelling conferences, and description of festivals addressing these issues
discovered as it was being lost, it was recovered as it ceased to be.
(O'Giollain 1991, 8)

Applied to rugged individualism, the death of tradition can be exploited to explain the 'death' of positive qualities within the individual and within an idealised, falsely-remembered concept of community. Traditions, and stories, are then used to revive the individual and make him or her more whole, and/or to create community or a sense of community. Storytelling then becomes part of a process moving individuals and society towards a conceived utopia, often based on assumptions, not conscious choices made through debate.

When this attitude finds its way into practices meant to express and support philosophies of multiculturalism, one can see inherent dangers. If an undercurrent behind the presentation of stories from 'minority' cultures comes from an unspoken belief that such cultures were 'lost', historically, or through personal transitions such as immigration or social repression, then that objectifies the storytelling and the participants for whom it originally existed. The story from another culture is easily exploited, as a product to become a 'tool' in socialisation or education, or commercial entertainment. The story, the teller, and the original culture become exotic, and are accepted without question. This is not to suggest that real learning, cultural exchanges and aesthetic experiences cannot happen. Too often, however, multicultural storytelling involves a teller from a cultural or ethnic minority performing before an exclusively white, middle class audience; or, just as often, a white middle class storyteller relating tales from cultures or religions not her or his own to predominantly white middle class listeners.

A performer and performance, or story, taken from their original and/or traditional context and placed in an alien one is something significantly different and no matter how much audiences and aspiring storytellers use these as models of inspiration, there is ripe potential for misuse and misunderstanding. It is naïve to think this does not happen solely because everyone states good intentions, such as learning from tradition. What is learned is not so much a tradition, but rather how to use others' traditions in a self-
serving way. Participants define and express their identities through encountering these 'exotica', reinforcing a sense of 'otherness' while at the same time incorporating their view of the other as accurate understanding and a sign of participants' 'tolerance'.

Such contemporary storytelling then anaesthetizes the teller and the listener, rather than criticising, provoking or subverting the status quo as real traditional telling does. All participants are patronised when this happens, particularly the visiting traditional artist, since by suggesting they have lost something or that something is dead and the teller is bringing it back to life for them denies there is any process involved in the act of telling. It ignores evolution from previous states to the present, and connection between the teller's actions, the actions reported in the narrative, and both past and contemporaneous listeners' actions.

For various reasons, individuals and groups were motivated to 'preserve' traditional folk material and 'revive' it for their contemporaries. These motivations are explored, in Part II of this chapter and in greater detail in Chapter III, Part I. Joseph Sobol and Jack Zipes have both observed the clear impact of wider cultural and social influences upon contemporary storytelling, even when its participants seem unaware or in denial of them (Sobol, 1999; Zipes, 2001). There have always been political and social motivations, often subliminal, inherent in this view. One needs only to look at the correlation of the Celtic Revival and Irish Nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as other folk and national movements of the past two hundred years. In the Irish context, as an example, those original nationalistic attitudes have become less dominant or suppressed in comparison to current attitudes and beliefs in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Many outside those countries, however, retain the Romantic, nationalistic 'Celtic Revival' view of Ireland and Irish storytelling and music traditions, maintaining a style and product native participants find discordant.  

The first, classic example is that of the Brothers Grimm. Their initial incentive for

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4 Appendix II. 3.1 – 3.4 Samples of conference abstracts, websites, and festival and storyteller publicity demonstrating marketing of 'Celtic' traditions
collecting folktales was the establishment of a standard German language and consequent justification for asserting German identity, culture and nationhood in response to French aggression. Over decades their work achieved this, but also evolved into the primer we now think of for children. There were periods, though, when the work was expressively harnessed for nefarious political ends and was nearly banned in the de-Nazification process (Zipes 2002). Romantic and/or nationalistic attitudes towards stories and storytelling, whether conscious or subliminal, allow this objectification process. This state is true of much that goes on in 'international' contemporary storytelling: that is, festivals which invite artists from all over the world, or present tellers from within that country who represent their own immigrant traditions or an outsider's interpretation of another culture's stories. Few have questioned whether this is a positive trend, the assumption being that it is both educational and utopian.

As a part of popular, vernacular culture, the study of folklore passed on many opinions, theories and definitions to the general public. Consequently today sees widely perceived views of folk being something moribund, gone or going, and irrelevant or in need of relevance by being educational, socially uplifting, aesthetically valuable, or a potential political tool. There is also the belief, in the areas of folk tales, songs, and tunes, that these are ancient, anonymous, traditional, and exclusively expressed and passed on orally.

Part of the tradition/modernity problematic rests on a notion of a pre-modern era which was unchanging. Hence the last glimpses of an earlier world are seen by Romantics in Europe as industrial society was consolidated or by ethnographers in Africa and Asia as colonial regimes were normalized seemed to suggest an infinite placid sea on the eve of the storm.

(O'Giollain 2000, 173)

This remains the public's view generally and a predominant view among contemporary storytelling participants specifically, though specialists, particularly folklorists and philologists, long ago moved on from such opinions.
Another strong attitude arising from Romantic and nationalist ideology is the idea of something (cultural artifacts, actions, and/or events) being 'ours' or of belonging to 'the others'. Only slowly are we beginning to realise what these relationships mean in terms of modern psychology and oral narrative performance, as well as their manipulation in power politics and personal relationships. Influences of past attitudes include more than perceptions of oral-literary relationships. Inherent in Romantic beliefs is the importance of the individual and individual free will, emotion and expression, related to the cultivation of the artist as hero and genius. As well as this, Romanticism stresses a universality of the human condition, presenting us with simplistic modern notions of what storytelling is, what folk stories are, and who can use them and how they can be used.

This contributes to the bourgeoisification of storytelling, its appropriation by middle classes for educational and socialising purposes. Overemphasis on *Märchen* led to neglect of other forms of narratives and styles of telling.

We are also misled by noted storytellers who enjoyed recognition for their entertaining services among migrant laborers and gave preference to long-winded magic tales, making us forget to look for other kinds of stories in their repertoires that fill other needs and are structured differently.

(Dégh 1994, 18)

Such 'mistakes' have begun to be corrected by folklorists and also contemporary storytellers wishing to experiment with the form and content of their work.

A radical departure was effected in folklore studies by the recognition that "texts" are not simply strings of words with a meaning, even when recited according to certain rhythmic patterns, but are an integral part of a performance, which is by definition local, historically timed, and variable in its very repetition.

(Sautman 1998, 6)

For those librarians and educators made public custodians of culture, part of the liberal agenda was to introduce their charges to the beauty, wisdom, and shared values of other cultures as expressed by their stories. (Bryant, 1905; Shedlock, 1951; Sawyer, 1962)
This was very much a philosophy evolving from the Enlightenment and Romanticism; yet these movements also fostered notions of capitalism and consumerism with us today. Professional storytellers motivated by both sets of principles end up sharing stories not of their culture, and entering long, unresolved debates about the value and morality of doing so. These and similar views are prevalent among contemporary storytelling participants. They also influenced various disciplines, particularly areas of Freudian and Jungian psychology, literature and cultural studies, and linguistics.

**Literary and Postmodern Input**

Besides folklore studies, literary criticisms and movements have formed prevalent, popular definitions about narration and narrators. Just as contemporary thinking about storytelling, stories and storytelling traditions is much influenced by Romanticism, so modern and postmodern trends in literature arose as reactions against that movement. Modernist notions about narrative and literature remain pervasive in education, literary and cultural criticism, and the public's general knowledge regarding narrative.

Art produced out of reactions against modernism, and postmodernism, evolved over that same fifty-year, post-war period that saw the rise of modern electronic media *and* revival or (as I prefer to term it) contemporary storytelling.

The turn against modernism since about 1960 has drawn much of its force from a revulsion against such aesthetic self-mystification, a revulsion visible in celebration of otherness, and assertions to the value of contingent forms... It would seem natural, then, for postmodernism to revalorize storytelling. Narrative *has* been repopularized: even this essay reflects growing critical interest in stories. Yet if postmodernism looks to narrative for alternatives to some unattractive tendencies in modernism, sociological obstacles to successful storytelling have become greater today than they were a century ago.

(Kroeber, 1992, 172)

The sociological obstacles are actually the incorporation of aesthetic self-mystification in contemporary storytelling: the inheritance of modernism within a postmodern phenomenon. Many, however, would consider the most obvious 'sociological obstacle'
as the development of modern electronic mass communication systems and related commercial factors.

It is simplistic to blame these for a decline in storytelling or oral and traditional culture generally. Non-reflective participants in contemporary storytelling generally do so, stating radio, or television, or computers ‘killed off’ storytelling or at least the social networks supporting it. Electronic mass media, however, did just as much to promote traditional and oral activities, to define as well as create misconceptions about them, and popularise these forms.

It is not enough to recognize that mass media play a role in folklore transmission. It is closer to the truth to admit that the media have become a part of folklore. Interacting with oral repetition they may constitute the greater part of the folklore conduit.

(Dégh, 1994, 25)

Mass media are more than a conduit. Now a prevalent aspect of that environment in which individuals and their actions are embodied, it affects cognition. One thing the presence of mass media, combined with its commercial excesses, has done is raise a self-consciousness about personal identity and actions in both private and public arenas. This especially includes discourse such as performing arts like storytelling.

The self-consciousness, related as well to what cognitive scientists term theory of mind, has much to do with the formation of contemporary storytellers as well as how they and storytelling are perceived. This again brings us to Kroeber’s observations about postmodernism, where he points out that

postmodernism’s relative hospitality (vis-à-vis modernism) to the popular and commercial expresses a self-reflexivity now—thanks to the effects of sophisticated modernism—deeply built into “popular” entertainments. Even our carnivals are no longer carnivalesque. This self-reflexivity, however, is tinged with sinister implications in so far as it testifies to lives dominated by imagination-stultifying imagery, increasingly confined within stereotypicality. The frightening feature of TV sitcoms is the possibility that they accurately reflect a de-realized quality in the actual lives of most of their viewers.

(Kroeber, 1992, 179-80)
In the few histories and many reported beliefs of contemporary storytelling participants, the one attitude voiced above all others is the recognition in and desire for storytelling to break away from the ‘dominant imagination-stultifying’ stereotypes of modern life (Sobol, 1999, Heywood, 1998). Yet, just as the self-reflexivity imbued in art and popular entertainment is a recognisable aspect of life and culture today, so too is it part of contemporary storytelling. Beginning with the best of intentions, contemporary storytelling has a greater tendency to succumb to the very values and actions that originally repelled and motivated its participants than many current participants are willing to admit or even recognise.

To an extent these ‘problems’ arise due to altered mental states involved in any storytelling. These will be the focus of discussion in Chapter Two, with a focus on how text contributes to these states, and specifically in Chapters Three and Four, which look at what techniques the storyteller uses to facilitate altered states in listeners as well as him/herself, and what listeners display in such states that provides a dynamic for what will be termed the storytelling experience. One example tying storytelling in with other aesthetic, and even general, experience is the liminal state. Eiichi Erick Masuyama touched upon this briefly in his study of rakugo storytelling (Masuyama, 1997). He based his definition on Colin Turnbull’s:

Liminality is a subjective experience of the external world in which “thisness” becomes “thatness.” It is integrative of all experience; in the liminal state disorder is ordered, doubts and problems removed, the “right” course of action made clear with a rightness that is both moral and structural since the inevitable discrepancies between belief and practice in the external world are among the many problems ordered and removed in the liminal state. It thus provides a charter for individual behavior and, by extension, for communal, social behavior.

(Turnbull, 1980, 80, as cited in Masuyama, 1997, 181-2)

Any genuine storytelling involves a liminal state, making the inner world of the story, happening within the imagination and the mind, more real than the outer world where teller and listener exist in the act of telling and listening. Contemporary storytelling, however, can involve such a high level of self-consciousness that a double liminality occurs.
The outer world becomes 'thatness' and the world of the story 'thiness'; at the same time, when participants revere the story, teller, and/or act of telling as precious, rare, and/or exotic then the actual story, teller, and acts of telling and listening become a 'thatness' as well. Contemporary storytelling events, being at most times highly self-conscious and artificial, warp the social transactions necessarily found in genuine storytelling.

Storytelling is a social transaction requiring both in telling and receiving actively individualized participation; it modifies or reinforces received wisdom and traditional modes of behavior and belief by engaging our imaginations in an account of a singular sequence of events.

(Kroeber, 1992, 192)

As I hope to show, however, in contemporary storytelling the contexts have several more sequential and non-sequential events that contribute to making the teller, tale, and acts of telling and listening more of a 'thatness'. Particularly when, as happens in contemporary storytelling, social ties are quickly formed and temporary without true familial connections; then complicated liminality ensues.

This also relates to Butler's ideas about performativity, explored in Chapter Three, Part One (Butler, 1990, Butler, 1993). Again, this double liminality is a means to objectify stories, acts of telling and tellers. Butler's thesis suggests language, and how it is used, defines identity, predisposing it to certain mental states and acts which can lead to the objectification of the individual. These acts and ways of thinking may be reinforced or changed by and through any art, temporarily or permanently. Assuming various mental states do play a part in storytelling, critical language must incorporate, or at least consider, cognitive theory. Cognitive science appears most useful for defining and exploring human activities, especially storytelling, that are bound up in or explained by theory of mind.

Literature, as art form and cultural criticism, has explored mental states for over a century now. Modernism in literature, if noted for anything, was the rejection of straightforward chronological narrative and, even more, for its depiction of characters'
conscious thoughts—particularly stream of consciousness (Lodge, 2002, 14, 30-1, 40). Postmodern literature continued to play with chronological sequencing of narrative, and in addition chose experimentation with narrative style, form, and genre. Parody, pastiche, ironic tone became recognisable features. So, also, did inclusion of unique or repressed individuals’ and groups’ voices: women, minorities, children, and so on. This brought renewed interest in oral histories, autobiographies, ancient traditions, particularly of ‘exotic’ societies, and so on: all natural territory for those interested in folklore, traditions, and antiquities, common ground of Romanticism and contemporary storytelling.

Romanticism, postmodernism and contemporary storytelling do find common ground in observations of cognitive linguists and narratologists. Postmodern argument is identifiable when Monica Fludernik points out that

the very natural situation of traditional storytelling imperceptibly develops into the forms of history, the epic or romance, where the parameters of hearsay narrative of vicarious experience become extended to cover much that exceed realistic storytelling frames. In the model that I am here presenting narrativization therefore first ‘strikes’ in noticeable manner when the experientiality of story experience—which, in the oral mode, is aligned primarily with first-person frame—becomes transferred to the third-person realm. This extension, which engenders the narrativity of third-person narrative, has its roots in stories of vicarious experience, in jokes and anecdotes—all of these familiar types of natural narrative—and there is therefore no perceptible break with natural storytelling modes.

(Fludernik, 1996, 315-6)

Cognition clearly has set recognisable patterns exhibited in all linguistic forms, spoken or written. Identifying these explains how contemporary storytellers develop and work. Within the context of recent literary and artistic movements there is commonality to support such views.

The Contemporary ‘Scene’

Kay Stone, like Linda Dégh, asserts ‘...that organized storytelling offers a rich field of inquiry for narrative scholars’ (Stone, 1997. 240). For that field to prove profitable, a clear understanding of modern organised storytelling is necessary. The generally
received, encapsulated modern history is provided from an American viewpoint by Birch:

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, "revival" storytelling began to emerge. It flourished beyond libraries, classrooms, places of worship and the natural cultural settings in which it had always thrived. To be sure, there still were storytellers from active oral traditions in American cultures, but an influx of actors, mimes [sic], performance artists, dancers, writers, poets, comedians, folk musicians, ministers, inspirational speakers, and educators also made their way onto the platforms of storytelling. People drew on aesthetic standards of other fields like anthropology, folklore, literature, communication, music, theater, theology, and stand-up comedy. Revival storytelling struggled without a critical language for approaching and assessing story occasions with widely diverse audiences, tellers, and types of material.

(Birch, 1998, 312)

Consisting of such diverse components, and remaining a 'fringe' activity in arts and popular entertainment, means storytelling is often misunderstood or misinterpreted.

Sobol points out a distinctive trait in storytelling when comparing it with alternative theatre, from which some contemporary storytelling evolved. 'The difference between the confrontational drama of a street theater performance and the guided inner fantasy of a storytelling event is emblematic' (Sobol, 1999, 10). That storytelling is a 'guided inner fantasy', taking place at any point of the performance continuum, makes pertinent the application of cognitive theory to describe and understand it further.

The contemporary storytelling 'scene' in Britain and Europe mirrors the development of 'revival' storytelling in North America. Much that prompted those developments came out of counter-cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s, reactionary responses to elite, classical art forms, and to educational, social, political and ethnic hierarchies. Multi-culturalism and identity politics—feminism, gender studies, gay rights, minority rights, and so on—contributed to thoughts about what storytelling is and what it is for (Görög-Karady, 1990; Rohrich, 1990; Heywood, 1998; Zipes, 2001).

This 'scene', though often arising out of altruistic and counter-cultural motivations, has become increasingly standardised and homogenous throughout modern, urban (mostly)
Western societies. The dominant form of practice in contemporary storytelling would make it a community and/or educational art form. Most professional storytellers earn their living through work with children in schools, libraries and other community centres, or with adults in similar venues (Peiffer, 1994; Wischner, 1991). To a lesser extent they derive income from performances, particularly highly stylised theatrical performances in arts centres, theatres, or specially developed concert clubs and festivals. Some contemporary tellers strive to make this their main activity and source of income, emphasising their status as performers of a higher standard and ascribing to themselves terms such as ‘bardic’ and/or ‘epic’ storytellers.

Not long ago the dominant image of a storyteller among the general public, one that lingers, is of a woman librarian reading stories to children sitting comfortably in a corner. It is an image many contemporary storytellers and their supporters rebelled against, failing to recognise important links with this figure who, sometimes solitarily, preserved and perpetuated any storytelling at all for a considerable time. It also ignores evidence that leading past librarian storytellers, such as Marie Shedlock, Sara Cone Bryant, Ruth Sawyer and Eileen Colwell regularly performed stories for adult audiences (Shedlock, 1951; Bryant, 1905; Sawyer, 1962; Colwell, 1980, 2001; Alvey, 1974). Now the dominant image of a typical storytelling event has become the storytelling festival, once an intimate gathering, now more often a highly public commercial enterprise. The dominant image of a typical storyteller has become that of an eccentric, sincerely precious, ageing, middle-class ‘hippy’. Whether a festival’s or teller’s profits are for personal gain or financial enrichment, and whether their acts enrich, financially and/or aesthetically, the community that sponsors it, festivals have appropriated much from popular commercial entertainment. While paying lip service to tradition and traditional storytelling, values and behaviours exhibited are more reminiscent of the producers, agents and prima donnas of the film, television and music entertainment world (Zipes, 2001, 128).

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5 Appendix I. 2.1 – 2.2. Journal Observations: Two Annual Reports prior to commencement of PhD studies.
Without challenging these behaviours and attitudes, or seeking to renew constantly those roots which initiated any perceived ‘revival’ of storytelling, there is potential for contemporary storytelling to become a ‘fad’ that eventually fades away. Its potential to enrich and empower communities—the avowed aim—will be lost. So, too, would any contributory knowledge of how narration, orality and cognition inform each other.

Part II. The Phenomenon of Contemporary Storytellers and Storytelling

*Storytelling in Modern Society and Reasons for Remark on It*

Observations suggest contemporary storytelling is ubiquitous in modern urban societies: not so much as practitioners think, but substantially enough to be worthy of study. Its apparent prevalence is magnified by storytelling practices monopolised by the professional and middle classes. Though common to all groups, what most practitioners now refer to as storytelling—that is, contemporary storytelling, or storytelling revivals, as referred to by practitioners—is bourgeois activity. Without many realising it, they are inheritors of a long process. ‘Between Basile and Grimm, elite society developed an intellectual fascination with the complex tale’ (Dégh, 1994, 17). Developments continued long after Grimm, with new technologies and ideas contributing to intellectual and artistic fashions practised by elites, often appropriated from other social or ethnic groups. Tom Brown’s study of the mutual influences of vernacular, popular and high arts and their sponsors, managers and participants bears this out. (Brown, 2000)

Many contemporary storytelling practitioners consider themselves ‘pioneers’, the first to take seriously preservation and perpetuation of storytelling and ancient stories and, ironically, that at the same time what they do is original and unique. Through ignorance or a difference in definitions and attitudes, they fail to realise such activities and interests are part of a long continuous process. Contradictions inherent amongst philosophies and practices in contemporary storytelling do not exist without comment, though few outside storytelling enter those discussions, lacking awareness of the issues or common knowledge to form a meaningful dialogue.
Reporters in small towns and big cities regularly proclaim the news that people “still tell stories,” you can hear one at a local festival, and so forth. Only the names and locations of the next storytelling event change in these reports. There are no reviews of performances themselves, just promotional articles. There doesn’t seem to be a generally known way to approach story occasions with a variety of settings, audiences, tellers, and material from both oral and print sources. People who know nothing about theater history and criticism are able to say when something is too avant-garde, but language for evaluating storytelling tends to be bound to the “other” disciplines. Even within the storytelling community, there is a lack of consensus on terms distinctive to the art. How-to-techniques and homages to the cult of personality dominate the written material in storytelling journals. (Birch, 1998, 308-9)

In fairness to the outsiders, few in contemporary storytelling make any attempt to present their discussions and knowledge in a form with which the outsider can easily engage. Practices are distinctly different from other disciplines’ academic conferences and journals, again coming down to a lack of common critical terms. Though many have attempted to develop a critical and objective language for discussing storytelling and storytellers, it is an ongoing process. When criticism does happen, critics from all disciplines, including those within contemporary storytelling, often speak a language with markedly different frames of reference.6

Folklorists have, until recently, been more interested in rural, traditional and/or pre-literate storytelling practices, focusing on texts, performers, and/or storytelling as act or event in such situations. Linda Dégh has reprimanded her colleagues, pointing out contemporary storytelling needs study.

The folk narrative scholar’s task is not to stick to past standards and bemoan the loss of classic forms of telling, but to move on to the questions: What makes modern (urban, if you like) society maintain interest in folktales? How does the folktale bear new variants to keep its audience spellbound? What are the successful media devices that carry the tales and adjust them to up-to-date needs?

(Dégh , 1994, 28)

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6 Appendix I. 3.1. – 3.2. Journal Observations and interviews in relation to broadsheet reviews of 1989 festival
Paradoxically, while Dégh chivvies fellow folklorists to consider modern forms of
telling, contemporary storytelling practitioners regularly hark back to past standards and
classic forms of the art. Her questions are valid for all and folklorists have begun
answering them. Contemporary storytelling practitioners, and by this I mean tellers,
organisers of storytelling events and audiences as well as scholars of contemporary
practices, have only made limited forays in response. When asked, contemporary
storytelling participants' answers commonly come with nostalgic references to some
idealised past based on Romantic influences and usually arrived at through non-
reflective consideration.\(^7\) Other disciplines touching upon narrative, performance
theories, and commentaries on contemporary culture neglect Dégh's questions even
more.

Ubiquity of oral and written narrative in all forms of discourse and levels of society
means wide ranging disciplines study similar phenomena from different viewpoints
using various, sometimes contradictory, terminology. Most definitions place practical
limitations on concepts, narrowing the terms of discussion and making subjects
conducive to study, but in so doing can create barriers to better understanding. One
example is seen in substantial numbers of contemporary storytelling participants
insisting on a concept of 'pure', 'rural', 'priliterate', or 'unbroken' traditions of stories
they believe need 'reviving' in 'traditional' ways.

In the singular relationship of oral tradition and literary variants, who can
tell them apart? Ironically, despite the efforts of folklorists to stay away
from alien urban influences and record only the genuinely oral traditions,
tales...reinforce their literary persona as shaped by further republishers
and recasters, editors and translators, designers, composers, cartoonists,
and film-makers to influence the folk masses. Isn't it time we also include
the study of the professional literary-artistic variants with those told by
oral folk tellers? They tell more about the sociological causes of possible
oral formulations—our traditional target—than if we have the consumers
retell the stories to us.

(Dégh, 1994, 18)

\(^7\) Appendix II. 4.1. – 4.9. Publicity material and websites noting and/or emphasising Romantic
elements in contemporary storytelling
Contemporary storytelling participants, particularly tellers, focus predominantly upon orality without reference to literary, media, and contemporary sociological influences. While some examine motivations and beliefs, there is little in the way of study regarding sociological, political and psychological causes explaining the presence and apparent need for contemporary storytellers, especially to themselves.

This is not to say contemporary storytellers have not defined themselves. Much fascination with this phenomenon derives from countless ways individuals find to declare and develop themselves as storytellers, and then to see how these self-definitions are applied artistically, psychologically, culturally and socially. Kay Stone, folklorist and professional storyteller, has for several years observed and attempted to define storytellers today.

Self-definition is central to artistic development. In the case of organized storytelling there is often a confused sense of what it means to be called, or to call oneself, a storyteller. The term is vague enough to cover a multiplicity of performance arts: telling and parodying folktales, doing one-person drama, mime, dance, puppetry, or stand-up comedy.

(Stone, 1997, 234)

Few, if any, academic studies have quantified the number of individuals identified or identifying themselves as storytellers, nor the number and variety of storytelling actions and events in contemporary contexts.

This study is not an attempt to do so, but relies on informal and formal studies and personal data. Regional and national storytelling organisations have sometimes commissioned reports doing so, and have created directories of storytellers, though these are potentially biased, being commissioned by practitioners themselves.8 Quantifiable data herein derives from publications by these organisations, although the only consistent theme arising from this is that everyone and anyone is a storyteller, with eclectic traits on show promoting both personalities and service.

Yet despite the problems and challenges, or maybe even because of them, the number of people who identify themselves as tellers continues to rise steadily. The ever-emergent quality of the face-to-face experience of

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8 Appendix II. 5.1. – 5.4 Samples from storytelling organisations directories and websites
storytelling events is unique among the performance arts; within the social and artistic context of these events, tellers begin to establish identities.  
(Stone, 1997, 240)

The process establishing a consciousness of identity development and use is not something most contemporary storytelling participants are aware of, nor are consciousness and identity foremost in their minds. Another reason for this study on contemporary storytellers is to bring this process to light, allowing further objective study by cultural commentators and others. Participants’ primary focus has been on stories and acts of telling.

Though current storytelling repertoires have moved on from a predominance of complex fantasy tales, the latter still contribute substantially to repertoires and, as shall be discussed, motivational factors.

In regard to folktales (magic tales), most folklorists express skepticism concerning their relevance today and speak of their demise, displacement, second-hand exploitation, and normalization. At the same time, it is almost incredible how much attention is given to this anachronistic fantasy genre, how much controversy it stirs up among child psychologists, educators, social workers, sociologists, and alarmed parents concerned with the mental health of society. With their fascination for the symbolic language of the world of enchantment, artists and literary authors exploit and propagate tale magic, while scholars in the humanities attempt to decode the hidden meanings of the tale. All these concerns—practical, artistic, and scientific—significantly contribute to the subsistence and further variation of the Märchen.  
(Dégh, 1994, 27)

While most of those giving attention to ‘anachronistic fantasy genre’ draw their philosophies mostly from Freudian and Jungian interpretations, little criticism making use of current cognitive psychology studies has been applied. Mary Crane, David Lodge, and other literary critics recently embarked on this path, but to date any study of narrative and cognition has been on the part of these and scientists, such as Roger C. Schank, not contemporary storytelling participants and scholars (Crane, 2001; Lodge, 2002; Schank, 2000). Disciplines sharing a recent interest in storytelling include cognitive scientists and neuroscientists, and informational technology experts, including those who develop websites for distance learning, computer games, and artificial
intelligence. Contemporary storytelling participants are almost totally unaware of these developments which thus far have had little direct impact on them, but have potential in the medium term to influence what we think of and do with storytelling (Figa, 2003).9

Cognition and neuroscience suggest storytelling generally, in any form, is a primary act of the mind, a phrase coined by Barbara Hardy in her essay for The Cool Web (Hardy, 1977, 12). Bruner suggests as much also, recognising a ‘readiness or predisposition to organize experience into a narrative form, into plot structures and the rest... It seems to me such a view is irresistible’ (Bruner, 1990) (45-6). Lesser agrees, asserting:

By the time man learned to read and write, much of such wisdom as he had amassed was probably already cast in story form. He had evidently created—or evolved—stories which set forth his surmises... It must have seemed natural to man...to turn to fiction for images of his experience, his wishes and his fears. Fiction was probably among the earliest of his artifices.

(Lesser, 1957, 1)

If this theory is correct, current practices are affected by how storytelling is thought of, thought about, and by the very mental processes used in oral narrative performance.

'The frequency with which discourses fall into—or are deliberately given—a narrative model...suggests the hold that mold has upon the human mind.' (Lesser, 1957, 3)

That narrative 'moulds' the mind is one reason for cognitive scientists, linguists and other psychologists' fascination with it as an art form. They seek to use it to explain mental processes that to now have been inaccessible except through observed human behaviour.

The art of storytelling has about it the halo and the stigma of the ordinary. All of us who speak a language well enough to represent our experiences are entering into our storytelling birthright. The verbal, musical, mnemonic, and kinesic “technologies” of traditional storytelling are, to be sure, extensions of ourselves... but they are inward extensions, technologies in which the body and mind are primary tools.

(Sobol, 1999, 1)

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9 Appendix II. 6.0 Samples from Websites from MIT and others
Technologies now allow scientists to view precisely what part of the brain is involved in both physical and abstract functions in human behaviour. Cognition, particularly, recognises the importance of a physical mind embodied and acting within natural environments, and how those environments affect mental processes which in turn affect surroundings.

As technologies multiply, each seems to perform a more culturally subdivided role. They are all touched by a ray of the archaic storyteller's light in that they provide a momentarily coherent narrative of the world, yet their narratives break down immediately outside the enclosed space of performances into a multitude of mutually comprehensible stories: not whole culture but artificially inflated mass culture or reactionary subcultures.

(Sobol, 1999, 2)

Even as new technologies add to our knowledge and change ways of perceiving, humans continue to resort to narrative to explain and understand this new knowledge and perception.

Whereas a few literary scholars have used cognitive theory to understand texts and narrative processes, telling, writing and reading, no contemporary storytelling participants have. Cognitive scientists have made extensive use of examples of oral narrative in their studies.

Cognitive linguistics tries to locate linguistic process within more general processes of cognitive comprehension. These cognitive processes, it is argued, relate to human embodiedness in a natural environment and are essentially motivated by metaphors of embodiment. .... Much of what happens cognitively when humans try to come to terms with new situations can be explained as relying on extrapolation from known situations.

(Fludernik, 1996, 17)

Cognitive scientists' interest in narrative was too narrowly focused. Because their purpose 'has been to expand understanding of how humans learn...many questions important to folklorists, such as genre, orality versus literacy, performance and creativity, were not relevant to these researchers when they began work in the 1970s' (Sierra; 1993, 57). Cognitive scientists' failure to find relevance in folklorists' interests regarding narrative might have been the problem.
Cognitive psychological studies focus either on conversational, anecdotal storytelling embedded in everyday life, or literary forms with purported oral connections, not more performance-oriented formal storytelling. 'Because stories are made out of images moving in a psychological field that is itself the image of the time-space continuum in which we have our physical being, they are the truest of all modes of discourse to our experience of being alive' (Sobol, 1999, 15). What has seldom been admitted until recently are profound influences between literacy and oracy and the fact literary forms are much manipulated, creating the impression literature is purposely distanced and significantly different from cognition involved in oral narration. Yet both literature and oral storytelling depend upon their existence in the minds of the receivers, readers and listeners.

Though the story's the thing, the interaction between teller and audience creates the storytelling event. To a large degree, storytelling actually occurs in the minds of the listeners. Part of its power comes from the fact that storytelling is story-triggering. People may resonate to different tales, but all are eventually touched and reminded of their own stories and thus of their own humanity.

(Birch, 1998, 317)

This story-triggering, which happens in all forms of narrative, oral and written, but which results in distinctive altered mental states in more formal storytelling performances provides empirical and theoretical links with current trends in cognitive studies and information technology.

Scientists have recognised the importance of mental schema, frames, scripts and indices, what folklorists and literary scholars would recognise as motifs, symbolic systems and genres. These allow, support or actually create mental processes such as memory and narration.

Research on story grammars in the field of psychology had largely ceased by the mid-1980s. It had failed to show promise in two key areas: facilitating generation of new stories, and revealing the structure of literature in general. Yet story grammars' potential to elucidate long-standing questions of folktale research does not appear to have been explored.

(Sierra, 1993, 58)
Folklorists' use of cognitive scientists' work on narrative structure informed performance theories, while contemporary storytelling practitioners have not made much use of either discipline's modern studies. One discipline displaying continuous use and interest in story grammars is that of information technology and artificial intelligence. Computer scientists have attempted programmes that generate narrative, even attempting to use Propp's and others' theories (Turner, 1993, Schank, 2000).

If narrative is a primary act of the mind, intricately threaded through universal domains of cognition as scientists suggest, then cognitive theory has potential to explain much about contemporary storytelling. Some folklorists have already noted significant differences and changes in storytelling by modern storytellers.

I have found that many urban storytellers...have developed an understanding of the creative dynamics of oral composition. They do not merely repeat tales, they re-create them at each performance. It is possible for a narrative scholar to examine the correlations between texture, context, and text. Folk narrative research has sought to disclose such correlations in traditional oral communities where individual tellers are often too immersed in their art to answer the endless questions academics are capable of asking. Articulate urban performers are equally absorbed in their art, but since they have had to learn it consciously rather than absorb it as part of an entire culture, they retain a self-consciousness that can respond to detailed academic queries. Not surprisingly, storytellers love to talk.

(Stone, 1986, 250-1)

These provide telltale signs for a greater understanding of cognition and cognition's function in storytelling. Not only cognition on the part of the performer in or around the performance, but mental processes of all participants go into creating a performance, allowing it to happen at all.

Fludernik points out that

storytelling is a general and spontaneous human activity observable in all cultures, it provides individuals with cultural discrete patterns of storytelling. These patterns include not only a knowledge about storytelling situations and the structure of that situation (who is telling what to whom, interaction and non-interaction with listeners, etc.) but also
of performed narrative and particularly an ability to distinguish between
different kinds or types of stories.

(Fludernik, 1996, 44)

As cognitive processes relate to human embodiedness, an observational study of
contemporary storytellers in reference to other practitioners should lead to some
understanding of the cognition involved in contemporary storytelling.

This means not only what but also how and why certain thoughts about storytelling and
storytellers are so important in modern urban society that the past fifty years saw
exponential growth of what can be defined as contemporary storytelling, taking multiple
forms in countless venues.

The relation between oral and written, folk and the elite, the informal and
the formal, the authorized and the unauthorized, the everyday and the
ceremonial, the lay and the professional, developed hand in hand though
the ages. The dynamic interdependence was regular, harmonious, and
predictable. However, since about the end of World War II, there has been
an upset in the equilibrium of the two. In the global village...created by
the media, a new communality has formed on the basis of the
homogenizing effect of uniform information and the mass-marketing of
stories to a mass society structured into occupational, ethnic, age, sex,
religious and other population groups, also identifiable as folk or folklore-
transmitting communities. The even flow of identical information
systematically enculturates the citizens of the world, turning them into the
consumers of identical cultural goods by creating a symbolic egalitarian
social order that supersedes segmentation by national boundaries. The
choices in careers and lifestyles have become boundless, while the content
of mass messages has remained as patterned as messages ever were,
composed of traditional (conventional), reconstructed (revivalistic), and
innovative elements.

(Dégh, 1994, 23) [my emphasis]

My practice as a storyteller and identity as an individual typify Dégh’s observation. This
provides a fundamental reason for my choosing to develop this thesis along the lines
which stipulate that the creative or performing artist uses her or his practice as a basis of
the study.

Joseph Sobol gives specific examples of this in his history of modern storytelling in
North America. Two rising cultural and social phenomena in storytelling in recent
years has been the rise of storytelling festivals and storytelling organisations throughout the world.

The National Storytelling Festival and the National Storytelling Association are quintessentially media phenomena. They function as elaborate mechanisms for amplifying an oral, face-to-face communal art in the arenas of modern print and electronic consumer culture. Since their inception, the festival and the organization have been preoccupied with representing and interpreting their mission to the media and to their membership. In so doing, they have generated an ever-expanding archive of print, audio, and video documentation of the movement's evolution, in plainly marked historical sequence...

(Sobol, 1999, 13)

This recognition of modern, electronic consumer cultural influence on storytelling, which participants often purport to be 'revivals' of 'old ways' indicates clear contradictions.

These forces naturally have a bearing upon cognition, providing motivation for contemporary storytelling practices that in turn re-shape that cognition. To look at phenomena shaping cognition in storytelling, one must look at it through the experiences of a contemporary teller and contemporary audiences. These must be contextualised so observations can be made useful and theories applied and tested.

Part III. Methodology and Terminology

Means of Observation and Analysis

To accomplish this study, data was gathered via five basic means:

- an observational journal, recording impressions of my own as well as of others' work
- analyses of my own and others' storytelling performances, recorded on video and audio tape
- interviews with selected tellers whose performances on video I analysed first
- the gathering of material data providing samples of evidence for my discussion—this includes copies of brochures, pamphlets, leaflets, artwork produced by participants in workshops, copies of websites, and photographs of events, venues, and the like

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and
- readings in cognitive and Freudian psychology, neuroscience, evolutionary biology, folkloristics, performance theory and semiology.

Any method of data collection has strengths and weaknesses. It was hoped the use of combined disciplines would provide valid viewpoints leading to better understanding of contemporary storytellers and recent developments in contemporary storytelling. What was of particular interest was how observations of contemporary storytelling informed current understanding of cognition and theories about the mind and memory, as well as how cognitive theories and theory of mind form and inform contemporary storytellers and storytelling.

The personal journal consisted of impressions arising from current work as a professional storyteller. Quantifiable data included information such as:

- the nature and size of audiences
- describing what physical space consisted of and how it was arranged
- the venue and purpose for the event
- the nature of the event—what texts were told as well as how—including variations, digressions, interruptions, interpolations, motivations and divergences

and also

- any audience responses of note: that is, both common, regular responses in repeated performances of stories, so as to be predictable responses, and unusual and/or unique audiences responses, including individual comments and exclamatory remarks during or after performances

Subjective impressions were also made: interpolations and interpretations from audiences and organisers regarding their thoughts and responses to the act and event, as well as any comments they gave me. In a similar fashion impressions and observations of other performers’ works were recorded. Many performers were storytellers, both traditional and contemporary, but also included are experiences of musicians and singers, actors, poets and authors, and specialists such as teachers, therapists, librarians and religious leaders. In addition, the impressions of non-specialists who engaged in
some form of oral narrative were drawn upon, though these contributors may not have been aware they were telling stories at all. Collectively these impressions provided a variety of instances and circumstances with which to compare and contrast my own storytelling in light of cognitive theory: they provided the embodiedness to which cognition in storytelling relates.

Video recordings of storytelling performances were provided by Doc Rowe, a folklorist who records contemporary vernacular culture on a regular basis to observe and analyse how it evolves over time. These recordings were primarily of two early storytelling festivals in London in the 1980s: one at Waterman's Arts Centre in 1987, the other in the Purcell Rooms in the South Bank Arts Centre in 1989. Other substantial footage included performances at storytelling clubs in the 1980s and 1990s, mostly in London, and interviews and storytelling performances at folk festivals over the past twenty years, mostly Sidmouth International Festival of Traditional and Folk Arts, the National Folk Festival, and Whitby Folk Festival. Rowe also provided video and audio recordings of traditional tellers in their homes, pubs, or community venues over the past thirty years, and of proceedings such as conferences, seminars and debates discussing storytelling carried out by the Folklore Society and/or the Society for Storytelling. Rowe provided additional video recordings of my own performances, at some of the mentioned festivals and clubs as well as projects and residencies with London school children and teachers. Richard Goodman kindly recorded one of my performances, including audience responses, at the Towersey Village Festival and donated this to the Rowe collection (Rowe, 1987a, 1987b, 1987c, 1987d, 1987e, 1987f, 1987g, 1989a, 1989b, 1994, 2001).

Analyses of these storytelling performances on video enabled me to examine various concerns relating to and arising from my study. Many videos showed certain tellers, myself included, performing the same material over a number of years. Therefore I could observe what remained consistent in terms of language and behaviour, on the part of both performer and audience, and what varied. Phenomena such as digressions, interpolations, interruptions and the like, mostly by tellers but also audiences, as well as physical gestures and body language confirmed uses of cognitive theory in critical
analyses, providing an understanding of cognition in storytelling. Performers I focused upon provided a range of styles, talents, techniques, skills and repertoires with which to compare my own. This range of storytelling, storytellers, and stories enabled me to 'place' myself in a 'spectrum', so as to analyse my thoughts and behaviours when telling stories and/or contemplating storytelling. This provided a hoped for objectivity. However, any chosen form of data for analysis is fraught with imperfections.

It may be that a tape recording can in no way convey the process in question, or can only do so at the price of fantastic verbal contortions on your part, while a movie, a videotape, or even a series of still photographs could do the job very simply.

(Ives, 1990, 58)

To increase the chances for objective understanding and honest analysis, selected performers were, where possible, interviewed.

These interviews did not consist of a set formal list of questions. Rather, each analysis of video performances raised different sets of questions in my mind for each performer. Single interviews were conducted over a three month period in the first year of my study, usually in informal environments, such as the home of the teller, or over a drink at a festival or club. One exception was with John Campbell, whom I interviewed twice. That discourse varied between these informants was not only due to my informal interviewing techniques. As Edward Ives points out:

Having made this distinction between performance and discourse, let me hasten to say that practically never will an interview be made up of one or the other exclusively. They are not polarities but rather limits of a continuum, and any interview will contain elements of both.

(Ives, 1990, 55)

What quickly became of interest to me was the different ways of responding among interviewees. With many—mostly those similar in age and background to me, that is, educated and very much contemporary tellers, with modern urban backgrounds and experiences—answers came through a discourse consisting mostly of conversation and dialogue. Those tellers readily identified as 'traditional' by folklorists, contemporary storytelling participants, themselves, and the general public more often responded to questions with stories: anecdotes, jokes, reminiscences, tall tales, gossip,
autobiographical tales and full-blown folk tales. In some instances traditional tellers, so used to being interviewed by folklorists and other contemporary storytelling enthusiasts for their stories, automatically went into 'performer' mode for the interview.

At first I was frustrated, wanting more clear-cut, self-observed answers. I realised soon, however, that narrative performance responses were themselves indicative of cognition related to embodied experiences. The manifestation of performer mode in interviews with these tellers was actually a natural response, particularly as, in the cases of Francie Kennelly and John Campbell, I was interviewing them in their homes, where they do, or originally did, most of their storytelling. This confirms Kenneth Goldstein's statements distinguishing between natural and artificial contexts. When a story is performed by the one who usually performs it, for his or her typical audience and in the normal setting, it is a natural context. If any of those elements are missing, the context is artificial (Goldstein, 1964, 80-7). This concept of natural and artificial contexts had much bearing on my later thinking regarding contemporary storytelling, which in some instances exists in very artificial contexts for itself or traditional telling and in others in natural ones, for contemporary but not necessarily traditional telling. Traditional tellers think in narrative in certain ways that result in linguistic expressions articulating narrative no matter what form of discourse and context is involved. They could not help but tell stories, even in conversational discussions. That contemporary storytellers could, and did, respond with far fewer narratives, or certainly with narratives of a very different kind, in itself demonstrated cognitive processes involved with all forms of storytelling.

The interviews were tape recorded, and transcribed. Questions and discussions in the interviews focused primarily on the variety of styles between tellers, and/or what tellers observed changing in their performance styles over the years. This included much discussion of techniques and repertoires. Teller backgrounds were also relevant and of interest. I submitted transcripts of the interviews to each informant for comment, correction or additional remarks. Grace Hallworth and Hugh Lupton responded this way in writing, and additional comments were obtained from John Campbell and Eddie
Lenihan in informal conversation at social gatherings. These formed parameters by which to compare all performances—theirs and my own—with current theories in cognition, folklore and performance. There were no comparisons, intentional or otherwise, made of performers and their styles in a judgmental way (that is, interpreting one as being aesthetically desirable over another). The only comparisons of relevance and interest were those explaining contexts and the existence of variations in terms of those contexts as well as cognition.

Although originally I assumed my final dissertation would consist primarily of reporting and analysing these performances and interviews, I soon found the need to relate general contemporary storytellers’ practices to a cross disciplinary study of theories. Experienced field worker Edward Ives observes,

Serendipity is the story of my life. ..... In each case I was looking for one thing: in each case I found something of value I had not expected. I could offer further examples...but the point is made: know what you are looking for and go for it, but never let yourself be blind to other possibilities. The most interesting material of all may turn out to be what you catch out of the corner of your eye.

(Ives, 1990, 64-5)

Too much explanation of terms and duplication of ideas, but often using very different terminology, existed in areas of folklore studies, writings on contemporary storytelling, performance theories, literary criticism and theory, cultural criticisms, and psychology, particularly Freudian and cognitive, not to mention neuroscience and evolutionary biology. Therefore extensive readings in these fields were required, with attempts to cross-reference any findings with the observational data gathered from the above processes.

In order to incorporate and use the data with my readings and subsequent thoughts, I have placed the relevant passages from my journal, the video analyses, interviews, and so on in appendices. When I wish to demonstrate a theoretical point or an opinion based on observation, I refer to a specific passage in the appropriate appendix. Entries in the appendices are selective and arranged by topic and theme for easy access by the reader. So much material was gathered that it would be impractical to include the entire
interview transcripts, video analyses and personal journal in one dissertation. All of these are stored with the University of Glamorgan and available upon written request to the author.

**Clarification of Terms and Vocabulary**

Because interest in narrative is found across distinctly different disciplines and expressed in various discourses, different terminology describes similar concepts, actions, items and events. There is a tendency for specialists and practitioners to follow strictly one definition or set of terms. This holds true in the areas of folklore, and storytelling. As already mentioned, within contemporary storytelling there was and is much discussion regarding what a ‘proper’ story is, what happens in storytelling and, indeed, what a storyteller is.

Dick Leith points out, the very terms ‘folklore’ and ‘tradition’ have evolved in meaning over centuries with the former not even coined nor in usage much before two hundred years ago (Leith, 2002, 44). Specialists will attempt to specify terminology initially in narrow ways to make their work practicable, though there are natural tendencies to use terms to exert control socially and intellectually, and in contemporary storytelling also commercially. Folklorists, taking a quasi-scientific approach to their fieldwork, have much of the evolutionary biologist about them.

Folklorists who feel it their duty to improve on the definition of folklore in order to make room for new discoveries, cannot keep in step with the speedily changing social climate that brought these discoveries to life. *It is the nature of definitions that they are biased by the personal interest of the definer; they are too narrow, simplistic, and enumerative; too broad and general; too abstract and philosophical.* Yet all are useful building blocks that clarify ideas, that help in identification and rethinking of concepts that strengthen the lifeline of the discipline.

(Dégh, 1994, 13) [My emphasis]

As a performing art, thoughts about storytelling are even more biased by personal interests of contemporary storytelling practitioners. This is because, as I hope to demonstrate, storytelling is so dependent upon personalities and their mental and emotional processes: those of both tellers and listeners. The very art form is one of
social interaction (Wilson, 1997, 25). Cognitive theory, applied critically to observations of contemporary storyteller practices, should inform more clearly the nature of storytelling and storytellers in modern society since it recognises the embodiedness of those personalities in a natural environment—which also includes social and cultural environments.

Although folklorists now recognise storytelling as a coming together of various elements (teller, text, audience and context) and that it is both action and event, focus almost inevitably starts with the story. Overemphasis on texts determines much contemporary storytelling, as we shall see. But it is a good place to start when clarifying terms. While text is described in detail later, it is necessary now to present some definition. This discourse, universal in human experience and culture, has long attracted attention with literary critics, linguists, and semiologists all having attempted narrative definitions and descriptions. Within contemporary storytelling, although many different kinds of texts can be found and described, it is safe to say certain forms predominate.

The tale—generally understood as a multiepisodic, fantastic, biographical adventure story of a central hero...—has been recognized and appreciated by authors, scholars, and educators as a fantastic and dreamlike fiction, a naïve, childlike but exquisite literary act, as far back in history as written documents can show. The entertaining effect of tales made storytelling an important skill for all layers of society seeking amusement, relief from boredom, escape from everyday drudgery into the world of illusion.

(Dégéh, 1994, 15)

Dégéh’s definition encapsulates enough for now: a specific, limited range of content and linguistic styles in terms of narrative voices, tense, clauses and so on appears employed in oral storytelling.

After the narrative, studies commonly focus on storytellers. As this is the subject of my thesis, and because of its complexity, I prefer to leave it for the moment. The other equally necessary component for storytelling to happen is the listener. Audience is often taken for granted, yet folkloristic performance theory recognises how integral listeners are for storytelling to happen.
Fundamentally, performance as a mode of spoken verbal communication is the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence. This competence rests on the knowledge and ability to speak in socially appropriate ways. Performance involves on the part of the performer an assumption of accountability to an audience for the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content. From the point of view of the audience, the act of expression on the part of the performer is thus marked as subject to evaluation for the way it is done, for the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer's display of competence. Additionally, it is marked as available for the enhancement of experience, through the present enjoyment of the intrinsic qualities of the art of expression itself. Performance thus calls forth special attention to and heightened awareness of the act of expression and gives license to the audience to regard that act of expression and the performer with special intensity.

(Bauman, 1984, 11)

Contemporary storytelling had to find or create audiences and, in the opinion of many practitioners, 'educate' those audiences to listen, understand and appreciate stories and the art of telling them. Making assumptions led them to take actions not necessarily required, in that listeners were perfectly capable of listening and judging what was a story and a performance worth listening to. Contemporary tellers automatically presented material as though it was different, unique and new, causing reactions they thought needed 'correcting'.

This in itself is an indication of bourgeois elements in contemporary storytelling, echoing similar motivations in the development of literary fairytales over the past three centuries (Zipes, 1993; Zipes, 2002; Bronzini, 1990; Haase, 1993; Neuman, 1993; Baumgartner, 1996). Nevertheless, new tellers found plenty of willing participants. The evolution of contemporary storytelling involved cognitive and emotional processes common for all storytelling, but also developed specific thoughts affecting performances and audience reactions.

This collective, one not actually as cohesive and uniform as assumed, quickly took to being referred to as both the storytelling community and the storytelling scene. Joseph Sobol describes in detail the development of North American contemporary storytelling in *The Storytellers' Journey, An American Revival*. 
The question worth raising is whether the term storytelling community is descriptive, illusory, or mythic in the sense that we have been cultivating all along—a magical word, invoking a wonder tale of loss and redemption that can never be fully told.

(Sobol, 1999, 156)

The few folklore studies of contemporary storytellers and storytelling, have not examined this 'community' and how it functions (that is, the nature of listeners), and contemporary storytelling participants have rarely done so. Sobol admits this: 'What the storytelling critique tends to avoid are the negative sides of community—conformity, fixed hierarchies, and the stifling of individual difference.' (Sobol, 1999, 155)

Sobol poetically differentiates between community and scene.

A scene is implicitly a function of the imagination at work, recomposing reality against a painted backdrop. Scenes assemble, play themselves out, and change when their part in the human comedy is done. Communities, by contrast, generate traditions precisely to protect themselves against change—they replay the same scenes over and over with changing casts. Communities have difficulty accepting change, inspired from within or without, lest the specter of disunity, community's nemesis, arise in the midst like blasphemy—even though the sacred tradition may itself have been put in the place of some failed tradition only a few cycles ago.

(Sobol, 1999, 157)

Specifying these contrasts between community and scene proves useful in understanding cognitive processes. These two terms are not diametrically opposed but part of a continuum (a term much used and explored throughout this paper). They are also more readily descriptive of contemporary contexts storytellers today work in and define themselves by.

In this study when I refer to both the storytelling community and the storytelling scene, it will be in the specific manner that those who recognise themselves as part of both do. For the most part, I shall refer to contemporary storytelling participants. This term includes all kinds of performers—traditional and otherwise, for a considerable number of the former have become involved in storytelling in modern urban society and that participation has changed them and their performances—listeners, and scholars and

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critics. Also included are event organisers, who have significant influence on how participants think of and about storytelling, and often are storytellers pioneering much of what is accepted as typical practice in contemporary storytelling.

As cognition is based upon the study of mental processes arising from embodiment in a physical world, the application of cognitive theory in critiquing contemporary storytellers and storytelling means focus will be upon process. Storytelling is action and event, and since the work of Georges and Bauman is accepted so by folklorists and anthropologists.

Only by beginning to study storytelling events holistically can we begin to appreciate their true significance as communicative events, as social expressions, and as unique expressions of human behaviour.

(Georges, 1971, 328)

Few contemporary storytelling participants have done this, for the most part viewing the art form atomistically. Those scholars, critics and, especially, tellers who have focused on process (in a specific, not holistic way) reveal much about mental and emotional processes in storytelling and allow links with cognitive theory, informing both disciplines.

What happens in storytelling events, easily recognisable to those outside and within them, has been referred to as the storytelling experience, and flow (Wischner, 1991, 70-1, 72-3), and a mild trance state known as the hypnogogic or storylistening trance (Stallings, 1988, 6-21). These terms are explored and used in this study. When successful, storytelling induces a trance state experienced by most or all listeners, providing that liminality discussed previously, when 'this' becomes 'that' and vice versa. This is what is meant when referring to genuine storytelling.

The told story, ideally, exists only in the moment of telling. Yet in the telling, the moment itself is expanded to encompass the imaginary time-space of the narrative. In this altered state, the particulars of the moment are left behind, and the group imagination lifts to dwell in the world of the tale, shaped and animated by the storyteller's voice, gestures, breathing, eye contact, and energetic presence.

(Sobol, 1999, 36)
Whether the teller enters the hypnagogic trance or not, and if so, in the same way as listeners, is explored here. Its symptoms are clear in audiences, who display ‘flattening of facial expression, staring, absence of blinking, and almost complete immobility.’ (Stallings, 1988, 6) More readily acknowledged is that all participants in successful storytelling participate in ‘flow’ and ‘the storytelling experience’ (Wischner, 1991, Bryant, 1905).

Psychotherapy provides insight into mental states, particularly the altered state of the mild trance that it makes use of. The unconscious mind is not unchangeable, and embodied experience with other individuals, with actions and events can have lasting effect. What is interesting about storytelling is that the act and event are embodied experience, yet the stories relate embodied experience, second-hand: as disembodied embodied experience, to put it awkwardly. Attempting to be subtly precise, one could say that stories are abstractions of embodied experience, and the mental processes making stories so are the same as or related to those mental processes engaged in autobiographical, historical, and conversational discourses. The embodied aspects of the act and event are influenced by these abstract mental processes which in turn impact upon the materialistic and physiological.

This transcendental aspect has clear effect in the embodied mind. Trance states are natural and experienced by everyone in myriad events.

Our most familiar experience takes place when we daydream, but other trance states can occur when we meditate, pray, or perform exercises. In these situations, a person is aware of the vividness of inner mental and sensory experiences, and external stimuli, such as sounds and movements, assume lesser importance.

(Rosen, 1982, 26-7)

Rosen explores how psychotherapy uses trance and narrative, pointing out...

...one may wonder how listening to a story, even in a hypnotic trance, can help a patient or student. The effect...is similar to the “glow” one may feel after seeing a good movie. During the movie, many of us enter into an altered state of consciousness. We identify with one or more of the characters, and we leave “trance-formed.” However, the feeling lasts only for a short time.... By contrast, people find themselves, many years later,
referring back to (a)...tale. Their behavior and attitudes may be permanently changed.

(Rosen, 1982, 28)

This 'glow' adequately equates with flow, the concept developed by Csikszentmihalyi whose work Wischner applies to explain the state and level of absorption a teller has in both tale and performance (Wischner, 1991, 72-3). Claudia March Wischner's thesis describes mental and physical states of all participants in storytelling (Wischner, 1991).

Those unfamiliar with storytelling would recognise similar experiences arising from absorption in common practices mentioned by Rosen, and there is potential for identifying and comparing elements of absorption in various activities. Sobol observes, 'In the storytelling experience...minds flow into one another in palpable ways, and powerful symbols are constantly at work' (Sobol, 1999, 25). This palpable mental, communal absorption is Csikszentmihalyi's and Wischner's flow. This suggests a possible trance state for the teller, different from that of listeners', but both a form of flow. Listeners, too, are 'in flow' when absorbed in the story as they hear it, and so flow is another word for, or part of, story listening or hypnagogic trance.

During narration, a storyteller attempts to tell the tale as if composing it. The storyteller tries to put himself in the mode of a composer's memory rather than a performer's memory. He must know his material well enough to be able to tell it as though he were re-experiencing a personal event.

(Wischner, 1991, 121)

The combination of these concepts—story listening trance, storytelling experience, and flow—means 'What we experience as we listen to true telling is not the suspending of disbelief. Rather it is an altered state of mind which teller and listeners share. It is as if we were participants in a different reality' (Ross, 1972, 12).

As altered states of mind, embedded in a physical embodiment, there is clearly opportunity of explanation through cognitive theory. The embodiment is physicalised by the fact that aspects of storytelling are not dichotomous, that is, they are not split along a hierarchy, but on a continuum.

Storytelling events belong on a continuum, not in a hierarchy. Many people would probably agree that the telling does not get better, the
communication is not necessarily improved, by virtue of being more public and formal. Nor does storytelling necessarily degenerate because it is more consciously developed or because it moves from an intimate place to a more public one. Any storytelling event may be dull or glorious. In each situation, factors come into play that affect the credibility and effectiveness of the speaker, as well as the suitability of the story for the teller, the audience, and the location. There are important and real shifts along the continuum. These shifts grow out of and simultaneously feed into the perceptions of roles and obligations of speakers and audiences alike. Most notably, differences in the degree of informality and formality affect the intentions and expectations of both speaker and listener. (Birch, 1998, 312-2)

Michael Wilson expanded understanding of the performance continuum in his study of oral narrative performances amongst teenagers, and in later presentations at conferences such as the one at Globe Education involving storytellers, actors, directors and writers [Figures 1 and 2]. Establishing storytelling primarily as the art of social interaction, he used it to chart clearly risks, rewards, and responsibilities of tellers and audiences in informal, highly formal, intimate, public, conscious and non-self-conscious circumstances. (Wilson, 1997, 28)

![Figure 1, The Performance Continuum](Wilson, 1997, 28)
The performance continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONVERSATION</th>
<th>CULTURAL PRESENTATION</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;-&gt; conversational anecdote narrator &lt;-&gt; professional storytellers &lt;-&gt;</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Pub</th>
<th>Wedding Reception</th>
<th>Theatres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e.g. at the pub</td>
<td>e.g. the best man's speech</td>
<td>e.g. at the theatre</td>
</tr>
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LOW INTENSITY | HIGH INTENSITY

- informal
- low risk
- low rewards

- formal
- high risk
- high rewards

**Figure 2, The Performance Continuum**
(Wilson, 1999)

The concept of a performance continuum allows one to track more clearly cognition in storytelling and listening in, about, and around oral narrative performance.

Such a reference structure is necessary due to the protean nature of all storytelling. Whereas many try to restrict and narrow down the concept of what storytelling is or what storytellers do, or to create new definitions suitable to their own aims and contexts, since narrative is a universal domain of cognition the forms it can take are limitless and pervasive. ‘Everyone is a situational storyteller. Everyone is prompted at home, at work, and at play to create narratives about the recent or distant past’ (Birch, 1998, 315) (: 315) [*my emphasis*]. This is recognised by low-risk, lower-intensity marked storytelling on Wilson’s performance continuum. Carol Birch, with help of folklorist Bert Wilson, described another storyteller often overlooked, or swept under the general category of ‘traditional’ or ‘public’ teller higher up that continuum, coining the term conscious cultural storyteller. These

pass on cultural and ethical standards when they begin stories with “We men...,” “We line workers...,” “We Mennonites...,” and so on. The culture with which they identify may be based on gender, family, work, play, geography, ethnicity, religion, economics, education, or other criteria.

(Birch, 1998, 315)
Conscious cultural storytellers would be another term for traditional tellers, a title much cherished among contemporary storytelling participants. The latter term, like ‘folk’, is fraught with problems, meaning slightly different things dependent on who uses it and why, and what the context or generation is that they reference it with. Many contemporary participants would not recognise the criteria Birch, Bert Wilson and Michael Wilson set (Birch, 1996, 1998, 2000; Wilson, 1997, 1999)—that is, the embedding of cultural and ethical standards within a strictly defined community framework. Instead they define ‘traditional’ tellers first by what they tell, i.e., ‘traditional’ stories as observers, not necessarily the informants, define them, and secondly, if at all, by their lifestyles, though these are rarely investigated or considered in detail, and are usually highly romanticised.

The third category asserted by Bert Wilson is the professional storyteller (Birch, 1998). This appellation is one of many carried by contemporary storytellers, and traditional or conscious cultural tellers can move into this category. That there are many ways of naming storytellers currently practising in seemingly uncountable contexts and styles indicates the need to find constructive criticism of the field, identifying common ground and the reasons for distinctions in the tellers and telling, and also in the perception of tellers and telling. I believe the application of cognitive theory, and related neuro-science and evolutionary biological theories, can aid this process.

The terms professional storyteller, and, possibly, more popular though perhaps fading, revival storyteller, disconcert some.

The skills for being effective in this context are basically the same as those that effective communicators utilize reflexively in other contexts. Nonetheless, the heightened intentionality and distance from audience make some people reluctant to tell their family story, give voice to their religious beliefs, or retell an oral or print-derived story from any platform outside their immediate circle.

(Birch, 1998, 315)

For the same reasons ‘revival storyteller’ repels others. As already discussed, this term, along with revival storytelling and the storytelling revival, arises from earlier beliefs
derived from eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth century folklore. These feed popular views that storytelling, and other folk or traditional arts, were dying or dead and with them valuable concepts and ways of life, such as community. Therefore a primary goal for new storytellers, especially those moving out of their communities, be they traditional or modern, rural or urban, in the home or the school or library, was to preserve, revive, and perpetuate and expand both stories and the art of storytelling. In fact, the national organisation promoting and supporting storytelling in the United States was originally ‘The National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling’ (NAPPS). That this evolved into the current National Storytelling Network suggests cognitive, perceptual changes already going on within storytelling over the past thirty years.

Birch and Stone propose alternative terms to describe different categories of storytellers. Birch prefers the term platform storyteller to professional storyteller.

This new term suggests a kind of storytelling that may not be so culturally bound; it suggests that the primary cultural identification of the teller may not be the same as that of the story. In contrast to situational storyteller, platform storyteller also suggests some degree of formality and distance between teller and listener that has to be bridged.

(Birch, 1998, 315-6)

The type of storytelling produced by platform storytellers is, of course, platform storytelling. These terms have common usage in North America, though storytelling participants in Britain and Ireland, and continental Europe rarely use them. In those countries theatrical storytelling is more often heard and would be the nearest equivalent.

Stone’s attempt at clarification sees three broad categories. These are the traditional storyteller, the modern urban storyteller, and the neo-traditional storyteller.

Oral narration of both traditional and nontraditional stories is carried out in three broad public contexts in North America today: among traditional storytellers in predominantly rural settings..., among nontraditional storytellers in predominately urban school classrooms and libraries, and among “neo-traditional” storytellers in concerts and festivals in both urban and rural areas. Traditional storytellers (excluding Native Americans)
were active from the beginnings of European settlement here, nontraditional urban storytellers since about the 1870s, and neo-traditional storytellers since the 1960s. The term neo-traditional is deliberately paradoxical since these storytellers, despite their recent emergence, blend the old and new in challenging ways.

(Stone, 1986, 16)

Stone accurately points out that within these contexts tellers learn and perform tales differently, and listeners receive them differently. This is so true as to be obvious, if simplistic. My interests, from a cognitive viewpoint, see much common ground in the processes, mental and emotional, in all three. Differences arise more from specific contexts rather than generalised categories.

Stone believes traditional tellers learn stories as they learn their language, as 'a holistic complex of cultural expression'. Nothing is isolated, consciously memorised or formally performed, but learned gradually through absorption when watching, listening, imitating and participating. Yet non-traditional storytelling participants can certainly learn in this manner as well. She also suggests traditional tellers can hear a variety of tellers over a long period, leading to flexible concepts of verbal creativity. In my experience, though this is sometimes true, more commonly, traditional tellers have a narrower view of what storytelling is and what is possible because of the conservative natures of small, usually rural, but also urban ethnic minority, communities.\(^{10}\) Those she identifies as modern urban tellers and neo-traditional tellers, for various reasons, often have a wider repertoire and more flexible viewpoints regarding storytelling's nature.

In traditional telling, Stone also asserts stories are passed on 'horizontally (intragenerationally within peer groups) and vertically (intergenerationally within family groups)...' (Stone, 1986, 16-18). While this might have been a true distinction when she first contemplated this topic in the early to mid 1980s, there are examples now of such passing of stories in non-traditional groups.

These assumptions by Stone are not supported by any documentation; they appear rather to reflect a scholarly tendency to dismiss as insignificant the

\(^{10}\) Appendix I. 4.1 - 4.2. Interviews Transcripts
traditional activities of women and children. A woman-to-child folktale conduit has been documented.... While gender of storyteller and age of audience should be accounted for in research, it is illogical that these should constitute grounds for exclusion from research.

(Sierra, 1993, 14-15)

Bauman also contradicts Stone's assertions, believing a traditional group does not necessarily have to be homogeneous, and cites adult-to-child folklore in contemporary society as well as folk groups (Bauman, 1971, 37). This makes, in his opinion, 'one of many instances of a differential identity as a basis for folklore performance' (Bauman, 1971, 37). This suggests that what Stone calls the modern urban storyteller is closer to the traditional teller, though she places this type further from the folk teller.

Stone traces the appearance of what she calls the neo-traditional storyteller, which Birch would equate with the platform storyteller, Bert Wilson with the professional storyteller, and others with the revival storyteller, to the modern urban storyteller.

Modern urban storytellers, lacking a natural storytelling community in which to learn and perform their stories, must find their own methods of preparing themselves as performers. Many attend workshops that last anywhere from one hour to two days. They typically perform individually in a classroom or library before ten to thirty children. Here the majority of performers are—and have been since the early days of organized storytelling—women, since women have long dominated children's activities in schools and libraries. The school classroom and the library "story hour" restrict these tellers both in physical setting and time. Most performances last no more than one hour, and the times are carefully scheduled in advance. Modern urban tellers, then, have far less flexibility than do traditional tellers, since their storytelling is scheduled rather than spontaneous.

(Stone, 1986, 18)

Her claim is that modern urban tellers who become neo-traditional storytellers are more like traditional ones, because they learn tales and techniques from other tellers rather than printed sources. Neo-traditional tellers primarily tour to perform at festivals, clubs and community and educational venues whereas modern urban tellers remain mostly within one community.
One fault in this argument is that while many contemporary storytellers learn techniques and repertoire from this circuit, which could be identified as Sobol’s storytelling community and/or storytelling scene, assumptions that stories learned are oral, traditional texts is dubious. As I explore later, even within traditional tellers’ repertoires there is much literary influence in any oral storytelling. Another mistake I perceive is equating touring professionals with traditional tellers who, for the most part, were and are very much embedded in a community, seldom moving or performing outside it. Those who move regularly or permanently into the ‘storytelling scene’ become more like contemporary (professional) tellers.

The modern urban storyteller, in my opinion, is much more like the traditional teller. The former tells regularly to the same group or groups of listeners who all meet regularly in the same environment and, usually, exist within the same social and cultural milieu: a school, community centre or library, etc. Sierra agrees, noting that in contrast to Stone who...attempted to separate contemporary storytellers into categories of genuine (traditional raconteurs and professional stage performers) and ersatz (institutional), French folklorist Veronika Görög...described a dynamic network which includes school and library storytellers, professional storytellers, traditional storytellers, and folklorists. I believe that a close study of contemporary storytelling in the United States would produce similar findings.

(Sierra, 1993, 15)

Rather than inflexibility with non-spontaneous telling, I found, as a teacher, more freedom as to when, how and what I would tell than I do as a professional, or neo-traditional, teller working at festivals or concerts. Such events often stipulate strict running times, schedules, and themes for performances, even requiring titles of performances to be printed months in advance.

Language, being a physical act embodied in a natural environment, plays a very important role in the formation, reflection and revelation of cognition. Discrepancies in what people mean by the words ‘storyteller’ and ‘storytelling’, and particularly in the distinctions made by modifiers prefixing them, suggest both different ways of thinking and overlapping cognitive processes. It is therefore necessary to break down elements...
of storytelling, specifically contemporary storytelling in modern society, in order to work towards an holistic view developed by critiques based on cognitive theory. To attempt this I will use the terms contemporary storyteller, contemporary listeners and contemporary storytelling events organisers. I do not use the term contemporary story. My concept of the contemporary storyteller includes what Birch describes as situational, conscious cultural and platform storytellers, what Bert Wilson describes as professional storytellers, and Stone as traditional, modern urban and neo-traditional storytellers. Any of these might, could and do tell traditional stories, original stories, autobiographical stories, literary stories and many other linguistic forms in performances throughout the performance continuum. When I use terms by Stone, et al, I wish to refer to a specific view of storytellers and/or storytelling in order to compare and contrast cognitive processes explaining both difference and common ground.

Summary

The phenomenon recognised as contemporary storytelling today is worthy of study. Purposes for doing so include its importance as a universal domain and common discourse in all sectors of human activity. Applying theories of cognition, folkloristics, literature, and drama performance and comparing them to empirical evidence gathered through personal journals, critical analyses of recorded and live performances, and interviews one should come to a better understanding of what a storyteller is and does, as well as what storytelling means today. The study will also reveal more about cognition, and potentials for studying formal oral narrative performances as a means of gathering more information useful to cognitive psychology, neuroscience and evolutionary biology.
CHAPTER 2. TEXT, WHAT IT DOES AND WHAT IT IS: ITS CONTRIBUTION TO CONTEMPORARY STORYTELLING AND THE STORYTELLING EXPERIENCE

Part 1. What Text Does

The Attractions of Story

Tellers share a passion for verbal art, especially narrative. A narrative can consist solely of arranged images conveyed by words, plotted recognisably as narrative or commentary on narrative, either oral or written or both. Narrative expression can also be visual, dramatic, or mediated: pictures, sculpture, theatre, puppetry, and cinema, radio and video all can and do convey narratives, as critical studies affirm (Mitchell, 1981; Van Djik, 1985; Thwaites, 1994; Schank, 2000). While this thesis focuses solely on oral contemporary storytelling, narratives about which contemporary storytellers are passionate come from all these expressions, significantly influencing repertoires and styles.

What attracts obviously varies. Attraction may develop gradually but more often is reported as sudden realization. Tellers claim responses to particular written texts or genres set alight a compulsion to tell, with exposure to their own and others' oral narratives producing an epiphany.1 Emotions are so strong one is moved to tell. The literature states the necessity of telling stories one likes for successful storytelling to happen (Baker, 1977; Bryant, 1905).2 Another's telling also makes a story, and/or the act of telling, attractive. This does not always turn the listener into a teller. Many future storytellers lose interest in telling stories soon after attempting to practise in the field.

Some of that loss of interest may be due to the discovery that the talents of the individual are not suited to satisfactory delivery of the story. But it is quite possible that the greatest reason for the loss of interest is that the

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1 Appendix I., 5.1—5.3. Journal Observations: Personal reminiscence and anecdotal reports of workshop participants' testimony to 'becoming' storytellers
2 Appendix 1., 6.1—6.4. Interview Transcripts: Informants discuss need to like stories for them to enter repertoire/be performed
new storyteller finds that the choice of the right story to tell is a skill that was not learned.

(Tanner, 1987, 2-3)

Experts note difficulties in selecting texts leading to successful performances. While attraction to texts undoubtedly contributes to the formation of storytellers, their repertoires, and story events providing context within which tellers work, there is no guarantee formations will be successful.

Within traditional storytelling, and some contemporary examples, folklorists recognise text created in the moment, not just recreated or memorized and recited (Lord, 1986, 45; Sierra, 1993, 34; Clayton, 2003, 7). Text and performer are mutually malleable, but content and structure of text must come from somewhere. Who and what the teller is determine what text is attractive to and assimilated by the teller.

The nature of oral composition is to rely on verbal skills and the art of memory; as such, it can be practised by members of different cultural strata...and it can be at once traditional and respond to change. These fluctuations—of meaning, function, and audience destination—are in themselves worthy of study.

(Sierra, 1993, 29)

Such study is the focus of this thesis. Memories and situations for storytelling affect teller and text, and attraction can come from the event and other socio-emotional motivations. Contemporary storytelling participants, and academics, too often assume discourse is a process moving in only one direction.

Observing contemporary storytelling one also sees subconscious appeals to egos. In the storytelling experience listeners feel completely caught up in the story and thought processes of the teller. Thoughts parallel the teller's, so replication of the story appears easy. Participating in successful performance produces desires to repeat it; when we enjoy narratives (whether oral stories, books, plays or films) we replay them in memory and conversation. The compulsion to share real and imagined experiences is evident, human cognition requiring narration of these mentally, orally and/or physically so to retain and make use of them. We re-experience not only thoughts inherent in texts and performances, but also emotions and physical sensations. Children re-enact narrative
and the instinct to do so is no less in adults.³ They naturally attempt their own style of re-telling so as to re-experience and extend desired emotions and sensations. It is a short step to the ego-satisfying idea of becoming a performer, recognised as having skill and discernment to perform text.

In interviews tellers describe motivational relationships to oral and/or written stories. Previous story art encounters attuned senses to think and communicate narrationally, but so too did real-world encounters. Traditional tellers mention important individuals: people who taught them or share their ordinary lives, those inhabiting stories, and people in audiences. Places, too, provide a role in remembering and performing stories.⁴ These ingredients are part of text, and its attractions: text stores tellers’ memories and their relationships to remembered events; the act of telling evokes memories, emotions and sensations, giving them shape in the physical world again.

**Mental Processes and Narrative Texts**

Certain genres and tales appeal because they match the teller’s personality, meaning the teller is predisposed to those narrative texts. Having either matched or shaped that teller’s cognition, the intellectual and emotional bonds facilitate learning, retention and performance. As observed in Chapter 1, Hardy, Bruner and others (Hardy, 1977, 12; Bruner, 1990, 45-6; Lesser, 1957, 3) acknowledge narrative as a primary act of the mind, universal with possible innate aspects related to human physiology. Predisposition is also culturally influenced, whether mediated exclusively through oracy, literacy, or modern electronic media, or combinations of these.

As such, it suggests narrative is a natural process or quality in humans, while others insist it is cultural. Gardner suggests the latter when asserting that cognitive accomplishments occur in a range of domains. Certain domains, such as the logical-mathematical one studied by Piaget, are universal. They must be (and are) confronted and mastered by

³ Appendix II. 7.1. - 7.3. Material Data: Examples of Students’ Writing from Storytelling School Residency Projects.
⁴ Appendix I. 7.1. - 7.2. Interview Transcripts: Informants relate certain stories to certain places.
individuals all over the world, simply by virtue of their membership in the same species and the resultant need to cope with that species' physical and social environment. Other domains are restricted to certain cultures. For example, a capacity to read is important in many cultures but unknown (or minimally valued) in others. Unless one lives in a culture where this domain is featured one will make little or no progress in it. Still other domains are restricted to pockets within a culture.

(Gardner, 1993, 26)

A weakness here comes from widespread assumptions that the storytelling experience is encountered primarily through story reading. Gardner is correct in saying some domains are culturally specific, but does not see universal properties underlying cultural domains. Genres and tale types, as well as certain storytelling acts, may be culturally specific. Variations occur in storytelling acts in different societies and cultures; this is problematic for contemporary storytellers assuming universality in storytelling and stories since they take this as a liberty to control, experiment with, and exploit text. The phenomenon of contemporary telling is evolutionary, influenced by many textual types and sources and equally influencing textual development. Underlying contemporary storytelling, as in all other forms, there must be universal cognitive domains.

Disciplines interested in narrative often fail to distinguish sufficiently between forms, or make use of cross-disciplinary studies tracing distinctions and common ground in definitions. Sierra pointed out psychologists' research on and disappointment in story grammars, and also folklorists' failure to explore use of such theory in their field (Sierra, 1993, 58). Harold Rosen, too, admonishes educationalists, literary and cultural critics, biographers, and oral historians for covering much of the same ground concerning narration with little exchange of ideas and observations between them in his book Speaking from Memory (Rosen, 1998). While folklore failed in comprehensive use of cognitive psychology, cognitive psychology and literary theory also made few distinctions in the ubiquitous nature of narrative, particularly 'oral' forms and forms considered 'primitive', failing to see highly developed formal and mutually influential kinds of oral stories. Barbaba Babcock emphasized a major weakness:

Another assumption of the myth of primitive narrative is that such 'other' narratives are fundamentally different from 'our' literary ones, and, therefore, can and should be analyzed by different criteria than those we
apply to literary narrative. The dichotomy is perpetuated by the very fact that students of “folk” or “primitive” literary traditions have insisted on calling their subject by another name.... While oral narrative is different, that which makes it different—its oral quality—is often not seriously considered.

(Babcock, 1984, 63-4)

Contemporary storytelling participants would benefit by incorporating cognitive theory in their critical language, and cognitive scientists by garnering observations from formal (higher continuum) storytelling in their studies of various performances’ texts.

Narrative belongs either to Piaget’s universal logical-mathematical domain, or other universal domains where cognitive accomplishments of language and/or art occur. Intuition and experience as a professional storyteller and primary school teacher suggest these domains are not discrete, but interconnected and even at base the same.⁵ Hobson points out Piaget’s error of focusing entirely on action-thought relationships to explain cognition, believing that by

...introducing imitation into his explanation, Piaget seems to have been trying to find a place for social factors in the genesis of thought, but there were two limitations to his theory that he could not transcend. The first was his preoccupation with action as the primary source of intelligent thought, to the relative neglect of feelings.

(Hobson, 2002, 104)

To an extent, observations of storytelling confirm Piaget’s way of thinking. Telling and listening are physical acts, representing through text physical acts of others, all learned through imitation. But telling and listening are also social and emotional events, tied to shared and remembered experiences (real and imaginary).

Lesser asserts narrative as ancient artifact, important in physical and mental human evolution (Lesser, 1957). While also supporting Piaget, Hobson asserts that narrative’s emotional and social aspects are equally important for developing theory of mind.

Hobson shows Piaget

⁵ Appendix I., 8.1 – 8.2. Journal Observations: Experiences with storytelling work with footballers, and storytelling in the educational classrooms
... could characterize thinking as a kind of action-in-mind, and although he tried to import the deferred imitation of actions into his explanatory scheme, he was unable to find space for feelings. This was a serious omission. The second limitation of Piaget's preoccupation with the individual child's efforts to construct an understanding of the world, to the relative neglect of the part that might be played by the social construction of thought. He was unable to accept that the fabric of thinking may be woven as the warp and weft of transactions between people. The very means to thinking may be interpersonal relations.

(Hobson, 2002, 104)

Here narrative, oral or literary, clearly becomes universal and fundamental in cognition. Potential for thinking narratively is innate, but developed through interactions. Effective oral narrative performance must be contextualised, with texts engaged physically, mentally, socially and emotionally. Contemporary and traditional storytelling practices demonstrate this.

**Storytelling and Cognition**

Fludernik states: 'Cognitive linguistics tries to locate linguistic process within more general processes of cognitive comprehension. These cognitive processes...relate to human embodiedness in a natural environment and are essentially motivated by metaphors of embodiment' (Fludernik, 1996, 117). Countering Gardner's emphasis on cultural specificity of reading, and, by implication, all narrative, she emphasizes genuine storytelling communicates what tellers think, feel, and value as important, which confirms or expands audiences' thoughts, feelings and values as well, all within and influenced by physicality. This happens throughout performances that, if successful, convey experience truthfully. Bruner points out, '...when you encounter an exception to the ordinary, and ask somebody what is happening, the person you ask will virtually always tell a story that contains reasons (or...an intentional state). The story...will almost inevitably be an account of a possible world in which the encountered exception is somehow made to make sense or have "meaning"' (Bruner, 1990, 49). Benjamin's philosophical essay stated this, correctly defining storytelling as sharing useful

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6 Appendix I., 9.1 – 9.2. Analyses of Video Recordings of Storytelling Performances, and comparisons with performances of the same teller(s) recorded in Journal Observations and/or Interviews.
experience, prompting deep psychological possessiveness to texts by all participants—a strong motivation for communal oral performance (Benjamin, 1992). He did so long before cognitive psychology arrived at this belief.

Psychological links between performance and cognition suggest similar structures in narratives and mental processes, and emotional processes connected to linguistic and socio-cultural expressions. Rubin’s and Fox’s studies of memory in oral traditions look at linguistic elements of texts, exploring how these mirror or aid memory (Rubin, 1995, 10, 11; Fox, 2000, 39-40, 113). Warner’s observations in No Go the Bogeyman and From the Beast to the Blonde reveal the importance of nursery rhymes, ‘old wives’ tales’ and nurturing roles in children’s social, psychological and linguistic development (Warner, 1998, 228-9; 1994, 21). Narrative structures best matching participants’ mental structures and emotional experiences speak directly to tellers. These are easily learned and told, and naturally chosen for repertoires. As tellers indulge this practice, repertoires enlarge, consisting of similar stories, variants of each other.

Certain stories and genres seem suitable to psycholinguistic structures. Personal stories are transformed into these so they become easier to remember and perform. Noticeable stylistic similarities between successful oral narrative performance texts and early written or printed literary texts exist, explaining why they differ markedly from modern literature. Rubin, Pleijj, Fox and others show early literary texts contain linguistic structures close to oral language (Rubin, 1995, 70, 71; Pleij, 2001, 61; Fox, 2000, 5, 6) Either they were transcribed from oral performances, or writers thought ‘orally’ as they wrote. Development of the novel in the modern era, and later experimentation within that form, significantly separates oral and written texts as art forms (Lodge, 2002, 39, 40). Hunt, and others, assert new electronic media will have similar impacts on how we look at, use, and create future narrative texts and genre (Hunt, 2000). Personal and original narrative texts will reflect these influences throughout the performance continuum.

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7 Appendix I., 10.1. – 10.4. Interview transcripts and Journal Observations: Comments regarding how contemporary storytellers’ repertoires reflect personality and background

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Oral and written literature interacts with participants' memories and knowledge on a subconscious level via the same mental processes. Psychologists developed multiple theories upon narrative and applied these subsequently to observations of the art from. Freudians explore effects of literature upon the subconscious and vice versa. Primarily viewing storytelling as literary activity, their insights explore connections between memory and emotion, metaphor, and the relationship of id-ego-superego to text and acts of telling. Jungian psychology also relies upon and makes use of oral, literary and, especially, traditional narratives.

Freudians and Jungians analyzed subconscious meaning and attraction of fairy tales and similar literary genres. Bettelheim’s Freudian analysis of fairy tales and children’s psychological development considered literary versions of Grimm, recommending they be told, or read aloud with ‘emotional involvement’ (Bettelheim, 1976, 150). Jungian approaches to traditional tales recognise oral performances and their impact. But literary conceptions dominate in analyses postulating universal meanings for specific images (Bly, 1992; Eliot, 1994; Zimmer, 1973), suggesting too formulaic an approach. These result in assertions of a fixed meaning to texts that are ultimately non-fixed. Non-fixed, in reality, if we are to understand cognition and narrative as always being embodied in physical experience provoking mental states of alternating liminality.

Storytelling’s universality as a human act does not prove universal consciousness asserted by psychological interpretations of literary forms, which are narrative texts taken out of context.

Is it unreasonable to suppose that there is some human “readiness” for narrative that is responsible for conserving and elaborating such a tradition in the first place—whether in Kantian terms, as “an art hidden in the human soul,” whether as a feature of our language capacity, whether even as a psychological capacity like...our readiness to convert the world of visual input into figure and ground? By this I do not intend that we “store” specific archetypal stories or myths, as C.G. Jung has proposed. That seems like misplaced concreteness. Rather, I mean a readiness or predisposition to organize experience into a narrative form, into plot structures and the rest.... It seems to me such a view is irresistible. And
other scholars who have addressed the issue of narrative have been tempted along this path.

(Bruner, 1990, 45-6)

Circular logic results from prescriptive psychological analyses based on specific definitively-viewed written texts. Many in contemporary storytelling, often inspired by Blye, Meade, Campbell, *et al*, perpetuate earlier psychological interpretations to interpret or defend repertoires and practice, suggesting one meaning or variant as valid. Freudian and Jungian views are not the only interpretations, though they are useful in categorizing some cognition engaged in storytelling. Texts, mistakenly assumed as definitive, describe or label mental conditions in psychoanalytical studies. Psychological dynamics between oral reader and listener or teller and listener are ignored or assumed.

Zipes, Ruben, Fox, Pleijj and others demonstrate that no literary version is definitive, having evolved over several editions in canons influenced by prevailing social, particularly bourgeois, mores (Zipes, 2002; Ruben, 1995; Pleijj, 2001; Fox, 2000). Recent analytical forms explore influences of text upon reader and, in non-psychological studies, literary and cultural criticisms of writers and societies upon texts (Friedberg, 1999; Friel, 1995; Kim 1996; Land, 1993; Posner, 1997). Reports on multiple impressions arising from writer/reader relationships with printed texts exist, mostly concerned with influences of illustration and print types in development of literacy; they seldom look at how these affect oral interpreters. Studies failing to recognise fluidity and equality of interaction between teller, text, context and audience are of limited use though influences upon contemporary storytelling are significant.

Narrative structures lending themselves easily to memory, associative thinking and performance reveal the workings of emotions and the subconscious, suggesting the potential for oral storytelling to inform neuroscience, cognition and evolutionary biology (Fludernik, 1991, 27-8; Sierra, 1993, 58). Narrative structures suggest order, logic, and sequencing so the brain makes sense of random observations and thoughts, making them associative. According to Freudians, narrative
is a means of dealing with our most urgent problems, even those we ordinarily shun. The greatest fiction poses these problems in their most essential terms. It gives form to our most fleeting impulses and fully discloses their consequences and ramifications. When we read fiction, moreover, we are ordinarily relaxed and secure, so that we can see things that might elude us at other times. In imagination we can experiment, try out various approaches to our problems, alter this or that circumstance to discover what results ensue. It would be a serious error to suppose that psychic activity of this sort is without value because it is largely unconscious.

(Lesser, 1957, 55)

While the above refers to reading, orally related stories make the same impact. If anything, the relaxed state is more prevalent with listeners than readers, allowing imagination and the subconscious to function more easily. This is the storytelling experience, which when it happens exhibits both flow and hypnogogic trance. Cognitive scientists question Freudian obsession with interpretation of the subconscious consisting of repressed experiences and emotions, revealed through dreams and narrative. Cognitive scientists believe the subconscious consists mostly of automatic mental acts taking place continually. Even so, Freudian depiction of the mind and mental states proves useful in cognitive theory, particularly in understanding mental processes such as associative thoughts, and, obviously, analyses of narrative.

Reading, writing, telling and listening parallel the form and function of daydreaming (Lesser, 1957, 39). ‘Storytelling becomes the joint daydream between the teller and listener. The moment created by an iconic gesture can bring the dream-like sense of a story into focus’ (Wischner, 1991, 115). Through narratives, conscious and subconscious minds find purpose and order in the universe. ‘We are encouraged to believe that we can find order in this diversity by the fact that so many storytellers, living and dead, have seemed to share a common idea of what those purposes are’ (Lesser, 1957, 60-1). Freud asserted perfectly satisfied individuals would not daydream nor, presumably, indulge in telling and listening to stories. We do so not because we are imperfect; physically and culturally our nature evolved so storytelling became a major component.
Stories provide vicarious experience, adding to memories from real life experience.

Narrative and primary process thinking are similar not only because both employ imagistic language.

[The] transitions between images in fiction, and the relationship between background details and events, are often explicable, as in dreams, not so much on logical grounds as in discourse, we mean common or repetitive experiences become quasi-automatic or subconscious. Participants of story then automatically pick up shared, understood images from narratives.

(Lesser, 1957, 148)

Memory, reverie, flow, and hypnagogic trance are all part of both storytelling and reading experiences. One thought, image, or word triggers others—for teller and listener, writer and reader. There is outer text of physical reality, spoken and heard, common to all, and inner text, transcendent and created inside, slightly different in each teller and listener.

Gianni Rodari captured this mental process in his metaphor:

A stone thrown into a pond sets in motion concentric waves that spread out on the surface of the water, and their reverberation has an effect....

In a short time, countless events or micro-events occur one after another. Even if a person had the time and desire, I doubt whether all of this could be registered without missing some aspect of change.

It is not much different with a word, thrown by chance into the mind, producing waves on the surface and in the depths. It provokes an infinite series of chain reactions and, as it falls, it evokes sounds and images, analogues and recollections, meanings and dreams, in a movement that touches experience and memory, the imagination and the unconscious, and is complicated by the fact that the mind itself does not react passively, but intervenes continually to accept and reject these representations, to connect and censor them, construct and destroy them.

(Rodari, 1993, 5)

Narrative manages such input continually on all points of the performance continuum.

Narrative artists, whether tellers (or writers), demand listeners (or readers) ‘...make interpolations and draw inferences, to participate actively in the task of understanding...
[the] tale’ (Lesser, 1957, 195). The unconscious mind plays an enormous role in contemporary storytelling, but clearly

it is unbelievably perceptive, and prodigal in supplying us with impressions and associations. Certain peculiarities of the unconscious processes facilitate speed and prodigality. The unconscious does not have to work out anything in detail either to reach or express understanding. Unconscious understanding is immediate, intuitive. In expressing understanding, the unconscious employs either words or images, whichever are most suitable for its purpose, without regard for consistency. Sometimes it eschews both, so that the only trace of its activity lies in the alteration of our feelings.

(Lesser, 1957, 196).

To attain the storytelling experience, one uses the unconscious in this way. Whether traditional, personal or literary, mental processes for remembering, telling or understanding text must be the same as for experiential memories.

When we are engrossed...

we imaginatively experience the entire action, ourselves act out every role. The experience is, of course, imaginary; it is elliptical; it utilizes energy which is at least partly neutralized. Despite all of these provisos, the experience is “real” and, in the view of its speed, astonishingly complete; it includes, for example, an understanding of the unconscious significance of the acts we perform.

(Lesser, 1957, 201).

This means fiction and fact are artificial concepts at one level. Useful terms for analysis, helpful for categorising participants’ preferences or choosing appropriate stories for a context, they are socio-cultural learned behaviours. The dichotomy between fact and fiction is not necessarily useful for considering mental processes engaged within narrative. Teller and listener really do feel fear, love, joy and other emotions and the physiological signs these produce.

Schema, Scripts and Indexing—Mechanics of Narrative Thought

Computer science provides insight regarding cognition and narrative. Considering narrative thinking as logical and chronologically sequential is simplistic: it is better viewed as spatial and multi-temporal, within all fields of the ‘mind’s eye’. Some
narrative mental images are only 'peripherally' within our 'inner vision'. Mental images take primary focus in the foreground, but associative thoughts encompass myriad images on the 'edges'. Identified as schema (Rubin, 1995, 21-37), these images to which we refer subconsciously or quasi-automatically help us understand immediate experiences, recall stored knowledge, and record and evaluate new data. They combine to form new mental structures (new narratives or old ones with new insights), as we speak or act (in life or narrative performance), we 'reach out' to those schema, melding them as narrative.

Using schema routinely in daily life causes structured thought patterns to become quasi-automatic, even subconscious. We do not retain memories of every waking moment; what is remembered is strongly tied to emotion. The greater the emotional experience, the more likely we remember an event. Stories and storytelling deal with emotion in socio-cultural contexts. Contemporary tellers, practising regularly, often with strong emotions, develop specialised schema or other patterned mental structures. These enable performance and paraperformance, and are displayed by such phenomena. They maintain storytellers' identities outside performance. Listeners experience the same cognition (associative thoughts, use of schema, etc.). Creation of the storytelling experience is shared equally, but differently. All texts convey experiential knowledge, processed similarly to real experience. 'People think in terms of stories. They understand the world in terms of stories they have already understood. New events or problems are understood by reference to old previously understood stories and explained to others by the use of stories' (Schank, 2000, 219). Unless previous experiences teach certain narrative events are fictional, stories (and theatrical and cinematic drama) are taken to be real. 8

Elements of narrative are processed, not entire narratives, making it easy to integrate actual and reported experience.

Events do not automatically add up to a story. We experience many sequences of events that we never organize into a narrative. Because the

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8 Appendix 1., 11.1. – 11.4. Journal Observations: Instances where listeners (esp. children) reacted emotionally and physiologically as though stories related were real.
process of constructing a narrative takes effort, we need a reason to do it. Once having done so, we are inclined to retell stories because they would otherwise be forgotten and efforts expended constructing them would be wasted. Retelling also offers chances to reindex, which may preserve a narrative.

(Morson, 1990, xxiii)

Instinct to do this is strong, observed by various Irish folklorists who recount apocryphal stories of informants reciting repertoires to a stone wall or door, or the plough, cart or livestock while working the fields, because locals were no longer entertained by old-fashioned amusements (Delargy, 1945, 12; Zimmerman, 2001, 452-3). Schank refers to mental narrative structures assembled from various schema as ‘scripts’.

A script is a set of expectations about what will happen next in a well-understood situation. In a sense, many situations in life have the people who participate in them seemingly reading their roles in a kind of play... Life experience means quite often knowing how to act and how others will act in given stereotypical situations. That knowledge is called a script.

(Schank, 2000, 7).

Whereas psychologists, cognitive scientists and linguists usually look to anecdotal stories embedded in conversations to explain theories of script and schema, their observations clearly describe mental processes during formal storytelling.

Traditional stories, received orally, are considered sources of wisdom, a quality sometimes attributed to the teller. ‘We take standard stories of our culture and interpret what happens to us in terms of such stories. In other words, often the stories we rely upon to help us reason are not even our own’ (Schank, 2000, 149). We do this referencing in conversation. Doing so in formal storytelling reinforces cultural and institutional systems. ‘The language of the culture also reflects the stories of the culture’ (Schank, 2000, 149). Successful contemporary storytellers are adept at choosing correct scripts (texts) to tell in effective styles; manipulating texts suggests ‘wisdom is often ascribed to those who can tell just the right story at the right moment and who often have a large number of stories to tell’ (Schank, 2000, 149).
Motif, 'the smallest element in a tale having power to persist in tradition' (Thompson, 1977, 415), is the term describing discrete images and actions in traditional tales. Motifs exist in all art forms, and could be considered as schema or scripts, allowing indiscriminate random associations occurring consciously and subconsciously during telling and listening—or when participating in any art form using or evoking imagery narrationally. Contemporary tellers absorb motifs from stories but also by experiencing multi- and new media. Even without naming the term, contemporary storytelling participants identify and use motifs. They provide metaphorical language for extending experiences, real and reported, and communicating understood experiences. Real life events (births, courtships, marriages, trials, combats, deaths) become motifs, incorporated into stories—'real' autobiographies or biographies or 'fantasy' wonder tales and the like—to achieve instant recognition, emotional responses, and understanding among participants. Narrative motifs function on conscious, quasi-automatic and subconscious levels. Fluent listeners (or readers), encountering elements not understood reflect on what they already know, combining such knowledge with narrative information to predict what comes next. We make an understanding for ourselves by anticipating possible future scripts for the story or real life. Associative thoughts involved in reflection and prediction keep us in the storytelling experience while maintaining connections with the real world.

In addition to experiential knowledge, motifs evoke intellectual and emotional knowledge. At different stages of development, motifs (or schema and/or scripts) evoke slightly different responses, because experiences are different, and tastes or priorities change. Thus tellers' repertoires can change significantly over a lifetime. Inventories of tales do not only change, with some dropped and others brought in; the tone and meaning of stories told consecutively over many years can be transformed. Different depths and a multiplicity of meanings are communicated even if texts are nearly exactly the same in a story repeated with a gap of a few days or fifty years. The same text causes different associative thoughts, leading to new texts and perceptions.9

9 Appendix I., 12.1-12.6. Interview Transcripts: Informants' perceptions of stories in their repertoires and how they have/have not changed over years.
The Impact of the Subconscious on the Physical Reality of Storytelling

Scientists theorize that interaction with different forms of text affects not only modes of thinking, but even brain physiology. Innately, or through experience, narratives cause minds to form different physiological structures, dependent on which media we most often encounter. More likely, structures form through combinations of inborn physiology and potentials and interactions with the outer world. It has been mooted that children and teenagers—all of us, in fact—over the past twenty years think, read, tell and listen in markedly different ways, due to influences of new electronic media (Zipes, 2001, 127; Hunt, 2000, 111-9). Experience suggests certain groups listening regularly participate more in the storytelling experience, entering it readily and more quickly than those with little or no experience of participation with any live performance arts. Tellers notice differences between groups, and this (discussed in the chapter on audience) affects what and how they choose to tell. How tellers sense differences, and take advantage of them, requires intuitive, either quasi-automatic or subconscious, use of texts. An experienced or naturally talented teller’s cognition consists of enough scripts to assemble text quickly for performance and paraperformance that engages the least experienced, least responsive participants.¹⁰

One hundred years ago, before modern technologies contributed to changing behaviours and mental physiology, Sarah Cone Bryant noted significant differences in modes of listening dependent upon children’s backgrounds (Bryant, 1905, 9-12). My own experience suggests there are audiences not used to listening, or thinking regularly or normally in ways evident when storytelling experience does happen. Anecdotal evidence supports the idea this is influenced culturally, with children in the United States having more difficulty than those in Ireland or Italy.¹¹ Such personal

¹⁰ Appendix I. 13.1. — 13.2. Interview Transcripts and Journal Observations: How a wide, varied repertoire of texts allows tellers to ‘shift’ quickly and accommodate ‘difficult’ and ‘challenging’ audiences

¹¹ Appendix I. 14.1.—14.2. Journal Observations: Experiences child audiences in various countries and how the repertoire is programmed/adapted/changed
experiences also show no matter how much difficulty listeners have, if using
appropriate texts effectively, then ultimately storytelling experience is achieved. This is
confirmed by Bryant's century-old accounts suggesting strong, innate physiological
propensity to create and use narrative text. Whatever brain physiology is employed,
inexperienced listeners quickly make use of schema and scripts as experienced listeners
do, and participate fully in the storytelling experience. Although one would need to
conduct several magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and/or positron-emission
tomography (PET) tests upon numerous participants involved with all kinds of narrative
experiences to monitor the range of physiological differences and similarities. Current
technology is obtrusive and prohibitively expensive.

Another aspect of schema to consider, in cognitive and/or physiological terms, is
whether 'set' schema and scripts truly shape and 'set' cognitive and physiological
structures. Certain patterns of thought may become too fixed, thereby preventing more
flexible means of manipulating thinking. This is not healthy for specific individuals or
society as a whole. Such cognition explains connections between narrative and religious
rites, mass entertainment, political propaganda and so on. Brainwashing, propaganda,
fanaticism, fundamentalism and other behaviours viewed as undesirable today result
from individuals and/or institutions utilising certain narratives and the cognition entailed
to create and communicate them. Cognitive processes which are activated through
narrative texts, thus become a significant part of what happens in the mind during both
storytelling and listening, but also form a major part of or interact with those cognitive
processes such as schema and scripts. These are similar to those cognitive processes
involved in what societies consider to be negative behaviours. For this reason narratives
have been censored or manipulated by political and religious regimes, and discussions
on censorship persist today. Further study is more appropriate for political or
philosophical papers. Inflexible thinking, however, is of concern here regarding specific
ways it affects storytelling.

When the mode of thinking for any type of storytelling becomes fixed, rigidity defines a
story and storytelling too tightly. This has been the problem in developing a critical
language, as discussed in the first chapter. Certain scripts exclusively used over others then create artificial notions about stories and storytelling. Actions create certain schema—expectations for specifically defined behaviours—inhibiting innovation and difference. Misunderstanding of definitions of text and relationships of text to performer, listeners and contexts occurs regularly in contemporary storytelling. Misunderstanding is not exclusive to inexperienced tellers; misunderstanding evolves, becoming noticeable when tellers and audiences are at cross purposes. With exchanges of performers between cultures, classes or ethnic groups, a common event in contemporary storytelling activities such as international storytelling festivals, a performer may come with one set of expectations and audiences another. Results may be positive, but equally probable is that such encounters cause a jarring effect.\textsuperscript{12} Wider, long-term views of contemporary storytelling show fixed ways of thinking among middle and upper class participants least aware of their prejudices. These tend to control events like storytelling festivals and concerts, having direct bearing on what stories or sort of storytelling are popularised or standardised, and to what purpose. A narrow view of text and straitjacketed exercising of cognition employed, militates against the storytelling experience and limit the democratising, egalitarian potential of storytelling as the art of social interaction.

With vast choices of scripts, why are participants continually drawn to stories told orally or read aloud? Stories heard, or read silently by fluent readers, are the closest means we have to experiencing another's thoughts directly. We think of similar images almost simultaneously with the teller, or writer. Listening to stories, we think the same thoughts as other listeners in the room (Ong, 1986, 149-150). This is when the storytelling experience happens, with all in some stage of hypnogogic trance. Variations of thought and image exist, because we carry different schema to which we refer. If we did not share a fairly common repertoire of schema there would be no effective communication or storytelling experience.

\textsuperscript{12} Appendix I., 15.1.—15.4. Journal Observations: Performances that resulted in 'cultural dissonance' from mistaken assumptions
If a blurring of fact and fiction is acknowledged, following Schank's theory, then indexing allows associations between factual and fictitious experiences so text is meaningful and useful. Fact and fiction remain distinctive while their mental processes are the same. This causes that 'blurring' since

...fiction has more power than we know to ...spin a web of illusion which ensares us. Without realizing it, we may very quickly become involved in the drama we are watching or reading. Naturally, of course, we do not completely forget that we are simply watching or reading a story....but a great deal more reliable evidence reminds us that the demarcation between fiction and reality is sometimes obliterated. (Lesser, 1957, 179)

These mental processes are used outside the arts, as well, to convey knowledge and experience as more than mere information. Dewey’s philosophy of experiential learning relies heavily on vital skills being acquired through fiction. Narrative thinking is also used for pleasure. Sport, as an example, can be viewed as enacted narrative, with conflicts, protagonists and antagonists, motifs and sub-stories, digressions and frame language (Ryan, 2002).13 Looking at the relationships of two narrative forms many contemporary storytelling participants consider unrelated exposes common cognition.

Part 2. What Text Is

Narrative Texts Common to Oral Narrative Performances

Text refers to all language in oral narrative performances, which contains different types. The narrative itself, an abstract construct in the mind, as well as the language to communicate it, is what most think of when considering storytelling. However paraperformance text, language surrounding narrative, is equally important, combining with narrative language to achieve the storytelling experience. Language of

paraperformance is referred to here as *paratext* and that of the narrative as *narrative text*. *Para-* and *narrative text* both derive from oral and literary sources and consist in many forms.

Story is generally identified as being made of the following:

- **narrative**: a series of linked, chronological, sometimes sequential, events involving an individual or related group of individuals within those linked events, the essential text for both storytelling participants and scholars, though an aspect of story seldom considered outside of folklore studies are the sequential events surrounding the story (*framing*);

- **plot**: how the narrative is arranged, which is arbitrary and dependent upon cultural aesthetic;

and

- **story**: the work of art, resulting from all combining to make it. Scholars outside folklore disciplines focus mostly upon literary stories and writer-text/text-reader relationships, or stories in conversation from the lower range of the performance continuum. Contemporary storytelling mainly occurs higher up the performance continuum.

These terms do derive from latterday semiological understanding of story. Semiological studies claim ‘...narrative is a structured *sequence of events in time*’ (Thwaites, 1994, 118). Semiologists view the signified (the story) as having no meaning but what the signifier and perceiver put to it. ‘Story is the narrative in chronological order, *the abstract order of events as they follow each other*. That is, like a signified, the story is what the reader conceives or understands’ (Thwaites, 1994, 1212) [*my emphasis*]. Accordingly in ‘abstract’ events and order of events, whether read or listened to, perceivers (readers or listeners) conceive meaning, create understanding and so possibly change meaning intended by the originator, either writer or teller.

In terms of contemporary storytelling, an oral narrative form, this is unsatisfactory (and is examined herewith). For the moment, weaknesses to point out in semiological definitions include the assumption that narrative is experienced solely through reading, or some other form of visual perception such as viewing a painting, play or film, or other forms that disallow, particularly, interaction between signifier, signified and perceiver. Related to this misconception is that only structured sequences of events in
time within the story are relevant to the creation of the storytelling experience, that is, meaningful narrative experience. This prevents semiological interpretations from taking account of the fact that signifier, signified and perceiver (signiflee) can and do exchange roles within the whole context of contemporary storytelling, especially when one analyses a specific oral narrative event in its entirety (Thwaites, 1994, Crane, 2001). This argument is developed further in the section exploring other disciplines, particularly literary influences upon ideas about text, and what it does and is.

Many contemporary tellers admit to few or no literary influences upon traditional texts and tellers. Research suggests otherwise, even with tellers from traditional backgrounds. Encounters with literature and other media impact on cognitive processes in all storytelling. So, also, do mistaken assumptions about the purity of oral tradition.¹⁴

All these associations severely overload the term ‘oral tradition’. For many folklorists, following in the footsteps of the Romantics, orality has been seen as synonymous with authenticity and purity. .... Literacy is accordingly seen as something that ‘corrupts’: it smacks of formal education and sophistication. But it is now widely recognised that the transmission of songs and stories has depended for centuries on print as well as word of mouth. In fact, literacy can encode the productions of a collective, ‘poetic’ mind as much as the individual ‘rational’ one. (Leith, 2002, 63-4)

Not enough contemporary tellers and listeners research or question sources of contemporary storytelling repertoires, resulting in assumptions that all text is anonymous, oral and traditional. Whereas there are moral and legal implications, and these have been explored in other publications.¹⁵ The concern here is how such definitive assumptions and practices result from or determine cognitive processes.

Storytelling as social reciprocation, meaning social interactions in personal and public relationships, establishes discourse inevitably influencing both the storyteller’s repertoire and the cultural stock of narratives and genres a society holds. Oral and

¹⁴Appendix I., 17.0. Journal Observations. Transmigration of 'The King's Big Toes' by Patrick Kavanagh, and other examples
¹⁵Appendix II., 8.0. Storytelling and Copyright: Ethics and Procedures. Web site address and summary.
literary texts, as well as traditional and personal texts, are not discrete forms, but different material manifestations of the same cognitive processes involved in creating and exploring the storytelling experience. The importance of emotions and personal relationships in making memories and in using memory leads to contemporary storytelling participants believing a thing is so (complete purity of oral traditions, for example) when evidence contradicts it. A love of reading, frequently indicating interaction with written text, influenced contemporary and traditional tellers’ decisions. Some conveniently overlook this fact, idealising that notion of pure, unbroken spoken traditions. ‘A major problem with the opposition of orality versus literacy is that it is so often seen as timeless and universal. We have only to look at the history of the words ‘popular’ and ‘folk’ to see how their meanings are part of debates held in specific historical circumstances’ (Leith, 1989, 48-9). As Crane maintains, slight changes in meanings of words indicate significant changes in cognitive processing (and hence, the storytelling) of individuals (Crane, 2001, 42-3).

Many contemporary storytelling texts are decontextualized in performance. When discredited early folkloristic and aesthetic philosophies arising from Romantic and Nationalist movements are unquestionably accepted as relevant, it is easy to ignore or minimize contributions of literacy and literature in contemporary storytelling. This denies findings recognising mutual, continuing influences of oral and written texts over half a millennium or more. (Pleij, 1997, 2001; Fox, 2000; Rubin, 1995; Leith, 2002; 1989) Doing so is dishonest, preventing comprehensive understanding of storytelling, and making it easier to manipulate the art form commercially and/or politically. Multiple sources mediated through social reciprocation influencing traditional tellers are demonstrated in interviews. Francie Kennelly, Duncan Williamson, and John Campbell are identified as respected, much-loved traditional tellers within their communities, the academic community of folk studies, and the contemporary storytelling scene. Participants in the latter category particularly place them and similar tellers on ‘pedestals’, romanticising their ‘traditional’, ‘oral’ and ‘ancient’ backgrounds; yet, these
three regularly and willingly acknowledge literary influences, which admirers choose to ignore or attribute to oral sources. 16

There are contemporary tellers from non-traditional backgrounds also reporting literary influences. 17 And contemporary storytelling participants are not alone in missing oral-literary connections, accidentally or deliberately. Literary critics also ignore mutual influences.

Folklore feeds on its own rich soil but also infuses literary—and other—works of art with motifs, themes, aesthetic structures, speech patterns, symbols and concrete details of everyday life as well as ritual practice. At the same time, the creators, owners, and cultural milieu of “high art” distance themselves as far—and as loudly—as they can from their folklore sources.

(Sautman, 1998, 2)

Ironically, contemporary storytelling participants are influenced by practices of literary critics: if the latter ignore traditional oral influences, ipso facto contemporary storytelling enthusiasts accept their art has no substantial influences on literature and assume literary tracts have no bearing on traditional oral material. Class prejudices prove influential as well, with many contemporary storytellers failing to see clear connections between attitudes towards this cultural milieu of ‘high art’ (and popular art also) upon their repertoires, performances and identities as tellers.

Defensive attitudes arise, perhaps, from the need to differentiate contemporary storytellers’ work from writers’, particularly when professional storytellers compete with writers for funding, public recognition and critical acclaim. This causes confusion in practice: some tellers ignore literary connections, others over-emphasize them as it suits, or mimic prima-donna behaviours of lauded writers and poets at the expense of their telling. (Zipes, 2001, 128, 139-40) Acquisition of commercial, Romantic, and/or bourgeois behaviours impacts upon text, and modern attitudes in contemporary tellers change the nature of storytelling identities and events, which equally affect text.

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16 Appendix I. 18.1. – 18.2. Interview Transcripts and Journal Observations: Traditional tellers, esp. in Ireland and Scotland, and literary influences on their storytelling and repertoires

17 Appendix I., 19.1 – 19.4. Interview Transcripts and Journal Observations: Contemporary tellers and literary influences on their storytelling and repertoires
Towards a Taxonomy of Stories, Story Elements, and Genres: A Never-Ending Story?

A taxonomy of stories, or story genres, would never be conclusive, though often is attempted. Tellers and audiences perceive and define a story from experience. How one generation, or individual, perceives a story or genre changes over time. Contemporary tellers look to ancient or foreign models, using these to form definitions of para- and text. Their interpretations and usage differ significantly from sources, because contemporary experiences and points of reference (shaping cognition) differ from original ones. ‘There tends to be a nostalgia in their works for a type of storytelling that is practically impossible in today’s advanced technological societies that foster globalized networks’ (Zipes, 2001, 130). Cognition remains the same in terms of processes, but associative thoughts (reference points) necessary for successful storytelling experience will differ.

A taxonomy of narrative and para-text elements might be more meaningfully considered as being similar to elements in musical theory and notation. Children's author Janni Howker responded to the familiar proposition that there are only a limited number of stories or plots by asserting three or four story shapes:

These structures appear few and simple, despite the astonishing variety of the stories they underpin—but then life itself is based on the beautiful, simple double helix of DNA. I am not talking about plots, but about that something as fundamental as DNA, which separates a living story from the inert matter of rambling discourse.

I believe the entire canon of the world’s stories may be based on three or four such structures.

(Howker, 1997, 1)

Howker identifies these structures, or story shapes, as:

- The Relationship, by which life paths of two strangers meet, and the encounter determines future meetings and developments

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18 Appendix II., 9.0. Past examples: Summaries of indices, catalogues and similar references.
• The Invited/Uninvited Guest, where a pre-existing circle of people is affected by the arrival of a stranger

• The Quest, which is a journey with a purpose. 

• The Trickster is a fourth possible shape, or a sub-shape of The Quest or other story-shapes. [Refer to Figure3, page 75] 

Howker argues all stories, written or told at any level, must follow one of these shapes or, possibly, a combination of these shapes. She leaves open to question whether the same story takes different shapes when told by different people, though leans towards the belief stories must maintain the same shape; if the shape changes, they are different stories with the same elements. Also left unclear is whether there can be combinations of shapes in one story (Howker, 1997, 2).

With this in mind, in my storytelling workshops I often equate motifs with musical notes. According to laws of physics, musical notes, especially if exhibited as mathematical expressions and notations, can be infinitely divided and created, but culturally and aesthetically we, in the Western world, generally agree upon a set, finite number of recognisable tones of a scale. However there is potential for combining these into an infinite number of tunes. If a set, finite number of narrative motifs exists for both para- and narrative texts, as well as an infinite combination of these motifs, as there is for musical notes, then each combination makes a unique story. With the placement of motifs in Howker's story-shapes, the musical equivalent for this being time signatures, musical keys, and chords of harmony, one sees how this creates 'genre' or 'cognitive frames'.

This metaphor lends itself to cognitive scientists' theories of schema, scripts, and indexing.

Playing music is analogous to telling a story. Music lives when it is played, whether classical formal forms like symphonies or informal, fluid forms like folksongs. Likewise, stories take on an added dimension when shared aurally among people. As notes are played, as words are spoken, they are transformed, adapted, and interpreted. (Birch, 2000, 9-10)
Howker's story shapes

The Relationship

The Invited/Uninvited Guest

The Quest

Figure 3, Howker's Story Structures or Story Shapes (Howker, 1997)

It explains both links between oral and literary forms, which flow in both directions, not solely from one to the other. It also allows for understanding how constituent elements and narratives themselves have embedded meanings that they convey and are
comprehended by listeners and/or readers through means of imagery inherent in motifs and shapes trigger associative thoughts and memories.

Listed generalised descriptions then are possible accounts of what contemporary storytelling participants define as text, or contemporary tellers are observed using, but listing text types in contemporary storytelling can only be relative within specific practices. Parameters are useful, but must not become dogmatic: as Janice Del Negro insists, parameters in storytelling must be permeable (Figa, 2003). This speculative model by a literary artist shows literary scholars' acknowledgment of storytelling as both oral and literary, while primarily focusing on writing and reading. If observed in practice by oral performance artists, the model provides applicable, influential theories from critical studies of literature for contemporary storytelling. These are worth considering in describing what text is in contemporary storytelling terms.

Other Disciplines' Influences on Ideas about Text and What Text Is

Literary theories still prove applicable and influential in storytelling. Postmodernist structural theories (Sardar, 1998, Chatman, 1981) consider narrative in ways sometimes expressed, unselfconsciously, by contemporary storytellers. Non-reflective acquisition of beliefs that the author is unimportant, and any story is told without need to reference or contextualise it accurately, is embodied in some storytelling. Postmodernist attitudes suggest stories are universal, told by any one and everyone in any manner. Text as object over which artists have power and control consequently raises questions of the politics of culture. Narrative malleability used as artists wish and understood whatever way audiences desire, Romantic tastes for dramatic feelings, and subjectivist approaches remain strong among artists, contemporary storytellers being no exception.

Foucault, Althusser and their followers viewed discourse expressing power and its penetration of subjects without considering how discourse is materially processed, inside and outside the brain (Stevens, 278). This leads to the mystification of art, making contemporary storytelling 'precious', separating it from its democratic, communal nature.
It is this failure to think about the brain that prevents most contemporary accounts of subject formation in the body from noting that just as surely as discourse shapes bodily experience and social interactions shape the material structures of the brain, the embodied brain shapes discourse.

(Crane, 2001, 7)

Prevailing Romantic views allow exploitation of text, but understood in cognitive terms such views are simplistic. Such attitudes inhibit understanding of and appreciation for contemporary storytelling, opening it to criticism.

More recent critical theories also fall short when considered in light of contemporary storytelling practices although, as mentioned, they, too, indirectly influence those practices. Propp's structuralism has been found wanting, its weakness, perhaps, inherent in being too mechanistic and disallowing the participatory nature of storytelling with audiences' contributions, derived from different associative thoughts and memories, contributing to the meaningfulness of text and act and event (Propp, 1968, Turner, 1993). Semiologists attempted to define narrative and its meaning by suggesting the latter was not inherent in text, but ascribed understanding of it to whatever meaning participants made for text.

Application of Howker's limited number of story shapes with the idea of finite but infinitely exchangeable motifs expands semiotic concepts of story, perceiving narrative text as an object without inherent meaning. This is deceptive. Howker is on record stating the shape of the story determines what the author can tell as well as how the story is told. She is clear that the narrative shape has inherent meaning of its own, which differs from the semiological viewpoint that perceivers create their own meaning (Howker, 1997). My argument is that motifs also convey meaning, by striking emotional or associative thoughts in each individual each time they are encountered. This would be the case for tellers, also, and explains why certain stories and story elements, and the techniques communicating them, signal to both teller and listener what is coming. This assists the teller's memory and the listener's understanding. It also provides listeners with the impression that they are 'thinking' the teller's thoughts simultaneously, which provides their sense of confidence that they could 'do' what the
teller ‘does’ with ease. The phenomenon is more complex than this, however. In Chapters Four and Five, I show how the wider context (including the elements of space, place and time as well as audience reaction) contribute to all participants’ confidence and understanding. These chapters attempt to show that it is not only what the teller says making mental processes in storytelling. It is also what the storyteller does, combined with other sequential events not only those constituting the narrative but also those enveloping each narrative event, that contribute to mental functions.

This is why semiological definitions of story are unsatisfactory. There is text about text in contemporary storytelling, sometimes obliquely stated, sometimes subtle or even existing as subtext within the greater context. Storytelling experience, achieved through oral narrative performance, is certainly a sequence of events, but not all its texts fit semiological definitions. Text clearly conveys meaning, evoking a multiplicity of meaningful images for tellers (signifiers) and audiences (signifiees). Considering text in light of cognitive theory reveals nuances and multiplicities of meaning within text, even when performances apparently remain the same.

But both signifier and perceivers must relate ‘abstract’ events and ‘abstract’ orders materially, taking into account physical laws, personal experiences, and past experiences of others who previously shared them either with signifiers or perceivers. In cognitive terms, it is true to an extent that perceivers conceive (create) meaning. Kroeber recognised this in his consideration of telling and reading, which pointed recognised weaknesses in recent literary criticisms of narrative when he pointed out the arousing of awareness in an audience of differentia of responses within it is one of the most important features of traditional storytelling—and another feature that has been ignored by contemporary narratologists, since modernist fiction cannot so differentiate.

(Kroeber, 1992, 100)

The mistake semiologists make is assuming a story is encountered solely through singular one-directional acts, such as reading or listening with no embedded meaning in either acts, contents or contexts. That narrative finds expression in many art forms means it is not static or neutral, which semiologists assume. Meaning is made through
multi-directional processes, but at the same time motifs encapsulate meaningful information for all to make associations creating understanding.

Another mistake by semiologists, caused by focusing on literary texts and reading, is to state the abstract order of events is always organised chronologically and assume events are only those within the story. Storytelling performances consist of events within narrative texts but also events outside them: that is, events of the act of storytelling, which is itself an event. Events within and outside of the act of storytelling can be planned, spontaneous, expected and/or unexpected. They are not necessarily placed in chronological order before the storytelling nor, even if planned, do they always happen in that pre-planned chronological order. Chronology is often imposed by the mind during and afterwards—this is part of cognition as individuals remember, experience, frame and index it as narrative.

This is not whimsical sophistry. Contemporary storytelling performances often include several stories told sequentially in one session, with paratext framing and making references between narrative texts. Even when contemporary storytelling performances present only one long narrative text (seemingly more common as contemporary storytelling develops), there must be framing and paratext to contextualise performance and facilitate storytelling experience. All meaning and understanding depends on oral narrative performance being an event made of mini-events and bracketed by bigger events. It could be argued that even read stories are surrounded and bounded by events, affecting understanding and experience. Events encapsulating reading are endless: searching for something to read; deciding to make time to read it; choosing whether to read at work, during a break, or lounging on a chair or sofa, or in bed before going to sleep; debating about waiting for the end of the chapter to make a cup of tea or a snack, or go to the loo.

Participants' prior knowledge (a cognitive frame) defines text, and knowledge changes through accumulated storytelling experiences. Storytelling meaning is achieved by constant negotiation throughout performance. The storyteller has already an
understanding of ‘events’ (in narrative text) and placed them in an order meaningful to
the teller, one not abstract at all. The teller may or may not have knowledge and
understanding of events outside the narrative, but will attempt as much control and
awareness of these as possible. Successful tellers (those experienced, responsible,
and/or talented) ascertain meanings of narrative texts on personal levels and also within
original contexts. One teller’s understanding will be a hybrid of earlier meanings.
Paratexts are used as negotiating tools to change or influence understanding and
establish storytelling experience, relating to or commenting upon reality and so relate
narrative and context.

Inherent meanings exist because of physical embodiment of the brain, the individuals in
the physical world, and storytelling itself as acts in that world relating remembered
and/or imagined acts. Traditional or contemporary storytelling performances’ language
must be direct and embodied for narratives to be stories and communicated, and
storytelling experience to be established. Rubin emphasises, ‘Concrete actions are used
where a modern, literate genre would use abstract statements.’ (Rubin, 1995, 24)
Scholars and storytellers have recognised significant differences between written and
spoken language and the latter, in the case of storytelling, must be direct and material,
not abstract in content, to be successful. Different tellers and groups of tellers will
disagree as to what is appropriate contemporary storytelling text, but appropriateness is
contextual and nuanced. Rather than look at descriptive terms of text as defined
artifacts, one should consider them as observed processes.

Part 3. Text Commonly Processed in Contemporary Storytelling

Para-text (metanarration, framing, paraperformance language, megaperformance
language, vocalization, gestures, and other texts in contemporary repertoires)

Paratext, vocalizations, gestures and other physical embodiments contribute much to
storytelling experience. ‘The language of story includes more than words. Researchers
have noted a particular style, a storytelling voice, in which the storytelling takes place’
Others define paratext as metacommunication, metanarration, frame language,
digression and accept that it makes up a large part of the paraperformance (Bauman, 1984, 16, Basgoz, 1986, 19-20, Wilson, 1997, 30-31). Nonverbal vocalisations, silences, and rhythms also support the storytelling experience (Crane 2001, 180-181). The commentary that tellers make about narrative text before, during and after the telling may become ‘set’: an aside, digression, or joke provoking positive audience responses is retained for other performances. While the first assumption might be paratext is mostly non-narrative language, narrative text can be embedded in paratext. Repertoires of paratext develop, chosen and discarded intuitively or subconsciously in response to context.

Paratext reveals much about performers and their relationships with (1) narrative text, (2) storytelling, as an art, and (3) the audience and context. If a stranger to the audience and environment, paratext connects the teller to both, achieving effective storytelling experience. Consisting of narrative (often in distilled form) and non-narrative text, paratext language (vocal and non-vocal) may be ritualised or formalized just like narrative text. However, it is culturally bound.

All framing... is accomplished through the employment of culturally conventionalized metacommunication. In empirical terms, this means that each community will make use of a structured set of distinctive communicative means from among its resources in culturally conventionalized and culture-specific ways to key the performance frame, such that all communication that takes place within that frame is to be understood as performance within the community.

(Bauman, 1984, 15)

Cultural conventions determine formality of paratextual language. In western traditional storytelling and much contemporary storytelling it is informal, but the informality can become ritualised or formulaic. There are instances in non-western traditions and in some contemporary examples for it to be quite formal. Just as with the example of the performance continuum, there is a sliding scale of formality and linguistic elements, with accompanying risks and rewards. Contemporary storytellers acquiring rituals or formulae inappropriate to their personality or purpose cause paratext to fail in its function.
Useful ritualised language in paratext is usually distilled narrative: personal anecdotes, riddles, word play, proverbs, poetry, songs, chants, idioms, cliches and similar linguistic forms. Riddles, proverbs and poetry parallel thought processes and emotional states for learning, recalling and telling narrative texts. Distilled traditional and personal narratives, a 'shorthand' alluding to others, help listeners access other levels of meaning. They also describe real-life states, emotional and social, summarizing the links between personal traditional narratives. 'The overlapping of folk and personal story and myth and personal story forces the viewer to make inferences and connections between the two' (Wischner, 1991, 44). Involving audiences in associative thoughts and memories leads to reverie, making storytelling experience. As mentioned, some paratext material receives such popular response it evolves into narrative text.

**Narrative Texts Common to Oral Narrative Performances**

Narrative text, what tellers and listeners readily identify as 'the story', can include non-narrative and distilled narrative texts. Examples, described above, with other linguistic features are embedded in narrative performance text to embellish, enhance, explain, entertain or provide nuances of meaning, or to special effect. In some ways, these are paratexts interrupting narrative performance text, but so embedded they must be included or the teller loses the 'thread' of narrative text. The concept of schema, scripts and indexing shifts the functions of para- and narrative texts as appropriate to the context and personalities involved in storytelling, revealing cognition.

Some genres in contemporary storytelling manifest themselves cognitively and culturally because they are more suited.

Contemporary literate storytellers have observed some tales can be learned and told easily using a memory technique that is not verbatim, while other tales require painstaking word-for-word memorization in order to guarantee retrieval in a performance situation. Of these two, the former tends to be folktales, the latter, literary creations. (Sierra, 1993, viii).

This dichotomy is not entirely accurate, with contemporary repertoires including literary tales or personal stories not memorized, but performed through the same mental
processes as traditional tales. These original stories are written in a style reminiscent of oral narratives, or transformed through a slow process into the performer’s oral style (Sobol, 1992, 67). Some adapt literary stories from others’ performances assuming a traditional status. Innate mental processes or cultural influences produce or facilitate transformations of original or literary texts into ‘the tradition’. Performers and audiences well acquainted with traditional structures will think and so produce and understand original stories as such anyway.

Contemporary tellers’ narrative texts can be sourced primarily from literary sources, though few realise it. Even if learned by listening to other contemporary tellers, those stories are most likely learned from books. Few do primary research or field recordings, yet continually refer to their repertoires as ‘traditional’. These are, however, traditions much interpreted, adapted and edited through mental and physical processes entailed in writing and publishing. Choosing to use this term without questioning means that “‘traditional” can become a rather vague word of approval, an impressive-sounding way of justifying our preference for... one story or storyteller over another. In short, it gets mixed up with the matter of personal taste’ (Leith, 2002, 82). With the inclusion of distilled narratives (including personal narratives) in paratexts, distinctive descriptions like literary, traditional, oral, original, and personal texts are not closed but porous boundaries for narrative texts overall. What might be an original or personal story for one is a literary story for another and a traditional story for yet others. It is with this in mind that the concept of text-processes arises.

**Personal narratives in contemporary repertoires**

Personal narratives maintain a significant presence in European tellers’ paratext, and as narrative texts for North American tellers. They arise naturally in conversational and

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19 Appendix I., 20.0. *Journal Observations: Examples of literary tales performed as traditional works*
20 Appendix I., 21.0. *Interview Transcripts: Examples from Storytelling in Ireland, A Re-Awakening—Gregor O’Duell’s comments*
31 Appendix 1.22.1—22.3. *Interview Transcripts and Journal Observations: Examples of storytellers specialising in personal narrative performances, gleaned from observations made and written up in the personal journal, and from articles and interviews.*
storytelling discourse among traditional tellers, particularly Irish and Scottish tellers and also musicians. Among these practitioners their most likely usage is in paratext. Commonly imitated, contemporary European tellers then use personal stories to introduce, explain or comment on narrative performance text. ‘Storytellers are attracted to personal stories both in the listening and the telling for many reasons. As listeners we respond to the emotional depth inherent in the best of these tales. As tellers we want the closure that personal stories seem to give raw experiences of our lives’ (Birch, 1996, 109). These attractions make use of personal narrative in paratext natural and successful for British and European contemporary tellers; however, this practice takes place, usually, non-selfconsciously and non-reflectively.

Within paratext, these tellers may only vaguely allude to or summarize personal text by a few words or simple gesture, but their presence is necessary in performances of literary texts and ‘traditional’ folk texts, particularly when from cultural backgrounds different to the teller’s. Narrative texts used in performances are often personalised to create the storytelling experience. This actually mirrors modern literary practices, and is evidence of either contemporary literary influences on contemporary storytelling, or an innate tendency in humans to personalise and contextualise fiction they relate, especially in oral storytelling. The trend in Modern and Postmodern literature to experiment in narrative voice, tense and so on, attempting to replicate stream of consciousness and other mental processes of characters and the writer, has parallels to paratext and personalisation of narrative text in oral narratives. Stories embedded in conversations have been a focus for linguists, and language studies exploring how elements of personal para- and narrative texts migrate to others’ repertoires are valuable, and several examples were found in the course of research for this thesis.22

In the context of North American contemporary storytelling, personal stories were developed and popularised out of aesthetic motivations, but the personal narrative’s prevalence in America is partly due to commercial pressures. Tellers became

22 Appendix I., 23.1—23.2. Interview Transcript and Journal Observation: Examples of Phrases migrating (and not working when transplanted)
possessive of repertoire. Coupled with notions of text as artifact with ‘correct’ or ‘ur’ versions (a German folkloristic term, ur versions are supposed original, proto-typical versions of texts), narrative texts became fixed, easily replicated by original tellers and admirers wishing to imitate them. This is something that will be examined in more detail in the next chapter regarding the teller. Personal, and/or, original stories are thought less amenable to this process.

Experienced tellers found livelihoods threatened and egos wounded when new tellers repeated stories so exactly after their sources. Any endeavour, no matter how good-natured or well intentioned, succumbs to rivalry or competition when commercial factors come into play. Sobol noted

> the combination of esoteric and exoteric models of ritual celebration, and the power of affirmation that went into them, made for powerful leverage in expanding the community. Yet tensions between the different models also opened fissures in the community as it grew, and familiar conflicts began to appear in the cracks...

> [The] festival and concert series are hierarchical in that they elevate an elite group of performers above a mass of listeners. The conferences, guilds, and support groups are more egalitarian in principle. But the hierarchies or reward and respect projected by the public models cast their shadows on all the community events. The transcendent boon had crystalized into coin of the realm.

(Sobol, 1999, 190)

Commercial factors of marketing and profiting from text (long established with protocols and etiquette in publishing) was soon manifest in contemporary storytelling.

Peiffer’s informant observed she ‘eventually reacted against her dependence on other people’s stories, and she thinks this is probably also a natural and predictable part of a beginning storyteller’s development. She began to feel strongly that she did not want to tell stories that other tellers were telling. It was at this point that she started searching for unusual stories and unmined sources’ (Peiffer, 1994, 74). Consciously or subconsciously, experienced tellers looked for original material that could be copyrighted and protected. Fictional, but mostly personal stories resulted: autobiographical pieces and/or anecdotes from lives of family members and friends,
often in traditional folktale idiom, consisting of similar structural elements and imagery. Folklorists and linguists have noticed people generally structure personal experience as narratives modeled on folktales.

The personal narrative always involves some manipulation of the truth of the experience. Such manipulation involves a degree of falsification, but generally only so much as to produce appropriate story material. This relatively minor degree of falsification occurs at three levels: (1) in the teller’s perception of the story, (2) in the initial telling of the personal narrative, and (3) in the readaptations of the story to the varying contexts of the retelling. (Stahl, 1980, 18)

Revival tellers developed original stories, some fictional, but mostly personal stories, autobiographical pieces and/or anecdotes from the lives of family members and friends. Some were in the idiom of the traditional tale, consisting of similar structural elements and imagery. Personal narratives for narrative performance still needed contextualisation. Contemporary tellers manipulate paratext to make traditional, fictional narrative more believable, revealing the inner truth of the metaphor; the reverse happens with personal narratives. ‘Manipulation of the reality involved is for the sake of rhetoric—to persuade the listener toward an appreciation of the cultural truths represented by the story’ (Stahl, 1980, 18). Personal narratives creating storytelling experience become metaphor.

With contemporary tellers relating personal narratives reminiscent of traditional stories, some inexperienced or less responsible tellers ‘stole’ them for repertoires, telling in first person narrative voice about ‘their’ grandmother or ‘their’ childhood, word for word and with the same intonation as the originator. Putting a positive gloss on this, one could accept Joseph Sobol’s theory, mentioned briefly in the first chapter. Rather than claim the ‘storytelling revival’ resurrects old texts and traditions for modern audiences, a claim many make especially in Europe and Britain, Sobol, with others, maintains it is a revival of the human spirit, a psychological/philosophical response to modern life. Stories and the act of storytelling help us become whole and cope with modern pressures (Sobol, 1999; Zipes, 2001). This is true, though one could say all art accomplishes this. The motivation to tell personal stories comes from this
psychological impulse for wholeness, for the re-establishment of real communities. As stated, reiteration is natural; tales and performances speaking directly to listeners motivate sharing of experiential knowledge. Proper behaviour would clearly be to create or find one's own material, rather than use another's. Even using paratext material gleaned from others, rather than one's own experience or linguistic expressions, comes across as false, showing a lack of storytelling voice. Barely acceptable, but theoretically consistent in terms of narrative practices lower down the performance continuum, would be for a less honourable teller to relate another's personal narrative as reported speech (third person narrative), which is what happens normally in both conversational and traditional storytelling.

Less experienced or talented tellers have also developed personal stories, with limited success. 'The arts often attract people who act out, indulge, or generally exploit the raw material of their troubled lives. Unfortunately, storytelling seems to be no exception, and the personal story can bring out dismal displays of excess. The experiences of our lives become fiction easily enough, but all fictions do not possess a transfiguring potency. Everyday life retold can sound quite banal' (Birch, 1996, 109). Shunning such practices, contemporary European tellers tend to stay close to texts they identify as traditional.

**Literary and Traditional Texts in Contemporary Storytelling Repertoires**

Cultural influences determining folktales in contemporary tellers' repertoires include traditional and folk tales gleaned from other contemporary tellers and, sometimes, traditional tellers. More often, however, the sources for such influences are literary and multi-media forms of folktales.

Since storytelling is a general and spontaneous human activity observable in all cultures, it provides individuals with culturally discrete patterns of storytelling. These patterns include not only a knowledge about storytelling situations and the structure of that situation ... but also of performed narrative and particularly an ability to distinguish between different kinds or types of stories. As genres proliferate and written texts appear...competence increases accordingly and also changes in kind. In the process of acculturation, particularly literary acculturation, potential
audiences acquire generic models, which decisively influence their reading experience. Genres...are large-scale cognitive frames. Such models are different only in degree from the simple text types or 'genres' encountered in oral storytelling in which the basic parameters are context-bound.

(Fludernik, 1996, 44)

The experience and impact of literacy and literature and other modern media develop participants' thoughts about and use of text. Movements and mass media popularise esoteric and fantasy themes (Weinker-Piepito, 1993). Contemporary tellers therefore find fantasy or exotic narratives and genres attractive: wonder tales, myths and legends, epics (particularly from foreign cultures or ancient civilizations) abound in their repertoires.

How these became popular may be a 'chicken and egg' dilemma. Successful contemporary tellers model them, encouraging imitation. Initially they were probably drawn to such stories because their 'underlying motive (...) was to recapture talk, to purify talk, and to make talk serve the people and spiritual ends rather than induce people to buy products or buy and sell other human beings' (Zipes, 2001, 139). Pervasive Romantic attitudes found in choice of reading material, but also influential media, determine what and how to tell. Folklorists and publishers popularise certain ancient, foreign, and cultural texts for similar aesthetic, social, political and/or commercial reasons as those which motivate contemporary tellers' choices. As an example, one might look at the huge number of anthologies with the same stories matching collections published in earlier decades (all including Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Hansel and Gretel, and so on), picture book versions of the same body of 'classic' fairy tales. More recently, responding to multicultural concerns, we see publishers including more stories from specific cultures (mostly those of minorities in the school systems they serve).

There is also far too much assumption amongst contemporary storytelling practitioners that literary forms of stories common to the contemporary storytelling repertoire started out as oral traditions and became literature. As a result, literary versions of folk and
fairy tales, particularly from children’s literature, ancient epics, and modern and postmodern (mostly feminist) short fantasies are popular items in contemporary repertoires. Most stories identified as traditional by contemporary storytelling practitioners were not obtained traditionally by them, nor, as mentioned, through fieldwork with repertoire developed from traditional tellers. Those assimilating repertoire cognitively as part of their personality should (and many do) consult published and manuscript collections to compare variants, using this knowledge of derivations as Albert Lord’s informants used formulaic rhetoric and standard images (Lord, 2000).

Chosen para- and narrative texts, whether original or literary, mimic nostalgic, Romantic models. This differentiates contemporary storytellers’ repertoires from alternative and stand-up comedians and performance poets, who work in different literature genres but with similar techniques, contexts and audiences. Performing verbal artists exhibit the same cognition. ‘Structural studies of folktales originated in speculation that these narratives might well have a formal, empirically-discoverable organization analogous to that which linguists had discovered in the phonology and syntax of languages’ (Sierra, 1993, 27-8). Structural studies of formal narrative acts potentially reveal empirically discoverable organisation of cognition as well.

The most commonly found literary forms are:

- Picture book storytelling
- Literary fairy tales and epics (ancient and modern)
- Short stories (particularly done in a folk tale or anecdotal style)
- Recitations and monologues
- Original stories, authored by the tellers

Techniques for learning and performing literary tales parallel practices for traditional texts with small variations in learning processes. Elements within, rather than entire, literary forms can migrate into personal and traditional tales. Tellers learning first to tell picture book stories, literary fairy tales, recitations and monologues, or short stories tend to ‘memorise rather than know and retell text in their own words. Librarians, teachers,
and actors are most likely to do this. Through repeated use, they eventually 'know' the story rather than memorise it, but keep true to the author's original words and literary style.²³

Current and past practices suggest composition as a process common to experienced storytellers, traditional and contemporary. 'The idea that structure may be analogous to rules of composition is perhaps implicit in structural studies, but seldom has structure been linked to the actual process of narrating. Yet once conversant with the rules, tellers of any background intuitively structure stories, so traditional and original narratives appear similar genres. Texts are known, re-assembled, and communicated quickly and intuitively: even traditional sources can be presented as original material (Lord, 2000). Oral and literary texts share linguistic features, particularly parallelism, '...the repetition, with systematic variation, of phonic, grammatical, semantic, or prosodic structures... which aid successful delivery of the meaning, as well as, especially proving a mnemonic aid' (Bauman, 1984, 18-9). Literary stories share with traditional tales imagery aiding the storytelling experience.

Learning orally from other 'revival' tellers does not make contemporary repertoires traditional, as the original teller could and most likely did learn that tale from written sources. That traditional tellers can and do glean repertoire from literature means adapting tales that may not be as they seem. This impacts on cognition and overall expression of style. Traditional lore inspires writers to mimic traditional content (images and motifs) and/or linguistic structures (parallelism, etc.) in original pieces. Easily performed, these prove so popular they enter the traditional canon, assumed anonymous. This parallels developments in folk music and song revivals. Music composed in idiomatic styles entered 'the tradition', causing listeners, singers and

²³ Appendix I. 24.1. -- 24.2. Video analysis and Journal Observation: Diane Wolkstein telling 'Elsie Piddock Skips in her Sleep.'
musicians to believe them ancient and anonymous. 24

Conversely, successful tellers adapt literary texts staying true to the author, while meeting responsibilities to listeners and contexts (Baker, 1977). They may do more than this. Folklorists observed traditional tellers taking and transplanting literary tales into traditional cultural contexts.

Irish folklorists examining transcriptions of narrations of Michael O Gaoithin and his mother, the well-known Blasket Island storyteller Peig Sayers, identified the unmistakable plots of Boccaccio tales. O Gaoithin, who was deceased by the time this discovery was made, had prepared a translation of some of the Decameron into the Irish language in the 1920s, yet forty years later, he was telling adaptations of the same tales, which he claimed to have learned from oral sources. These accomplished storytellers had relocated the tales in rural Ireland and populated them with Irish characters...

(Sierra, 1993, 37-8)

Other substantial literary contributions found in traditional repertoires include poetry, excerpts from novels, short stories adapted or summarised, and so on. Paratexts also use literary texts with quotations of poetry and prose as introductions, digressions, and codas.

One can continue with Sierra’s model of Irish oral and literary forms affecting each other. Many assume Irish storytelling a pure unbroken traditions of either leprechaun stories, if American enthusiasts, or Fianna and ‘faerie’ epics, if British or European. Yet current traditional storytelling repertoires in Ireland consist mostly of anecdotes, short humorous folk tales, and monologues and recitations. (Harvey, 1992; 1994) Even those non-Irish enthusiasts who appropriate Irish terms mistake aspects of meaning, and can fail to see political and commercial nuances even as they appoint themselves as experts in the subject. Many use the term ‘seanchie’ to describe a storyteller telling wonder tales and legends, whereas a seanchie’s repertoire consists mostly of the current repertoire Irish audiences expect. Some use the term ‘filid’, which technically means

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24 Appendix I. 25.1 – 25.3. Interview and Journal Observations: Tradition and musicians and composers, observations of popular tunes and songs at festivals and sessions, anecdotes framing and regarding musical performance
'poet' or 'composer-singer' and few use the 'correct' term (by Irish linguists' standards) of 'sceali' (Ryan, 1995). It is not that all these forms do not or cannot exist, nor that meanings cannot change or are not used differently with different groups. When contemporary storytelling participants' preconceptions are based upon secondhand, (usually) read definitions and models, they unconsciously create expectations that force a 'traditional' or 'natural' form—genuine storytelling—into a pale, artificial imitation of itself.

Audience perceptions are tempered by experiences with literacy and literature, with their view of what text is or should determine teller choice and their reception of material. Tellers and audience bound to images defined by literature most likely consider stories as artifacts with definitive versions, leading to strict interpretation of texts, and development of attitudes asserting 'correct' versions, or 'good' or 'right' ways to tell. Although wishing to recreate the spontaneity of traditional telling, their attitudes and acts result in artificial storytelling, limiting effectiveness.

'True' Traditional and Folk Narrative Texts in Contemporary Storytelling Repertoires

The turning of genuine, natural or traditional storytelling and stories into a form participants manipulate easily for personal, social, aesthetic and commercial reasons is reminiscent of Romantic and Nationalist movements inspiring early ideas of folklore. For this reason, one more aspect of what text is and means in contemporary storytelling can be labelled folk narrative text—even though it may consist of original, literary elements, or genres technically not folklore, such as ancient epics. How contemporary tellers use these texts is similar to the way publishers as well as musicians and events organisers have used the term 'folk' over the last two centuries.

Contemporary repertoires consist of heritage and exotic stories, often considered multicultural or world stories. Traditional tellers may have 'world stories' found as variants

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25 Appendix I. 26.0 Journal Observation: Anecdote collected from librarian of Vaughan Williams Library
in many countries, but these are told within the teller’s cultural style, becoming part of that specific tradition. Some contemporary tellers similarly assimilate world tales into personal styles. Such tellers, especially in countries with immigrant traditions, express themselves through ethnic stories reflecting cultural heritage. In a sense, they both rely on background or heritage for developing repertoire and establishing themselves as tellers in wider communities of strangers. They might use background or ancestral stories to develop ‘images’ they can ‘market’. While some contemporary tellers assimilate world tales in their own style, alternatively, many often attempt performances in the manner of the original tradition, or a Westernised, Romanticised, middle-class version of it. The stories remain ‘exotic’, contrasting with and highlighting contemporary tellers’ ‘traditions’. The exotic is an attraction to tellers, events organisers and listeners, often becoming a feature for marketing or at least defining storytelling. The inclusion of heritage and exotic repertoires by contemporary tellers is consistent across Britain, Ireland, Western Europe, North America, and Australia and New Zealand: tellers draw upon ethnic cultures within their countries (Görög-Karady, 1990). Assimilated and distinctive texts both appear in contemporary tellers’ performances.

These two strands display sociological and psychological legitimization for how contemporary tellers develop repertoires. Exotic tales are often related for altruistic reasons. They may be responding to the need for multiculturalism in the education curriculum. Tellers wish to educate audiences, express sympathy with members of those cultures the stories represent, and who may be in the audience, and/or support those ‘others’ politically, and so on. Stories contain great emotional and aesthetic appeal compelling tellers to share them. Part of the psychological appeal is the premise that exotic stories are good stories, expressing universal truths. Naturally they attract tellers

26 Appendix I., 27.1. - 27.3. Interview Transcripts, Analyses of Video Recordings of Storytelling Performances and Journal Observations: World stories found in and adapted for traditional teller’s repertoires
27 Appendix II. 10.0 Lists and Summaries of ‘exotic’ stories popular with contemporary storytellers in Britain British tellers express great interest in stories of specific regions and/or subcultures (such as Scots, Irish and Roma Travellers), and also of immigrant subcultures, Romanticised collections of ancient literatures, and anthologies of foreign cultures’ folklore.
passionate about using narrative and language to express and comment upon life. In other instances tellers relate heritage and exotic tales to legitimise themselves, making themselves feel good, special and/or unique. Performing stories of other cultures perceived as having strong and ‘correct’ storytelling traditions and certainly telling from one’s heritage strengthens a teller’s sense of self. Such acts also confirm audience perceptions of storytelling, reinforcing their own identities and ideas about the teller and storytelling. Using a ‘good’ text, recognised as ‘traditional’ or ‘the real thing’ by experts supposedly establishes one definitively as a teller. Text used to impress suggests, it is hoped, that the teller and the telling are ‘good’.

Märchen (wonder tales) and myths, particularly, meet numerous criteria, being both exotic and expressive of specific and common heritages. Aesthetically, working psychologically on many subconscious levels, they are adaptable for personal and political agendas. Their popularity comes from allowing performer, and listener (in any discipline, not just contemporary storytelling) to think and to speak metaphorically, with simple structures allowing a multiplicity of meanings and layers of imagery.

Summary

Successful contemporary storytellers retain power to recast old stories, although not all are aware of this potential. Lack of reflection on what forms and transforms scripts and schema used in storytelling performance means outside influences, that is, specific ‘trends’ or ‘fashions’ in contemporary storytelling and society generally, hold power over the teller.

Märchen, as a genre, appear pre-eminent in contemporary repertoires, satisfying all possible motivations for meeting storyteller responsibility. Even literary, personal and/or original stories are expressed through its structure.

The wonder tale that everyone knows, the common heritage of narrative, is there to be reshaped for each generation by the teller, but its potential is so rich that many seek to control it in their interests: it is a central ironical paradox of his case that his enemies, as they desire to destroy
him admit that they recognize and fear the power of the teller to recast an old story and direct it a different way.

(Warner, 1994, 412)

Cynics may see here a psychological appeal in para- and narrative texts manipulated commercially by storytellers in the modern climate. For the moment, it is not to suggest tellers are ruthless or nefarious; they may not even be aware of motives when listening to and reading stories to develop, unselfconsciously or even consciously, their repertoires. The potential misuse of storytelling is explored in detail in Chapter Six.

Given the complex, multi-layered appeal of texts to the subconscious, survival as a professional teller requires a good repertoire appealing to many audiences and working in various contexts. Even focusing on one genre, such as ‘traditional’ tales or epics, or literary tales, or personal stories, will incorporate other genres consciously or unconsciously. Therefore the psychology of the storyteller and of narrative text are entwined, and both must be linked in any study. In cognitive terms, the possibility of mingling genres is impossible to avoid, as is the likelihood that the genre informs some aspect of the teller as well as the teller informing texts of that dominant genre. The cognition of the storyteller in both the storytelling experience and the appropriation and use of texts is explored in the next chapter.

Reinforcing self-esteem and self-confidence, storytelling is as much a risk to ego as it is a balm. Disastrous performances crush a teller and alienate audiences; thus many tellers rely on good material to hide their lack of talent or weaknesses. The dynamics of a teller’s personality interacting with text, audience and other elements of the context of contemporary storytelling is the focus of the next chapter. The use and misuse of text in this relationship is a typical, but seldom explored aspect, of contemporary storytelling.
CHAPTER 3. THE IDENTITY OF THE STORYTELLER AND THE STORYTELLER'S ROLES OUTSIDE AND WITHIN PERFORMANCES

Part I. The Formation of and Reasons for Storyteller Identities

*Mega-Identity and Performativity*

The role and identity of a storyteller are bound up in the personality of the individual, the influence of text upon that teller, and vice versa, the social relationship between that individual and audiences, and the relationship of all these within the culture and society. How a teller perceives identity and role and how audiences and society perceive these contribute to the making of a storyteller. We all tell stories, yet not all identify themselves as storytellers, particularly on lower ranges of the performance continuum. Storyteller identity can form with the teller unaware of it. The individual may have a natural propensity for expressing narrative, or socio-cultural interactions may hone that skill. Some also self-select identity as a storyteller, yet fail to succeed in the role.

This is a variation of Judith Butler's concept of performativity. Gender and feminist studies use this term to describe contributions of cultural discourse upon gender roles. As Butler states, 'performativity must not be understood as a singular or deliberate "act" but, rather, as the reiteration and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names' (Butler, 1993, 2). If various forms of reiterated and cited discourse subconsciously and intuitively shape gender identity, they certainly contribute in developing other aspects of identities and roles individuals perform. Within lower and middle ranges of the performance continuum various discourses, both para- and narrative performance texts as described, but also written and mediated discourse, contribute in forming a *mega-identity* for the storyteller. Mega-identity can be recognised as a quality of personality recognised but not necessarily named by listeners, particularly intimates such as family, friends and work colleagues, while the teller remains unaware of it.

In the case of contemporary tellers higher on the continuum, where exists conscious identification of the individual as a storyteller, mega-identity is formed consciously and
subconsciously. This is where mega-identity and Butler’s definition of performativity definitely tend to overlap.

Performativity is not a singular “act” for it is always reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition. Moreover, this act is not primarily theatrical, indeed its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated (and conversely, its theatricality gains a certain inevitability given the impossibility of a full disclosure of its historicity). Within speech act theory, a performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names.

(Butler, 1993, 12-3)

The making of a storyteller, particularly a contemporary teller performing higher on the performance continuum, is partly self-awareness, as well as awareness of distinctions within and between all discourse. Formation and maintenance of mega-identity is ongoing, as are stages of cognitive development throughout life.

An emphasis on performativity ... does not mean an assumption of fluid, ever changing identities. Indeed, the temporal performative nature of identities as a theoretical premise means that ... one needs to question how identities continue to be produced, embodied and performed, effectively, passionately, and with social and political consequences.

(Bell, 1999, 2)

Once tellers and audiences become self-aware, identifiable behaviours appear suggesting cognitive and emotional states specific to narrative performance art.

Describing how self-awareness as a teller develops is problematical. Individuals rarely stand and declare without warning, ‘I am a storyteller and I am going to tell you a story.’ When they do the effect is off-putting.1 Audiences and opportunities must develop concurrently with the teller. Contexts, along with gradually raised self-consciousness, are part of developmental processes. Contemporary tellers are not created, but, mostly, create themselves. William Hugh Jansen observed that the teller ‘steps outside himself as an individual and assumes a pose toward his audience’ (Jansen,

1 Appendix 1., 28.0. Journal Observation, Audience response at the first storytelling festival in Kiltimagh, County Mayo, Republic of Ireland.
Karen Pieffer points out, however, that there is no clearly delineated, widely recognized persona into which a self denominated storyteller can move.... This performance pose must be implicit in his daily persona so that his audience will be able to recognize what he is trying to communicate. He must assume a daily stance that sets the stage for the occasional performance. The everyday relationship or appearance must serve as a key to the more conventional performance events in order to alert the audience to that performance. To attract an audience to participate in and attend to his storytelling performance the storyteller must give a storyteller performance.

(Pieffer, 1994, 92)

This storyteller performance, and para-performance, I refer to as mega-identity. Although no single storyteller meta-identity exists in modern society, after thirty or more years of acknowledged, recognisable contemporary storytelling activity, with a history over a centurylong in some arenas (Heywood, 1998, 229, 239; Bryant, 1905, xix), one becomes aware of specific aspects of mega-identities. Observations provide explanations as to how mega-identities contribute to contemporary storytelling performance.

If mega-identities of storytellers come about through self-awareness, meaning a heightened awareness, then clear cognitive and emotional processes lead to, maintain, and are used in those states. Heightened awareness leads to storytelling with the greater risks and rewards for all as articulated by Bauman, and Wilson (Bauman, 1984; Wilson, 1999). One must keep in mind the development of identity, the self generally, and mega-identity of the teller, and roles of tellers in and out of performance situations, is bound materially to the individual's context and interaction with and use of artifacts. Artifacts in storytelling are all forms of text, the discourse, as well as physical elements in the context, such as audience and space, looked at later in chapters four and five.

These factors consist of elements that tellers are both aware and unaware of.

It can never be a case that there is a "self" independent of one's cultural-historical existence. It is usually claimed ... that Self arises out of our capacity to reflect upon our own acts, by the operation of "metacognition." But what is strikingly plain in the promising research on metacognition that has appeared in recent years ... is that

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metacognitive activity (self-monitoring and self-correction) is very unevenly distributed, varies according to cultural background, and ... can be taught as a skill.

(Bruner, 1986, 67) [my emphasis]

There is certainly an element of teaching and self-taught acquisition of storyteller identity. Contemporary storytellers consciously seek material and models outside their own contexts—from traditional field recordings, nineteenth and twentieth century collections, children’s literature, Romantic folkloristic theories, other cultures usually considered marginalised and/or colonised, or defunct—thinking to present these models ‘authentically’ and ‘correctly’. Unconsciously, usually, they also use cognitive processes imposed or acquired through modern life, their true cultural-historical existence, which may have little or no similarity to storytelling practices included in their consciously chosen ‘ideals’.

Contemporary tellers interpret and change stories and telling styles through assimilation into modern contexts and values. Using personal stories for paratext and, especially, narrative texts involves highly evolved metacognitive activity as Bruner describes. Cultural background and educational and social experiences develop self-monitoring and self-correction, two important skills in the contemporary storyteller.

How Individuals Develop Identities as Contemporary Storytellers

If the contemporary teller is self-aware and consciously contributes to paraperformance that does not mean the teller is always capable of knowing how others perceive or interact with that mega-identity. ‘How much and in what form [metacognition] develops will...depend upon the demands of the culture in which one lives—represented by particular others one encounters and by some notion of “generalized other” that one forms...’ (Bruner, 1986, 67). Traditional tellers may tell regularly and prolifically while not identifying themselves as tellers in the sense contemporary storytelling participants perceive the identity, until someone outside their tradition recognises and describes them as such. Bauman’s case study of a Texan storyteller proved this (Bauman, 1986). We could say such development, when not self-aware, is
organic, an imperceptible process deeply imbedded in material and social existence. Analyses of various traditional storytellers’ performances, comparing their performances within the home or their local pub with those in formal public venues such as festivals, as well as interviews with some of those traditional tellers, supports Bauman’s findings. This can, as we see, significantly change traditional tellers’ identities, roles, repertoires and styles.

This is also true for some non-professional contemporary tellers, particularly professionals who find storytelling as one of many tasks in their job descriptions. Tellers making a living commercially coming from such backgrounds perhaps had someone identify the role for them. Others may have witnessed a teller and consciously developed from that point. Contemporary tellers have not sprung from ether. Görög-Karady observes:

the biographical itineraries which lead to narration and the storyteller’s individual motivations are extremely varied. In their development most of them experience a sudden break in their careers: they may “make contact with oral literature” as opposed to written culture. Although not all of them began as outsiders in established artistic professions, most have generally gone through some sort of conversion experience to find their vocation. There are no typical cases. For some, beginnings in theatre ... led them directly to folktales. Others will reject the written constraints in literature. Still others are librarians or cultural animators for whom storytelling seemed to expand their professional lives. It enabled them particularly to extend the didactic, even political, dimension to their vocation. And even others, launched into narration as the inheritors of an extant oral tradition in order to reclaim an ancient social role. Sometimes, they began storytelling by accident.

(Görög-Karady, 178)

Roughly delineated, backgrounds of contemporary storytellers could be categorized as follows:

__________________________________________
2 Appendix I., 29.1—29.3. Analyses of Video Recordings of Storytelling Performances and Journal Observations: Francie Kennelly’s performances at festivals and at home, compared; Duncan Williamson’s performances at festivals and at home, in formal and informal situations, and over two decades, compared.
• educators and librarians
• performance artists
• professional care-workers
• legal, political, media and business professionals
• those coming into storytelling through their lifestyle.

The last includes members choosing alternative lifestyles and traditional artists moving outside their traditional community into the contemporary storytelling ‘scene’.

All backgrounds provide material experiences forming cognition and metacognition in identities and roles contributing to mega-identity. Professions listed develop storyteller identities as one part of many aspects to careers: these professions have a long history in using narrative (Heywood, 1998, 7-26). The storyteller identity or role begins subsumed within the larger professional one. Educators and librarians working with children, and religious leaders and counsellors with pastoral duties have professional traditions of storytelling. Serving children and adults, particularly in dysfunctional communities, storytelling provides means to deliver education and advice, thus, they hope, mitigating a sense of helplessness and loneliness, for themselves as well as clients. Professional values in these careers shape their storytelling and their identity as storytellers.

Such values are of a utopian nature, recognised and described by Zipes in literary fairy tales whose interaction between orality and literature and socio-political influences is entwined strongly in the professionalisation of teachers and librarians over the past two hundred years.3 Zipes asserts the bourgeoisie appropriated oral folklore to its own use, namely the education and socialisation of children, and recently adults, through formal education, therapies, mass media and social programmes. In doing so they created a literature, institutions, and technologies to promulgate the

3 Appendix II., 11.1-11.3. Websites: An indication of the studies in education and pedagogy regarding the use of narrative, especially oral storytelling, over the past one hundred and fifty years.
progressive Enlightenment thinking. That is, characteristic of the literary fairy tale... is its enlightening and didactic function that has always been associated with utopian desire. The fairy tale provides us with the verbal power and narrative skills to inscribe our hopes and wishes in the world.

(Zipes, 2002, 62)

Those who live manipulating and mastering discourses—performers as well as lawyers, sales and marketing people, elected officials, etc.—must develop oral narrative skills and doing so, see their advantages and importance. Their motivations, too, can be utopian. Such assertions have been explored and supported in the work of Joseph Sobol and Simon Heywood (Sobol, 1999; Heywood, 2000).

Just as often professionals’ backgrounds perceive and make more of commercial potentials in contemporary storytelling. Many involved in storytelling forget this ‘darker’ side is also the intellectual inheritance of Liberal Enlightenment philosophies and Romantic movements which centuries ago formed the basis for modern western societies. These commercial viewpoints, commonly held in modern society, influence mega-identities as storytellers become established primarily as tellers, and not as practitioners of established professions with telling as one task among many. 4 Bakhtin points out:

in each epoch, in each social circle ... there are always authoritative utterances that set the tone—artistic, scientific, and journalistic works on which one relies, to which one refers, which are cited, imitated, and followed .... This is why the unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others’ individual utterances. This experience can be characterized to some degree as the process of assimilation—more or less creative—of others’ words.... Our speech, that is all our utterances (including creative works), is filled with others’ words, varying degrees of otherness, of varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate.

(Kroeber, 1992, 190)

With interaction between contemporary tellers of varying backgrounds, commercial,
professional and bourgeois values impact significantly when mega-identities emerge, even if previous identities with original motivating values are submerged and individuals remain unaware of such influences.

Lifestyle tellers have particular outlooks, belief systems in which they are raised, in the case of traditional tellers, or which they adopt, in the case of alternative lifestyle tellers. Stories and the act of telling are means of establishing and/or confirming that worldview. Lifestyle tellers also possess strains of utopian storytelling. Some traditions express this, but these sometimes seem to come from outsiders’, folklorists’ and non-traditional contemporary tellers’, idealistic views, influencing traditional tellers’ perceptions of themselves and their art.\(^5\) ‘An intervenor, by virtue of his or her status, power, and established credibility, is frequently able to define what culture is, to normalize and legitimize that definition in the larger society, and even to feed it back into the culture itself where it may be internalized as “real” or “traditional” or “authentic”…’ (Whisnant, 1983, 260). Such interactions can change the nature of traditional tellers’ identities and telling styles.

Lifestyle tellers’ identities reside within wider ones, such as Irish farmers, Scots Travellers, or New Age Hippies. Those constructing identities within alternative lifestyles often reject middle class values of materialism and consumerism, though bourgeois backgrounds continually affect identities. Traditional tellers often come from marginal communities, but effects of ‘middle class’ or ‘mainstream’ values influence them by exclusion, comparison or aspiration. When lifestyle storytellers opt to identify primarily as storytellers, especially professional, commercial tellers, many mainstream, bourgeois values come to the fore, with some tellers becoming reactionary, superior and severely critical in tone. In some instances what lies beneath the acts are nostalgic urges to return to childhood, no matter how much childhood influences on narrative enjoyment are denied.

The balance between popular taste and democratic representation poses one of the most urgent questions facing all the narrative acts,

\(^5\) Appendix I., 31.1 – 31.2 Interview Transcripts: Discussion of utopian views in traditional storytellers’ perspectives.
performance and broadcasting as well as literature... but it seems a simple admission of defeat to weep and gnash one's teeth...; it is simply unthinking and lazy to denounce all the works of Disney and his legacy. Theme parks and popular entertainment quarry the tradition of fairy tale...; they rely not only on the characters and stories, but on the idea that adults enjoy being children again, that a public can include different generations and classes, who will lose themselves in the make-believe in a different way, united by the pleasures of enchantment.

(Warner, 1994, 414-5)

Rather than utopian beliefs of the past being better, with contemporary tellers 'reviving' a tradition, or that the act of telling prepares a better future, contemporary storytelling could be one of many coping strategies with the present. Warner proposes that an awareness of millenarian anxieties, fear of terrorism, war, massive changes in society and technology, and so on, finds expression in old art forms: the telling of fairy tales. Cognition, drawing upon schema and script to cope with this, leads to various expressions sharing specific narrative traits, so 'there has been a strongly marked shift towards fantasy as a mode of understanding, as an ingredient in survival, as a lever against the worst aspects of the status quo and the direction it is taking' (Warner, 1994, 415).

Tellers' identities, whether arising within careers or lifestyle backgrounds, need not be oppositional. Identities, made of many roles, overlap, determined by choice and inheritance. Lifestyle and career both contribute. Distinctions lie in tellers from professional careers, who are conscious first of being members of professions, with training, skills and demands of specific jobs, and afterwards a raised consciousness of being tellers. It is speculation, but possibly, at an early age, they expressed interest in certain texts, genres, folktales, or children's or fantasy literature, or kinds of performance, amateur drama, speech and debating societies, or folk clubs and festivals, but these inclinations were not first articulated in storyteller mega-identity. Careers deemed best for such inclinations were chosen. Storyteller identities evolving from a lifestyle seem first to have responded to stories, and relationships to their social group
and culture. Both developmental tracks exist in the evolution of storytellers. Such speculation was confirmed regularly in my informants’ interviews and through perusal of contemporary storytellers’ publicity. Both sources regularly identify childhood experiences with ‘tradition’, in the academic sense or their own definition, literature, personal interests leading to career choices, and the like.

How and why do subsumed storyteller identities emerge to become primary identities for professional commercial storytellers? Emergence can be attributed to three factors with any or all coming into play. One could be an individual encountering a model, or several models, of storytelling, then emulating the model, consciously choosing to be a professional storyteller. Another comes from intellectual, aesthetic, and/or emotional satisfaction provided by storytelling within first careers and/or lifestyles; satisfaction is so great individuals choose primary identities as tellers, to establish that satisfaction on more permanent bases. Material and status rewards that come or are hoped for provide a third motivation for identification as a professional storyteller. These need not all happen, nor take place in any particular order, but all contribute to establishment of contemporary storytellers’ identities.

A Storyteller Aesthetic

Storyteller identity exists within and outside storytelling performances. Abrahams and Peiffer observe storytellers pursuing activities outside acts of telling in order to maintain storyteller identity. This is not unselfconscious expression, but, like the concept of performativity, it is ‘reflexive stylized activity’ meaning a teller’s entire career could be ‘seen as a mega-performance’ (Abrahams, 1981, 69; Peiffer, 1994, 3). Identity and self-awareness, with the responsibilities these entail, do not exist solely when the teller is in front of listeners. They precede and follow storytelling events, encompassing daily routines. Identities outside performance situations arise from various factors outlined

6 Appendix I., 32.1 — 32.5., Journal Observations: Careers choices and other influences on storyteller identity.
7 Appendix II., 12.1—12.15., Samples/summaries of Pamphlets, leaflets, brochures, websites: demonstrations of backgrounds contributing to formation of storyteller mega-identity.
above. Peiffer's description of mega-performance refers to maintenance of a contemporary teller's identity being primarily that of a storyteller when oral narrative events are not happening: storyteller performance as opposed to storytelling performance (Peiffer, 1994, 92, 92-106). Whether a teller's identity in mega-performance is that of a 'storyteller' or some other identity who tells stories, that identity outside of performance informs performance and is the mega-identity.

All mega-identities, but especially traditional storytellers', appear dependent upon bonds defined by community and places, and lifestyle and work. 'A great storyteller will always be rooted in the people, primarily in a milieu of craftsmen. But just as this includes the rural, the maritime, and the urban elements in many stages of their economic and technical development, there are many graduations in the concepts in which their store of experience comes down to us' (Benjamin, 1992, 100). Families, friends, neighbours, work-mates, and also strangers provide tellers with a sense of self, audiences, and material for repertoires. These in turn define content and style, as well as aesthetic and moral philosophies, a sense of aspirations and responsibilities, that may or may not be articulated otherwise than through narrative discourse.

Within traditional settings, listener/teller relationship and the teller's evolutionary development appear symbiotic and natural to observers. 'Storytellers within a culture better understand which seasonings can be added freely and which require judicious measuring. Listeners within that same culture develop the palate to assess the tastiness of both the tale and the telling' (Birch, 2000, 77). Space and place, explored in chapter five, and how one moves about and interacts with these, are of importance. Dwelling in one spot a long time provides vast shared experience and knowledge for tellers and listeners to draw upon. 'Place is geography, a location for politics; community evokes the social and personal dimensions of place' (Sennett, 1998, 137). Roles and responsibilities are acquired though 'osmosis': shared experiences inculcating that society's mores.8

8 Appendix I., 33.1. – 33.3., Interview Transcripts: Social mores impacting on storyteller. choices/identity
Contemporary tellers articulate more often a storytelling aesthetic, harking back to idealised models as well as aspirations reflecting professional and bourgeois values to formulate mega-identity, consciously and/or subconsciously. Failing to see wider, global conditions, bourgeois actions and philosophies precipitate dangerous justifications for contemporary storytelling. Zipes points out:

Without idealizing the past, let’s recognize the significant qualitative difference in the manner in which tales were told and used up to the twentieth century. The work and customs of small tribes, villages, towns, reading circles, court societies, and small communities shaped storytelling, but today market forces, mass media conglomerates, and the Internet determine how stories will be spread. There is an intricate “web of dictation,” an arbitrary set of rules based on profit and power, that limits how far and how deep storytellers can go.

(Zipes, 2001, 128-9)

Contemporary tellers pay lip service to the universality and ubiquity of the act of storytelling, too often assuming this equates with details and cultural values of storytelling being universal. Contemporary tellers sensitive to nuances and most aware of their identity recognise dangers in this, and know mega-identity will always be rooted to locale and community.

Even so they face a dilemma. Espousing a philosophy treasuring traditional texts and styles, prompting development of means to experiment with, perpetuate and adapt narratives and related activities in modern society requires contemporary tellers to use mainstream, usually meaning bourgeois, means of professionalised, commercial practices. ‘Just as every act in a complex social order is inescapably political in character, so it is also bound up—in origin, intent, and effect—with culture. Thus culture must inevitably be construed in political terms, especially in an encounter between two cultural systems that are socially or economically unequal’ (Whisnant, 1983, 259).

Zipes similarly recognises mainstream commercial culture’s influences on modern storytellers’ identities and practices.
Linguistic standards, word choices, expressions, and gestures are molded into a semiotic system manipulated by politicians, religious leaders, and corporate heads to create myths that serve to consolidate the power structure. This system fosters the thoughtless consumption of products, faiths, and laws that inhibit the free expression of ideas. But ... the web of dictation is not seamless. By challenging and exploding the putative truths of the myth of freedom, we can make room for truthful and imaginative expression. Here is where genuine storytelling comes in.

(Zipes, 2001, 129-30)

Zipes believes contemporary storytellers can resolve this dilemma when reinterpreting Benjamin, who outlined how the capitalist market system had created enormous barriers to the free exchange of experience. Therefore one of the key roles of storytellers...is to be subversive, to pierce through the myths of the ruling elite in order to free people to recognize who they really are.

(Zipes, 2001, 129)

This comes back to the importance of identity, using the tellers’ true characters in real relationships for the formation and use of mega-identity. This is how genuine and truly subversive storytelling is achieved.

Symbiosis of community, location and work is difficult to replicate in modern life, a point acknowledged by politicians, community leaders, and scholars but not always by contemporary tellers and organisers of contemporary storytelling events. Not easily created, contemporary tellers must balance contradictory factors with difficulty to establish mega-identities in modern urban, suburban, and dormitory communities lacking established ties with lasting meaning. ‘Strong ties depend... on long association. And more personally they depend on a willingness to make commitments to others’ (Sennett, 1998, 25). Primary differences between traditional and contemporary tellers are not in repertoires, nor how they come by them, but rather upbringing and context in which craft is practised, the traditional teller regularly expressing commitment to significant others and the place they share. Contemporary storytelling refers to the storytelling community, but this is an artificial, dispersed, transient and temporary association; Sobol’s distinction between community and scene is applicable here, and the ‘community’ is really the ever-changing ‘scene’ (Sobol, 1999 155 156 157). The traditional (real) community meets none of these descriptions.
Part II. The Mega-Identity Outside and Inside Storytelling Performances

*Storyteller Identity Outside of Performance*

Mainstream values unconsciously forming contemporary tellers’ mega-identities are those all participants react to, even resist. Alienation and destruction of community are often motivations to use storytelling to create desired intimacy and sense of community. The personality of the teller becomes a narrative, a mega-identity, to attempt this.

When a person tells a personal narrative, he or she invites someone to know him, to know her, intimately, personally. Such a person is very vulnerable; he may be repulsed or misunderstood. Like physically intimate encounters, such verbal encounters carry the risk of rejection along with the promise of pleasure. Usually, however, a person tells personal narratives only to those people who want to know the teller better. This is not a conscious motive, of course, but it is a basic directing strategy of the genre. One gets to know some one else by sharing experiences, *intimacy* is our word for the exciting sensation that comes with our perception of some one else in our personal world.

(Stahl, 1980, x)

Tellers and organisers of contemporary storytelling experiences try various approaches to achieve intimacy and community. Compensating for lack, or perceived lack, of both they create artificial communities through festivals and concert clubs, workshops, conferences and residential courses, and professional or semi-professional organisations with publications, websites and directories. Peiffer observed ‘although there was not a natural community within which a storyteller might fit as a performer in contemporary...life, there was large community of storytellers brought together by their intention to tell stories’ (Peiffer, 1994, 2-3).

Initially, the activities of the storytelling revival, and the original small community of tellers that Peiffer describes, stimulated a significant quantity of new storytelling activities. As these activities repeated and developed, and as the small community evolved into a wide, loose association of professional and semi-professional tellers, the quality of storytelling varied more. The activities themselves (particularly festivals and clubs) became more set, and were potentially limited to this erstwhile storyteller
community. Activities were also very middle-class and commercial. Participation provided a semblance of achievement but structures quickly become inward looking and exclusive, thereby cutting tellers off from various, potentially more intimate audiences and allowing exploitation of false mega-identities. When this is employed in or next to 'genuine' storytelling, as defined in Zipes (Zipes, 2001, 134, 135), the differences are clear.

Lively, supportive storyteller communities can and have been developed. They can also become exclusive cliques marginalising potential wider audiences and prospective new tellers, traditional and otherwise. Such 'communities' impact on formation and maintenance of mega-identities outside performance situations, allowing—even encouraging—behaviour imitating commercial entertainers, with the new breed of professional or platform storytellers... caught up in the game. They charge high fees for their services in schools, libraries and community centers and perform in a manner that has more in common with Hollywood.... Though many of them are gifted, their primary mission is not to share wisdom, but to amuse, distract, entertain, and to celebrate their art. (Zipes, 2001, 128)

Such contemporary storyteller mega-identities make them unrecognisable as storytellers to traditional tellers, listeners, and folklorists and other academics outside contemporary storytelling. To expand on Peiffer's observation, individuals pursued too much the development of storyteller communities rather than storytelling communities. Without a developed culture of storytelling a culture of storytellers becomes an irrelevance in society.

Counteracting this, some contemporary tellers, storytelling organisations and events organisers develop storytelling residencies in communities, particularly those recognised as marginal, dysfunctional, and/or disadvantaged. Residencies place a storyteller in one location to work with targeted groups—school children, the aged, prisoners, refugees, etc. —for an extended period. Sometimes taking place within the teller's community, more often residencies 'drop in' a teller from outside. Residencies can be effective, creating and maintaining a culture of storytelling on lower and higher
ends of the performance continuum among the target group, who do not necessarily develop mega-identities as storytellers nor go on to become full-time contemporary tellers. Even so, most residency projects are initiated ‘top-down’, by education or arts administrators, cultural animateurs, tellers themselves, or a combination of these; participants rarely initiate and maintain storytelling work. Participants’ identities as tellers are shaped by mega-identities of tellers brought into projects. One could, of course, view teachers, librarians and administrators as being part of the community hosting the residency, with, it is hoped, an accurate and legitimate input from all participants channelled through the initiators in the planning.9

In contrast, some storytelling festivals’ and clubs’ audiences consist of significant numbers of practising storytellers aspiring to the commercial success of the platform performers. Organisers build on this fact, providing only a token presence in the community. They send booked artists for one-off performances in schools, libraries, community centres and/or old people’s homes with hopes that this encourages the purchase of tickets for the ‘main event’, often out of that catchment area’s price range. They charge substantial amounts for pre-festival workshops and courses for those who want to learn storytelling, become storytellers, or improve their commercial and aesthetic ‘success’ as tellers. The better, more altruistic festivals recognise these obstacles and do more to integrate the local population. However, when the primary aim is self-promotion for commercial gain such self-serving actions militate against genuine storytelling and when such attitudes predominate in a teller’s values they impact seriously upon his or her cognition and mega-identity.

Sense of self, formation of identity, and use and expression of identity related to audiences within one’s community seem key to all narrative forms, oral and written. ‘The teller’s identity is the listener’s treasure; there is treasure in each story—not the text, not the transcript, but the experience of hearing another voice, of seeing—if just for a moment—some one else in a subjective world’ (Stahl, 1980, x). This should make

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9 Appendix I.7, 34.1 — 34.5. Journal Observations—Examples of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ community practice.
each performance unique, not only unlike others' performances of the same tale, but also unlike previous and subsequent renditions by the same teller. Though looked at separately, one must point out that identities of listeners contribute to uniqueness of storytelling events, too, as

it is the listener who identifies the traditions, and it is the experience of hearing the text that is translated into an interpretation. Literary folkloristics does identify traditional elements in a text, but it goes beyond conventional folklore-and-literature studies in asserting that the range of traditions significant in the listener's hearing of a story is larger and more inclusive than previously assumed and that the process of hearing a text is a creative art in which the listener's own large store of cultural and personal resources is used to produce a unified response of meaning.

(Stahl, 1980, 2)

How audiences view and respond to mega-identities in and outside performances helps form and reinforce them.

Interviews reveal traditional storytellers answer with stories when asked how they became tellers, what inspired them, how they choose and develop repertoire, and what techniques and skills they use. Asked for aesthetic theories of their storytelling, they sometimes reply telling traditional tales. More often they answer with personal anecdotes, genealogies, and local history: stories about families, neighbours and work.10 Answering scholars' questions, tellers affirm they know what defines them. Experiences are raw material for repertoires, making stories come alive, apparently 'real' to listeners no matter how fantastic. Physical tasks known from years of repetitive toil are imitated in gestures the tellers use. Places seen every day are referred to in settings. Character types from real life, as well as personal relationships and emotional experiences they and audiences know well, are described or briefly, but effectively, alluded to.

Contemporary storytelling mega-identities can appear 'artificial', obvious constructions compared to traditional tellers. What makes contemporary storytellers has much in

10 Appendix I., 35.1. – 35.3., Interview Transcripts: Excerpts articulating or demonstrating storytelling aesthetic.
common with traditional ones—mega-identity exists and is created in both cases through metacognition. Details of difference can appear major, the degree of differences partly related to conscious and unconscious development. Differences are informative, but ultimately result from the same cognitive processes and emotional states, arising from human reactions and interactions. Contexts differ but metacognition does not, except regarding levels of awareness. The more limited the contexts, the less aware participants are of different mega-identities, and diverse repertoires, styles and uses for storytelling. It is not traditional contexts that are limited, but contemporary ones based on preconceptions and assumptions and coming from philosophical-psychological perspectives rather than socio-cultural or historical-cultural contexts—real life.

Traditional storytellers attractive to contemporary tellers are used as ideals, models to emulate and be compared with. This appeal comes initially from texts contemporary tellers read with abstract, Romantic notions. Text, in this case, includes written stories and theories of traditional storytelling and stories. Attraction and use of text, already covered, naturally form mega-identities. Attraction sometimes comes from witnessing traditional tellers' performances. More likely, developing contemporary tellers see revival, not traditional, tellers perform. Even if performers are traditional, their performances are mediated by contemporary influences if part of a festival or similar venue, with audiences of friends and family. Traditional tellers in contemporary events are interpreted through publicity, leaflets, programmes, and introductions made by non-traditional organisers.

**Storyteller Identity inside Performances**

Inescapable influences and mediations of text and, with them, bourgeois values, create mega-identities.

The appearance and relative success of a new storyteller undeniably constitutes a return to an expressive form which had lost...all pertinence among the common symbolic products of contemporary society. This revival is obvious even if today's listeners no longer hold the same relationship to folktales of the peasants of yore. The existence of such a
movement can be understood in the context of a fast rehabilitation of naïve artforms ... which began at the turn of the century. This rehabilitation means that the producers of traditional civilizations were graced with nobility and taken as models rather than being relegated amongst the survivals. In addition, the specific relationship which one imagines between the creators and users of primitive art tends to be exemplified and recreated whenever possible, thanks to the actions of spontaneous artistic movements or activities coupled with official instances of cultural diffusion.

(Görög-Karady, 1990, 174) [my emphasis]

To say rehabilitation graces old stories and storytelling with nobility romanticises contemporary storytelling in the extreme. No doubt contemporary tellers have potential to do good, and do so. However, assuming categorically that 'rehabilitation' is noble and graceful presupposes many things and ignores others. It patronises, assuming older art forms needed to or should be revived or reformed, and is potentially hypocritical if rehabilitation of an art form masks participants' real motives such as ego gratification. It is shallow, failing to recognise possible exploitation, specifically cultural appropriation, commercial excess, and so on, of stories and of certain cultures and marginal social groups. Leading to dangers Zipes and Whissant warn about, it is succinctly represented in a recent VIZ comic strip (Fardell, 2001, 20-1). 11

For non-reflective participants in any storytelling, text appears to be the primary cause of emotional and cognitive reactions participants have in storytelling. Emotional and cognitive impact of text can and does inspire people to assert themselves consciously as tellers. For beginning contemporary storytellers, those first coming to storytelling of any kind but particularly revival telling, text appears malleable to them, providing valid and impersonal point of focus that allows engagement with the self without risk of revealing the self. Focusing on text allows avoidance of self-evaluation or self-expression. But overemphasis on text and the teller's relationship to it neglects aspects and use of personality and social and cultural relationships forming mega-identities. Whether neglected, over-emphasised, or militated mega-identities create multiple

11 Appendix II, 13.0., 'Modern Parenting' from the comic book Viz: this satire accurately, and cruelly, exposes specific vanities and misconceptions common among contemporary storytellers and audiences.
interfaces with storytelling as action and art.

Failure to identify and reflect upon these complexities leads contemporary tellers to exploit narrow aspects. Exploitation of mega-identities contributes to commercialisation, reflecting cognition influenced by existences that are materialistic, consumerist, and tied to class-status. Living and working as a full-time, professional, commercial storyteller, one sells oneself through brochures, leaflets, web-sites and publicity packets. Contemporary storytelling event organisers sell products: stories, and storytelling performances, or services, residencies, courses, conferences, workshops, etc. Whether that self, product, or service offered for sale matches expectations of consumers depends on tellers making use of appropriate aspects of identities and adapting to contexts to achieve the storytelling experience. Some tellers and organisers prefer to limit the nature of contexts, or recognise limitations of their talents/abilities/skills/interests, so as to perform only in the ‘best light’, for themselves that is. Different mental states determine how aware or unaware tellers are of the influences and uses of their identities within different contexts. Some contemporary tellers consciously create different storyteller roles in performances.

While recognising each teller is different, working according to individual talents and situations, the fact modern society does not have agreed definitions nor recognises specific roles and identities for storytellers causes diversity. Partly a consequence of personal responses, diversity reflects common and divergent cognitive processes. It also results from expectations and preconceptions made by all participants. While response and attraction to text motivates the contemporary storyteller to tell, many, particularly traditional, tellers also acknowledge that relationships to specific individuals prompted their conscious development as tellers. Recognising this means a necessary part of any teller’s nature is a sensitivity to individuals and groups as well as social conditions; not entirely, nor necessarily, a conscious condition. Sensitivity also motivates tellers: tellers whose mega-identities emerge from work in education, library

services, caring professions and radical political theatre. 'Lifestyle' storytellers might also find sensitivity a motivation. Practising within cultures considered to be minority, 'marginal' or 'under threat', they develop as bearers of traditions with distinctive styles.

Cognition involved in developing and maintaining tellers' identities clearly relies on emotional processes, so social ties are a dominant factor. Differences in style and language of traditional tellers from contemporary tellers, noted by linguists and folklorists, reveal this cognition. For traditional tellers working within their tradition, the linguistic process is internal. For contemporary tellers not from a traditional background, the linguistic process is external. Traditional tellers moving from original contexts into the contemporary scene on a regular basis begin to externalise, even exploit, traditional identity, thereby creating mega-identities similar to contemporary non-traditional tellers. Some contemporary tellers come from more 'traditional' backgrounds where there may be no actual traditional telling, only an ethnicity, culture or race separate from the mainstream and informing identity; this can contribute to a more 'natural' mega-identity.

Deborah Tannen refers to a study suggesting 'that oral tradition is associated with the family and in groups, while literate tradition is banned and passed on in the decontextualized setting... ' (Tannen, 1982, 3). This leads to the crux of the cliché that some cultural groups have 'natural', stronger storytelling traditions and abilities. Some contemporary storytellers fail to recognise ties with class issues as well, with much activity in contemporary storytelling being unselfconscious bourgeoisification of storytelling. Tannen and Labov acknowledge this.

Labov suggests that middle-class white speakers tend to use more external evaluation, while inner city blacks use more internal evaluation. He notes as well that internal evaluation makes a better story. I believe this explains the often perceived phenomenon of 'good storytellers' among working class people, rural people, or members of certain cultures, including Jews and Greeks. This phenomenon results from use of strategies that build on interpersonal involvement to create a sense of
identification, or involvement, with characters and tellers of stories which has been linked to oral tradition (though obviously need not be).

(Tannen, 1982, 8-9)

Mega-identity constructed after an individual decides to be a storyteller with construction being conscious or unselfconscious, though more usually the former, sees identity intrude more upon performance. Commentary and detail is more literary, external and even superfluous. The latter appeals to audiences used to literary traditions while repelling those from traditional backgrounds; to appeal to as many as possible, genuine storytelling is demanded. Traditional tellers, even those on the contemporary 'scene' with developed mega-identites trading in on 'traditional' or 'ethnic' personae evolved naturally and slowly, perform in ways less literary, with understanding and explanation internalised.  

Acquisition or exaggeration of contemporary tellers’ backgrounds becomes significant in performances. Folklorists emphasise more often ethnicities of traditional tellers, practising solely within their cultural milieu, than tellers themselves, until such time as those tellers enter contemporary storytelling. Even then, organisers of events and contemporary tellers modelling themselves after specific traditional tellers make more of these qualities—making a fetish of 'tradition' and/or ethnicity. Diversity of mega-identities does not develop solely through passive, unselfconscious or evolutionary response to text, individuals, groups, or social conditions. Contemporary storytellers consciously and actively construct diversity.

Making a living storytelling leads into a highly competitive environment. Decisions, conscious and otherwise, as to how to represent and make use of self outside and within performances come from desires to be distinctive, thereby 'getting ahead of the competition', while simultaneously imitating those who appear aesthetically and commercially successful. Demands of 'clients'—funders, sponsors, organisers, and audiences—come into play. Contemporary tellers strive to meet expectations and

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13 Appendix I., 37.1. – 37.4., Journal observations and Interviews—cases of identity used in performance, and of identities clashing with expectations of performance.
preconceptions so as to communicate successfully and receive financial compensation. Pressures lead contemporary tellers to choose models of practice not from their 'ideal' traditional, or imagined traditional, teller, but from professional, commercial standards of practice in business and entertainment. This result is not always positive. 'It is not only how we practice our art that is affected by this confusion, but the very definition of our roles as storytellers in a media-and-entertainment saturated age' (Heckler, 1996, 17).

**Mega-identity, Cognition, and Performance**

It cannot be stressed enough that these observations are not always recognised by storytellers themselves. Development of the sense of self and mega-identity is gradual, never-ending, and often non-reflective, lacking self-consciousness.

The movements, looks, and vocal sounds we make as an unintended by-product of speaking and listening never seem to remain innocent. Within the life time of each of us these acts in varying degrees acquire a specialised communicative role in the stream of our behaviour, looked to and provided for in connection with the displaying of our alignment to current events. We look simply to see; see others looking, and soon become knowing and skilled in regard to the evidential uses made of the appearance of looking.

(Goffman, 1981, 2)

The knowledge, skills and techniques communicative roles involve are present in tellers throughout the performance continuum.

*Listeners* identify an effective teller and 'proper' story (Bauman, 1986, Birch, 2000). Once identification happens, a consciousness arises simultaneously among participants, with lessening conscious awareness of anything extraneous to the story and act of telling; absorption is in the space and time of the narrative. Wischner recognised this quality where mega-identity and audiences' perception are congruent with text and act, quoting Csikszentmihalyi, whose studies on boredom and anxiety noted those who were one with their activity experienced exhilaration. He called this flow, described as an oceanic feeling.
The amount of flow in storytelling is a matter of the teller's involvement and absorption in a tale or aspect of a tale during narration. The use of gesture, visualization, asides, and shifts in speech from third person to first person indicates the degree of flow being experienced by the teller. (Wischner, 1991, 73)

Elements Wischner lists achieving flow—vocalization, gesture, visualization, etc.—relate to linked paraperformance elements and cognitive processes. Absorption and involvement in the tale, or part of it, are only part of flow for tellers; absorption and involvement in the act of telling is equally important. Too much engagement in the tale and ignoring context creates artificial, not genuine, storytelling. Flow is achieved when mega-identity and true persona of teller are harmonious with each other, context, and text; audiences then find convergence with storytelling, noting elements within the story more than their surroundings. When this happens, participants move up the performance continuum. Tellers take more risks, tell more challenging stories, and seek a wider circle of listeners. Audiences are more involved while listening, and afterwards remember more of the story, and far less of the teller's mega-identity and role in telling.

Sense of self and use of identity are strengthened by telling. In cognitive terms this suggests integration of memory, emotions and imagination, and identity and narrative (fictional and factual) when taking on teller/listener roles. Bauman stressed this creates increased responsibility on tellers for successful storytelling, and upon audiences for judging whether teller and story achieve success (Bauman, 1984, 18). Wilson points out success provides increased rewards (Wilson, 1999). These are not financial, but emotional satisfaction in support of the ego. Listeners entering storytelling experience achieve an inflated sense of self because involvement in associative thoughts reinforces identities, beliefs, memories and emotions. This happens for tellers, too, making use of these to convey narratives. Tellers have the added 'reward' of audience feedback, inflating their sense of self as a teller and reinforcing mega-identity. This sparks different sets of associative thoughts and emotions, contributing to euphoria.14

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14 Appendix I., 38.1 – 38.3. Journal observations and Interviews: Descriptions of the 'buzz', 'adrenaline rush', and 'highs' from storytelling.
Commercial, professional contemporary storytellers, successfully creating storytelling experiences and images as storytellers with powerful, colourful and accomplished mega-identities naturally appeal to individuals whose sense of self is insecure, diminished or weak. The effect is charismatic. Acts of telling and listening strengthening identity happen at any level of the performance continuum. When conscious of themselves as tellers, especially self-identified in the role, performers feel a need to move higher up the continuum—often when they need not or are unable to do so. Powerful attraction of ego-inflation, which professional and commercial storytelling presents, encourages this.

Commercialisation of all kinds of narrative is now long embedded in thought processes, so much so it is barely recognised.

No recent art can escape from... the commodification of culture that has accompanied the industrial revolution. This “commodification” refers to the fact that the emergence of a distinct realm of “aesthetics” and art’s hard-won independence from control... was made possible by a spreading commercialism that... penetrated with accelerating thoroughness all aspects of Western European society.

(Kroeber, 1992, 10)

Rapid development of antiquarianism and folklore studies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries arose simultaneously with rapid industrialisation, commodification and consumerism. Enlightenment and Romantic thinking distinguished clearly between modern and ancient, starting processes of making certain texts into historic artifacts: worth preserving for some, for others something to profit from, and for many something to react against to create ‘modern’ and ‘individual’ authored works challenging ‘restrictive’ traditions.

The twentieth century saw increased commodification of the self. This major contributory factor to development of self-chosen ‘life-styles’ is often expressed

15 Appendix 1., 39.1–39.3. Journal Observation and Analyses of Video Recordings of Storytelling Performances that ‘break’ the atmosphere/ambience/buzz of a storytelling session.
through contemporary mega-identities of tellers.

(The) emergence of consumerism is closely associated with Romanticism’s celebration of the pleasure of private, inner experience, which became the basis for what has been called “modern hedonism,” those impulses driving individuals to seek satisfaction of a subjective “self-illusioned quality of experience,” a quality of experience deeply influencing and deeply influenced by developments in the arts.

(Kroeber, 1992, 11)

Impacting upon the formation of any mega-identity in contemporary storytelling, these inherited attitudes and responses become unconscious or quasi-automatic in cognitive terms. As discussed, Freudians’ early definition of the unconscious was developed by cognitists who recognised that, rather than consisting of dark, forgotten or suppressed secrets, much of the unconscious are automatic or consist of quasi-automatic processes constantly going on. Their theories concerning inter-relations between conscious and unconscious minds and narrative acts are relevant here, since construction and use of storyteller identity rely on them.

Lesser described conscious, quasi-automatic, and unconscious activities while readers interacted with fiction.

Basically the mind is occupied in following a story as it develops and grasping its manifest meaning. Secondly—incidentally rather than systematically—it is engaged in appraising: in judging such things as the honesty of the story, its relevance for the reader, the skill with which it is worked out. Both activities may involve “placing” the story—in terms of period, tradition or genre, the previous work of the same author, or any other point of reference which facilitates understanding and judgment.

(Lesser, 1957, 195)

Appraisal is inherent in quasi-automatic and unconscious cognition of all kinds of narrators as well. It also keeps minds of all participants in any form of narrative very busy (Lesser, 1957, 195). Following and interpreting the ‘surface significance’ of stories involves more than appearances suggest.

A good storyteller, in whatever medium, appeals to his or her audience’s imagination. The most potent effects of story derive not from what is told, what is positively represented...but from what is omitted, not told. Visual omissions may be as potent as verbal ones. Omissions play a crucial role in narrative because story does not and cannot exist without
both narrator and audience. Narrative is social interchange that is misunderstood if the actively contributory force of any participant is ignored.

(Kroeber, 1992, 19)

Not showing something, not acting it, may be more powerful in narrative. Non-representational telling contributes to genuine storytelling more than storytelling that acts or shows. It is better to suggest, and this observation is expanded upon in Part III of this chapter, with discussion of theatrical, oratorical and literary axes, and the style termed personation.

The quasi-automatic responses assisting the interpretation and understanding of omissions leads to readers', and listeners', engrossment in a story. Readers feel impelled to read rapidly, and listeners often spontaneously contribute what comes next. Tellers, especially those lower on the performance continuum, and inexperienced, less talented or undisciplined tellers higher up, tell tales too quickly or provide too much information, because they are caught up in cognition required for narrative and forget to or do not realise the importance of omissions.

The events of a single story may be numerous, complex and intricately interrelated. Furthermore, they are not developed continuously; and certain things are left unexplained or are only partially explained. The storyteller requires the reader [or listener] to make interpolations and draw inferences, to participate actively in the task of understanding his tale.

(Lesser, 1957, 195) [my interpolations]

Tellers make interpolations and inferences as much as, perhaps more than, listeners/readers. Not only do events of a narrative overwhelm, crying to come out, or in the case of readers, be found out, all at once, so do mechanics of telling. A beginning teller, or an experienced one presenting a newly learned story, first concentrates on elements of narrative performance text. Mental and emotional associations are rediscovered, and new ones discovered, by tellers through repeated tellings. Once 'known', the way a personal memory is known, interpolations and inferences about

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audiences, their responses, and wider contexts—the environment, nature of the event and so on—constantly go on subconsciously, quasi-automatically or self-consciously.

Techniques, skills and talent serve to answer interpolated questions and concerns and suggest inferences, pushing matters in a way making for responsible oral narrative performance. Mega-identity consists of both innate abilities and personality traits and acquired skills and techniques that must be quasi-automatic or subconscious and that employ talent and methodology suit ing the teller's definition (articulated or not) of successful performance. Therefore each telling is reinterpretation, no matter how much the performer intends to, and does, keep it the same word-for-word and gesture-for-gesture, or how original another performer intends to make the narrative.

Reinterpretation that is reevaluation does not destroy the value of story, but rather enhances the story's value. Reinterpretation enables a story to serve as a continuing focus for the most probing moral questions we can devise, every retelling and rehearsing being—and demanding from its audience—a reevaluation.

(Kroeber, 1992, 34)

All participants reflect upon memories and apply them to narratives; so do tellers (and writers) when re-creating or creating stories. 'Human consciousness...is self-consciousness. We not only have experiences, we are conscious of ourselves having them, and being affected by them' (Lodge, 2002, 14). We internalize real experiences and reported memory of others (conveyed in stories). 'Phenomena such as memory, the association of ideas in the mind, the causes of emotions and the individual's sense of self, become of central importance to speculative thinkers and writers of narrative literature alike' (Lodge, 2002, 40).

As current practices in neurobiology, evolutionary biology, and cognitive science develop, their technologies such as PET and MRI (positron-emission tomography and magnetic resonance imaging, respectively), mentioned earlier (Chapter Two, 'The Impact of the Subconscious on the Physical Reality of Storytelling'), will provide insight into understanding this phenomenon of oral story, mental structures (physical and transcendental) and identity. Scientific studies now reveal parts of the brain active
during speaking and listening, reading and writing, and remembering (Greenfiled, 1997; Schank, 2000; Crane, 2001; Lodge, 2002). The seeming importance of links between personal memories and listening and reading might be observable through measuring physiology and physiological processes (neuro-chemical and electrical activity) when a teller and/or listener is engrossed in imaginative texts, narrative structures, and production of speech. What would be revealed are mental correspondences in storytelling and listening, and reading and writing. For the moment, due to the obtrusiveness of these technologies in their current state as well as the extreme costs, their lack of availability and primary use in health care, such academic pursuits are beyond the remit of this thesis.

**Part III. Axes and Modes, Presentation, Representation and Personation**

**Three Axes in Contemporary Storytelling Performances**

There are tellers and others who identify storytelling as theatrical practice, with elements of acting. Drama theorists Tamar Alexander and Michal Govrin consider the story-telling [sic] event as a performance that makes intense and variegated use of overlapping aspects of literature, oratory and theatre, without being exhausted by any one of them.

(Alexander, 1989, 3)

They represent these aspects of folktale performances as three axes. The literature axis addresses audiences though linguistic representations of a fictional world. The oratory axis derives from conventions of political speeches, lectures, religious sermons and so on: speech acts that necessitate audience, and oral language, tone, and gesture. The theatre axis, their primary focus, sees audience addressed through the medium of fictional material treated simultaneously in language, rhetorical oratory, and acting (Alexander, 1989, 3). Axes consist of modes defining and/or delivering their aspects.

Axes and modes reveal elements of mega-identity in narrative and para-texts performances. Alexander and Govrin concede that at
the performing level of Story-telling [sic]... there are also permanent elements: fixed devices used by the folkteller and transmitted by oral tradition. These devices shaped the different narrating modes adopted during performance; they determine the traditional performing art of a given ethnic group... and within this group they establish the artistry of the individual story-teller’s performance’

(Alexander, 1989, 3)

The fixed devices they recognise in folkteller performances are, from my observations, expressions and techniques inherent in the literary and oratory axes. Looking solely at the theatre axis, Alexander and Govrin identify these others as ‘fixed’. They can be so, with some contemporary, and traditional, storytelling performances effecting performances so stylised as to be artificial. However, ‘fixed devices’ may appear so only on the surface. It is the earlier noted mistake assuming the unchanging primitive nature of oral and folk literature (referred to in Chapter One, ‘Folkloristic, Romantic and Nationalistic Influences’ and in Chapter Two, ‘Literary and Traditional Texts in Contemporary Storytelling Repertoires’ and ‘True’ Traditional and Folk Narrative Texts in Contemporary Storytelling’ (Leith, 1998, 2002; Seirra, 1993; Harvey, 1992, 1994, O’Giollain, Diarmaid, 2000). Analysing literary and oratorical expressions through cognitive terms show that, embedded in different contexts, these same devices reveal different subtexts, with mental and emotional processes reacting to the circumstances.

Alexander and Govrin looked only at one teller, giving little detail regarding personal background and performance context. Clues are few to determine aspects of self incorporated in mega-identity inside and outside this performance. Their teller ‘was cognisant of the theatrical use of story-telling [sic], of the role it can play and the sophisticated possibilities for which it can be used. He considered artistry a major factor in his evaluation of himself as a story-teller, and used it as a criterion for judging other story-tellers’ (Alexander, 1989, 8). Their study gives no indication of the nature of the audience and whether the teller’s audiences vary in age, social make-up, size, etc., nor does it report the typical venue for performances and whether this changes or is always the same. Looking only at the teller’s performance, they de-contextualise it. This is a common approach in what few performance theory studies of storytelling that
exist, though folklorists have moved on from this methodology because of inherent weaknesses already reiterated.

Alexander and Govrin observed different behaviours: body language, tone of voice, types of address to the audience, and so on. Attributing specific acting modes to each, they claim tellers use these modes while telling. The storytelling acting modes are:

- The storyteller mode, in which the performer appears as himself, addressing the audience directly
- The synoptic mode, when the performer tells the story as reported speech
- The proximate mode, when the teller is so involved in the narration he begins to act it out through gestures, mime, and vocal expressions
- The character mode, when the teller takes on and acts out the character or characters in the story.

Further descriptions are given of ‘sub-modes’, combinations of the four primary modes, such as the proximate-character mode, and so on (Alexander, 1989, 4-8). These all no doubt occur in some instances, although tellers interviewed claim not to recognise or use them. Since encountering Alexander and Govrin’s article I sometimes witness them when listening to other tellers. I do not believe they are aware of the modes, nor of using them.

After my initial analyses of various storytellers’ performances at festivals or in informal surroundings recorded on video, I returned to analyse the same performances using Alexander and Govrin’s methods. This was easily done, one could identify the acting modes discussed in their article. I have doubts as to the efficacy of the exercise in truly understanding what goes on in a storytelling. With no accounting of audience presence and interaction, or of the nature of and use of the space, it is impossible to see how these determine and/or influence modes. That both these affect and are affected by cognitive processes is part of the basis of this thesis. Audience and space determine the teller’s

17 Appendix I. 41.1. – 41.2., *Interviews. Discussion of reaction to concept of acting modes.*
18 *Analyses of Video Recordings: See example in Appendix I.,* 29.1.
conscious and unconscious decisions, so the teller meets responsibilities to the story and audience.

Alexander and Govrin give little indication as to whether they observed their subject tell the same stories more than once, in different or similar contexts, or if there are any variations of modes via different performances and their contexts. This suggests their idea is that performance modes are 'set', fixed in whatever way a teller assumes, without analysis, are the folkloristic devices. The suggestion is also that the teller's artistry comes from the development and choice of these modes, without indicating if these come about consciously or unconsciously. They do assume that the fixed devices shape the different narrating modes adopted in performance, and determine the traditional art of an ethnic group by which the group can judge an individual's artistry (Alexander, 1989, 3). Just as literary criticism too often treats story as being solely written and divorced from context and interaction, so does this system of analysis put storytelling in 'Perspex', as though teller and story were bound in a book or beyond the 'fourth wall' of a box stage. This analysis is too shallow, and while it is possible that in all forms of storytelling one could identify 'fixed devices' transmitted by oral tradition, it fails to take account of the cognition and potential for change behind these devices.

The identification of acting modes and method of observing, recording and defining them is of interest and some purpose, in the teaching of storytelling and in developing a critical language to evaluate and understand the art. The tellers I interviewed certainly agreed what they did was a specific art; they recognised common techniques and skills, and constantly ascertained their own and others' artistry as tellers in relation to these.

In our interviews, discussion revealed they usually viewed their storytelling more from a literary axis. 19 Like them, as a teller I recognise the literature axis, and the role of author, and also the oratorical axis. I do not recognise the theatre axis and acting modes as such.

19 Appendix. I., 43.0. Storyteller's essay in response to a review that storytelling is theatre, not literature.
It may be the ‘traditions’ I am influenced by and comfortable in, a combination of
traditional Irish and Irish American styles with professional training in
‘library/educational’ storytelling, incorporate the first two axes more than the latter.
Similarly, backgrounds of my informants, with library, education, folk revival,
literature, folklore studies and/or traditional influences, may have blinded them to any
acting modes they employ. The one exception was John Campbell, one of the three
traditional tellers interviewed, who has been much involved in amateur dramatics and
amateur and professional poetry circles. The storytellers interviewed, when discussing
performance styles, more often spoke of literary comparisons in positive terms, and
theatre comparisons in negative ones.

The Theatre Axis

Alexander and Govrin’s naturally gravitate to theatrical terms based on their own
experience and knowledge to describe storyteller performance. Somehow this denies
pre-Stansislavskian styles and automatically incorporates Romantic notions of genius
and individual authorship, equating the storyteller with the author who ‘is responsible
for creating characters as well as descriptive passages, evaluations, summaries, etc.’ The
difference is that

the writer can address the reader only through his written words, the
story-teller, like the orator, is present in person, face-to-face with his
audience. In Aristotelian terms, the ‘modes of imitation’ used by the folk
narrator constantly fluctuate and interweave between the mimetic
‘representational mode’ and the diegetic ‘descriptive mode.’

(Alexander, 1989, 3)

Alexander and Govrin’s implications are problematical in cognitive terms for two
reasons. First, by assuming how a teller presents himself in storyteller mode is always
the real self; and, secondly, by implying a teller does not use this sense of self, whether
real or constructed identity, in other modes. Not that role-play happens only in
performance; in every-day life we might take on a role or present an identity, for social
conventions hiding or only partly revealing the ‘true self’. 
The ‘storyteller mode’, where the teller addresses audience as himself, would be where paratext occurs and mega-identity is most evident. Remember paratext includes tellers’ thoughts, comments, and created language, but also ritualized and formulaic linguistic features. These can be internalized and a true expression of personality, but also be ‘put on’, imitating or adapted from others. Paratext does not have to be tellers’ real thoughts, allowing tellers to convey identities alien to their own. This enables artificial expression, but also ‘arch’, ironic, melodramatic or similar tones. The ‘real’ self could be presented but at the same time deliver an ‘ironic’ detachment. Alexander and Govrin explain this is in the sub-modes. But these do not describe adequately the infinite variety of tones available to tellers, as modes and sub-modes can become too formulaic, something taught or nonreflectively reproduced, resulting in artificial storytelling.20

Consider Goffman’s observations on presentation of self in everyday life and social life as drama. Individuals play roles so observers take seriously impressions fostered. The popular view is that a ‘performer’ puts on a ‘show’ for the benefit of others, to convince them of certain attributes in the speaker or situation that the speaker represents. Goffman suggests ‘looking at the individual’s own belief in the impression of reality that he attempts to engender in those among whom he finds himself’ (Goffman, 1997, 95). In real life

the performer can be taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality. When his audience is also convinced in this way about the show he puts on ... only the sociologist or the socially disgruntled will have any doubts about the “realness” of what is presented.

(Goffman, 1997, 95)

A storyteller can sincerely believe in and identify with mega-identity as reality, convincing audiences. It is equally possible the teller is not sincere or convinced about his or her mega-identity but is still able to use it so that audiences believe what they see and hear. Conversely, audiences can be sceptical when the storyteller’s mega-identity is truly real. There are degrees of reality and belief in both parties—a kind of continuum between liminal states: the ‘this’ and ‘that’, ‘here’ and ‘there’.

20 Appendix I., 44.1 – 44.2., Interview Transcripts and Journal Observation: Commentary regarding
For his purpose Goffman observed only two types of performer, the sincere and the cynical, recognising the performer who

may not be taken in at all by his own routine. This possibility is understandable since no one is in quite as good an observational position to see through the act as the person who puts it on. Coupled with this, the performer may be moved to guide the conviction of his audience only as a means to other ends, having no ultimate concern in the conception that they have of him or of the situation. When the individual has no belief in his own act and no ultimate concern with the beliefs of his audience, we may call him cynical, reserving the term “sincere” for individuals who believe in the impression fostered by their own performance. It should be understood that the cynic, with all his professional disinvolvement, may obtain unprofessional pleasures from his masquerade, experiencing a kind of gleeful spiritual aggression from the fact he can toy at will with something his audience must take seriously.

(Goffman, 1997, 95-6)

This description is too commonly the position of contemporary storytellers pursuing mechancial, artificially constructed practices just to make a living from storytelling. They may do so for the best of intentions: because they believe in the educational and/or social aims of the story or act of telling. This is just as a teacher or counsellor does when presenting one stance for the sake of a lesson teaching a pupil or treatment healing a client, hiding true feelings or opinions to achieve that desired result.

Contemporary tellers do not all employ an identifiable ‘character mode’, portraying characters mimetically as in actors’, allegedly, representational styles. ‘The colloquial conversation is conducted in simple, everyday language that imitates the characters. The swaying of the upper part of the trunk indicates…[one character]…thereby distinguishing him from the man he is talking to whose movements are less purposeful. The teller acquires the gestures and facial expressions of each character as he impersonates him’ (Alexander, 1989, 9). In my experience, traditional tellers do not portray characters as actors do. There are changes of gestures, facial expressions, competitions and the affect these have on storytelling 'styles' and storyteller identity.

Appendix I. 45.1. – 45.2., Interview Transcripts and Analyses of Video Recordings of Storytelling Performances: examples confirming characterisation is not mimetic but diegetic, with personation in play in that the speech and actions are exaggerated traits of the teller's own persona.
vocal dynamics and stances, but these seem variations of tellers’ own expressiveness exaggerated to a degree. Previous discussion recognises that traditional tellers incorporate nonreflectively and unselfconsciously gestures from daily actions and expressions commonly shared with audiences. Contemporary tellers modelling themselves on traditional tellers or because of their own backgrounds or personalities, do not use character mode, though they may imitate a traditional teller’s gestures and stance either purposely or without realising they do. If they represent a character mimitically, it is the ‘character’ of the mentor teller, or the ‘character’ of a constructed mega-identity, not a character in the narrative. In the storytelling, most report words, actions and emotions of characters, presenting the characters in diegetic (descriptive) not mimetic (representational) mode.

Many contemporary tellers come from performance backgrounds, while others avail themselves of professional performers’ knowledge, expertise and experience in training and development. The theatre axis is therefore significant in considering contemporary storytelling, since critical language from drama and theatre will be absorbed and used in discussion and understanding of storytelling via this experience. ‘Performing a folktale requires proficiency and flexibility in different modes of acting. In the course of only a few seconds the teller may fully impersonate a character by imitating his dialect, voice, gestures, etc., then assume the vantage point of critical observer by commenting on the character, and finally appeal directly to his audience’ (Alexander, 1989, 3). It is incorrect to assume all tellers do this. A beginning teller, assuming it is a fact, will develop in markedly different ways from one who questions this statement. Following such a description leads to a highly theatrical storytelling style, where storytellers do appear more like actors. The result is more focus on the teller rather than narrative.

Sara Cone Bryant recognised the dangers of this a century ago, though her criticism was the over-reliance on too commonly used oratorical conventions of the time in storytelling. Discussing the use of a dramatic style in storytelling, she stressed the teller

22 Appendix I., 46.1. – 46.3. Analyses of Video Recordings of Storytelling Performances demonstrating ‘acting’ and ‘narrating’ by traditional tellers.
must be ‘one’s self’, and in telling the story the ‘expression must...always remain suggestive rather than illustrative’ (Bryant, 1905, 102). Alexander and Govrin’s ‘impersonate’ is the wrong aim here: if calculated or over-exaggerated it is artificial. When it is suggestive, and arises out of the teller’s personality, it is more effective, more likely to be genuine storytelling. In traditional storytelling proficiency and flexibility evolve naturally, and non-reflectively at first. This is not to suggest traditional storytelling is artless, without self-reflection and study of technique and practice of skills. One need only look at the descriptions of traditional tellers reported by James H. Delargy, Joe Neil MacNeil, Calum I. MacLean and many others (Delargy, 1945; MacNeil, 1987; MacLean, 1956). All these report that simple, suggestive style arising out of the teller’s personality, with gestures, inflection and stance so subtle and delicate that one could, and in the ‘field’ of a living tradition often did, listen to the story in darkness or with eyes shut. Even so, one could still be drawn into the storytelling experience.

Dramatic conventions creating theatrical styles in storytelling are acceptable when involving audiences so the performance is enjoyable and effective, resulting in the storytelling experience. Events purporting to be traditional activity that are too theatrical, meaning too contrived, repel. As an example one need only look at ‘traditional’ performances staged for tourists in the West of Ireland, North American Indian Reservations, African and Caribbean holiday resorts, and so on. These are artificial, constructed purely to make a profit. Much of revival storytelling slips too easily into this same category. The style can appeal to a few, as whatever conventions or experience are used affect meta- and ordinary cognition. Those needing a boost to ego or inflated sense of self, who most enjoy romanticised versions of storytelling, are presenting Goffman’s cynic obtaining pleasure from his or her masquerade.

**Personation and Liminality**

Alexander and Govrin’s interpretation may be too simplistic, or draw too much upon modern theatre aesthetic, to explain contemporary storytelling in light of what we know of cognition, and formation and use of identity. They analyse storytelling too much
along the lines of current layman’s understanding of acting and theatre. Peter Thomson’s supposition ‘that the evolution of audience expectations occurred alongside the evolution of acting styles’ (Thomson, 1999, 5) hints at a more successful approach to understanding the relationship, or mutual influence of acting and storytelling, in that it admits a continuum of styles and changing in perception from both performer and audience perspectives. Thomson is reluctant to suggest clear progression from presentational to representational styles, especially as the former were prevalent until recently (Thomson, 1999, 9).

Thomson’s discussion of personation, a third style bridging these, seems remarkably close to contemporary storytellers’ mixed use of self and text, and oratorical, fictional, and theatrical elements. He proposes personation ‘did not abolish the performer’s self from the playing space. He had access to the audience, and so could slip easily from dialogue to aside to dialogue to direct address or soliloquy’ (Thomson, 1999, 8-9). With regard to the mega-identity, personation would require that the teller’s real self be present in the performance, while at the same time allowing for different perspectives to be reported, presented, or represented.

Alexander and Govrin’s description closest to personation in storytellers comes when they point out that, compared to theatrical performers, storytellers take all roles, ‘...at one and the same time, author, director and actor, and a trace of each of these styles and modes of performance’ (Alexander, 1989, 3). Their description is too mechanistic to account accurately for cognition in storytelling, though personation can and does have potential to do so. Thomson believes in a ‘need to take account of the material circumstances that conditioned performance...’ (Thomson, 1999, 11) and as we know embodiment in the physical world informs transcendental manifestations such as memory and imagination in cognition, a significant part of cognitive theory.

In contemporary storytelling styles that effectively achieve the storytelling experience, and are thereby truly genuine storytelling, the literature and oratorical axes are
predominant. In genuine storytelling, the audience remembers more of the story and less of the performer. Philip Pullman, the well-known author, stated

We who tell stories should be modest about the job, and not assume that just because we've thought of an interesting story, we're interesting ourselves. A storyteller should be invisible...; and the best way to be sure of that is to make the story itself so interesting that the teller just disappears.

(Pullman, 2002, 6)

The contemporary teller focusing too much on mega-identity presents a problem. If the storyteller is an actor, Thomson's personation style represents the most practical and aesthetically successful for contemporary storytellers. Personation takes place not only during oral performance of narrative text, but also in paratext and mega-performance. Used in mega-identity, it is displayed when the teller 'performs' the persona. This happens whether mega-identity is real or artificial, and whether consciously or unconsiously done outside the storytelling to support or project the identity as a teller, and within the storytelling to present the story as real, personal memory even when fictional. When a storyteller is overly theatrical, too 'actor-ish', audiences remember the performance or individual more than the story, an indication that the storytelling experience was not entered.

Use of Aristotelian terms to explain storytelling fares better when considered with personation. In cognitive terms, narrative and, especially para-text are mostly in diegetic mode. Linguistically, storytelling is usually reported: described speech, action and emotion. It is remembered, not recreated and imitated in the present as present activity. Emotions that are spontaneous and created in performance are a reaction to the reported, not a representation or reenactment of the emotion of characters in that moment of the narrative. Dialogue will be in first person/present tense, but framed by reported speech or indicated through change in vocal tones and physical gestures more often suggesting a distanced viewpoint, rather than immediate involvement in the subject narrated. What Alexander and Govrin might describe as mimetic—gestures suggesting the miming of some action in the narrative, for example—are usually vaguely represented, a physical remembrance of described action not a true mimicking.
Different cognition is suggested because the *reporting* is in the present, but, even in personal stories using first-person narrative voice and syntax, the narrative is clearly in the *past* tense.

This is not to say present tense is not or cannot be used to report narrative. Nor is it to say there are not storytellers who perform in mimetic mode: some act out elaborate, accurate mimes of the characters’ actions in the story. Many traditions also, particularly of cultures in East, South, and Southeast Asia, and parts of Africa and the Americas, express story physically through mime or fixed traditional choreographic devices (Pellowski, 1977). But these tenses and physical expressions are embedded in the personality, society and culture of that storyteller and storytelling tradition, so as to be effective. ‘Effective’ means, here, genuine storytelling, not something artificial and off-putting. When effective it is usually because the use of the tense is innate in certain dialects or social classes, or the structured physical expression itself is a language, understood if not expressed by all participants. Contemporary storytellers, particularly from urban, western societies, often try to incorporate these linguistic and physical expressions in their storytelling. They do so either because of a sincere attempt to recreate another culture’s art form faithfully, or from a personal attraction to it because it is beautiful or exotic, or non-reflectively thinking that is the ‘right’ way to do it and one ‘ought’ to mimic it. In most cases the result is affectation, and artificial rather than genuine storytelling.

Other examples of the oral narrative using present tense effectively, in contemporary and traditional tellers, come when the teller starts the narration in a reported form—past tense, first or third person voice—and unselfconsciously slips into present tense, and/or from third to first person voice. This happens usually during a moment of intense emotion: the teller is reaching the most exciting part of the remembered action, or even the climax of the narrative, and/or becomes excited not just from the story but from the *act* of telling, feeding off audience reaction. This first person/present tense form appears especially lower on the performance continuum in anecdotes or stories particular to certain dialects, but can be found in contemporary storytelling.
This is an indication of flow; when flow occurs neither teller nor other participants are aware of shifts in tense. When in flow the teller is in a liminal state. Where a piece is presented entirely in first person, present tense there is still conveyed a liminality: a sense of the teller being ‘here’ (‘this’) and the story being ‘there’ (‘that’). When the linguistic shift occurs, the impression is that the teller remembers something so strongly he/she is ‘there’ again and presents the narrative in present tense. Listeners continue to sense this is something of the past and are aware of the performance as storytelling. If they sense this is a character enacting or creating a vision before them in the actual present, their awareness of the performance changes, and, usually, they feel they are watching an actor playing a character in a theatrical performance. When slipping into present tense and/or first person does not work and the audience does notice, it is an indication of that double liminality described in chapter one: participants are overly aware of the ‘this’ of the story and the ‘this’ of taking part in a storytelling event. It is indicative of inexperienced contemporary tellers, or those lacking talent or skill. Common examples of this problem would be a storyteller speaking too quickly, slipping up vocally, thus shifting confusingly between tenses and/or viewpoints.

The Oratorical Axis

The Oratorical axis is a strong component of storytelling, and perhaps the most neglected. A discipline not practised nor studied much now in Britain, as a remnant of past fashions it is present in traditional styles, which carry over skills and techniques once common. It remains prevalent in the United States where rhetoric, speech and communication, and oral interpretation departments exist in universities and colleges, which often include storytelling courses on the syllabus. Culturally, a strong oratorical tradition in religion and politics also still exists in America and can be recognised in revival storytelling. Oratory is non-reflectively imitated by contemporary tellers unaware of its sources or implications: storytelling festivals and

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23 Appendix II., 14.1—14.3., Web Sites: A sampling of communication, rhetoric, speech, and oral interpretation courses offered in university education in North America.
24 Appendix II., 15.1—15.3., Programmes, and personal observations, of storytelling events in North American incorporating oratory and similar forms of rhetoric.
gatherings often draw upon socially accepted conventions of public speaking, debates, and recitals of poetry and classical music. More than any acting mode imitating character or emotion, the storyteller must communicate the story oratorically. This necessitates public speech convention of projection, breathing, pause, tempo, and other vocal dynamics and gestures, all determined by cultural and social conventions.

Another obvious source for artificiality in contemporary storytelling arises from overuse of codified oratorical conventions. Codification is observable, and an explanation of those taking on a noticeably different 'voice' for para- and/or narrative texts. This is especially noticeable when observing tellers working with children or others with special emotional, mental, or physical needs, or in the rarified environment of storytelling in some arts venues. We unconsciously assume modes and conventions having seen others use them, because we assume or fail to question efficacy. ‘False voice’ comes from the oratorical elements in recitation and oral interpretation.

As Alexander and Govrin developed the concept of acting modes within the theatrical axis of storytelling, there is potential to explore oratorical modes within that axis. Expanding upon their model is essentially a means of identifying storytelling practices contemporary storytellers, particularly beginners, exhibit. Improperly used, established tellers develop these as crutches or bad habits. These are not simply to do with performance: these modes, especially improperly used, can become a part of the mega-identity of tellers, especially when developed non-reflectively. There are a number of recognisable oratorical modes that immediately suggest a false voice or stereotypical way of speech. A few examples are

- The Professional Child Entertainer’s Voice—commonly putting on a high pitch tone, with intimate but meaningless endearments, and lots of shouting and feigned enthusiasm

- The Teacher Voice—usually assertive, even aggressive, underneath a pleasant, friendly tone forceful enough to show it brooks no interruption or contradiction

- The Public Speaker Voice—a bombastic tone and physical presence to pummel listeners into agreeing with whatever is said

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- The Standup Comedian Voice—an aggressive tone, meant to appear friendly, ‘mate-y’, ‘bloke-ish’, also sometimes meant to shock by content and/or vocabulary and always going for laughs

- The Sincere, Caring/Sharing Voice—often that of an intensely religious or ‘new age’ individual, or a counselor, usually so concerned and precious about every detail spoken of that the most trivial event or common emotion is made to appear as major tragedy or with great profundity

- The ‘Cool’ Conversationalist Voice—a laid back, informal approach so silent and slow it is almost a monotone, which refuses to be perturbed by anything in the narrative or the performance context, as though the speaker is in a permanent liminal state

- The Artistic or Byronic Voice—a posing, prima donna tone, conveying that the speaker is immensely talented, sensitive, perceptive, and serious, and what he/she says is of utmost importance, a form of ‘high art’

- The Multi-cultural/Multi-ethnic Voice—where the teller adopts rhetorical conventions from a culture other than her or his own, particularly with integrating those conventions within the teller’s own real identity (for example, making ubiquitous use of a call and response convention such as ‘Cric-Crac’ from Jamaican/Afro-Caribbean traditions, when the teller is not of that background, nor, even, is the story that follows the call and response from that rhetorical convention’s tradition).

Needless to say, there are other modes and combinations of all these in any public address. Should any oratorical modes be used too heavily, however, and be imposed upon the teller rather than arising from the teller’s natural self, then the storytelling experience is never achieved.

Oratorical modes are obvious in beginners developing and using mega-identity, though contemporary tellers with long experience can become histrionic and over-precious, with oratorical voices ‘fossilized’. Oratorical modes used too self-consciously create artificiality but are easily imitated, taught and adjudicated. It is readily seen in storytelling competitions, oral interpretations and theatrical monologues, and some high school speech contests, and of course in professional contexts such as festivals and arts centre concerts. Step-by-step codes followed rigorously, never internalised, create modes of no use to genuine storytelling. Codes are easily made into fervently followed
guides and technical programmes. This discomfits as many as it attracts when people encounter conventions producing artificiality in storytelling.

Beginning, inexperienced tellers develop repertoires by taking experienced tellers’ para-
and narrative texts, as mentioned. Peiffer, studying one contemporary American teller, reported that teller believed that ‘...beginning storytellers tell the stories that they have heard their mentors or other performers tell. It certainly seems more comfortable to face an audience with material that is known to work than it is to try out all new offerings at the same time one is trying out a completely new public role’ (Peiffer, 1994, 73). Without researching variants nor making efforts to personalise tales, tellers rely on memory of another’s performance, replicating it word for word but also with each gesture, tone, pause and digression. ‘Many people who tell stories attend festivals…and try to retell stories just like they heard it. They never get beyond putting their energy into duplicating the very words, gestures and styles of storytellers they admire’ (Birch, 1996, 110). Folk wisdom suggests we learn this way naturally, but it also comes from focus on text rather than process. The subservience of identity to that process, rather than to use the act of telling as a means of ego gratification, achieves individual voice and genuine storytelling.

If text is sacred, with eager participants perceiving its necessary preservation, recreation, and performance, it becomes concrete artifact. To be successful, the teller must ultimately find his or her ‘own voice’. A unique voice comes through a combination of innate talent, affects of ‘natural’ development, specific traditional or cultural environments of one’s upbringing, or years of experience. Oratorical conventions are used, but internalised or arise naturally from the self so as not to be noticeable. The teller who attempts adapting his or her voice to the text, rather than the text to his or her voice, will not achieve genuine storytelling. Bad storytelling manifests itself too often because contemporary tellers tell in a vocal manner and linguistic style they believe ‘ought’ to be used, and this arises, again, from misplaced Romantic attitudes regarding ‘ancient, revered’ texts.
Para- and narrative texts contribute to mega-identity with tellers assimilating not only repertoire but vocal and physical mannerisms. Oratorical conventions play a part in identity, performance, and cognition in contemporary storytelling. Peiffer's study of a contemporary teller reported the teller eventually reacted against dependence on the others' stories and developed her own unique repertoire. She does not state whether the teller's narrative voice evolved distinctly or imitatively. She does compare textual variances of stories told by her informant and by other tellers, but this gives little indication of voice (Peiffer, 1994, 74).

Peiffer leaves us unsure regarding absorption of mentors' oratorical conventions, and whether beginning storytellers are aware of 'inherited' mannerisms. Acquisition of new and unknown texts will not necessarily eliminate imitation nor establish unique narrative 'voice'. Tellers consciously or intuitively aware of oratorical conventions make use of those most natural to themselves, exaggerating expressions, mannerisms and vocalisations developed within a real persona over years. Alternatively they take on those close to them psychologically, culturally, socially, and/or linguistically. Achieving genuine storytelling higher up the performance continuum through 'internalised' language and gestures, they establish and use cognition similar to storytelling done unselfconsciously lower on the continuum.

Contemporary tellers developing similar mega-identities, imitating each other as they learn and become professional, commercial storytellers result in certain 'house styles' or 'corporate styles'. This is the danger of institutionalised, commercialised storytelling. Performances become cliched, theatrical and/or artificial if the only model is the platform storyteller, stand-up comedian, actor/monologuist, child-entertainer, or teacher/librarian storyteller. 'Storyteller voice', a tone of expression distinctive from conversational voice, becomes imitated: representational in the sense of either representing the idealised image of a teller or the constructed and false mega-identity as a character, as opposed to presentational or personational. To be effective, voice must be unique and remain natural, a crucial point in development and use of mega-identity.
Voice is most often conveyed, oratorically, in paratext. Paratext consisting of conversational language transforms a story when embedded in narrative texts, making it unique to that teller, and is often a distinctive sign of traditional tellers (Leith, 1989). Inexperienced tellers imitate this more personal material when repeating mentors' repertoires. They make informality formulaic or ritualistic, hoping to repeat effects of witnessed performances. This causes offence to original tellers or discomfort among listeners. Even experienced tellers alienate listeners when using stylised language for para- or narrative texts.

Some contemporary tellers never develop unique 'voice', through lack of talent or a poor range of models upon which to base practice. The latter is the more likely. These do not become effective tellers. 'Voice' most clearly demonstrates how tellers express identities and roles within performance situations. Focusing on repertoire rather than persona and context, these failed tellers, who none-the-less may be quite successful commercially, will claim to be traditional tellers themselves, when in actuality they take traditional stories and change them in a most untraditional way. They do not seek out traditional tellers and experiences in the field, so as to understand the importance of context. Taking into consideration only stories, and failing to recognise ways of life and outlooks, their imitative acts focus too much on texts and use theatrical and oratorical axes' modes, directing the entire action to support of the ego rather than effective use of mega-identity.25

Such artificiality also results from reliance on mediated performances: contemporary events, printed material, or electronic media. What is missing, gleaned from observing traditional tellers in context, is character in the old sense of the word, personality imbued with moral and aesthetic sense gradually cultivated through vast experiences. A condition missing not only in contemporary telling, Sennett identifies the problem in many walks of life in socio-historical studies of globalisation and other forces in Western Society (Sennett, 1998). Cultivating character in the sense that Sennett means

25 Appendix I., 46.1. – 46.3., Journal Observations and Interview Transcripts: Social rituals and habits of traditional tellers interaction with field workers.
is an ideal aspect of mega-identity. Combined with a clear understanding of ‘place’ the awareness and use of character leads to genuine storytelling.

**The Literature Axis**

Alexander and Govrin provide little discussion regarding the literature axis. Literary criticism and related theories of cognition provide insight, as mentioned in the last chapter. Besides the teller’s identity and mega-identity in storytelling, there are other identities: those of the narrator within the story and of the characters. Alexander and Govrin ascribe acting modes to communicate characters. However, the authorial voice, which can be the teller’s own, the voice of a mega-identity, or character identity either outside or inside the story/performance, also communicates characters via literature modes. This they ascribe to the storyteller mode. Yet some contemporary storytellers, particularly with literary backgrounds, commonly represent the narrator within the story as a character or create a narrator persona, either different from their true selves and embedded in the text not real life.

Authors choose narrative voice, deciding on point of view, tense, perspective, and so on. Stories are literally told authoritatively, in different styles depending on author and/or genre, such as omniscient or embedded narrative voice, etc., or from the viewpoint of a character or characters, or in some combination. Literary narrative can be a reporting or a description of consciousness or even stream-of-consciousness (Lodge, 2002, 62, 72). Traditional oral storytelling’s predominant use of reported voice (third person, past tense) led to its neglect by modern literary critics. It stems from the view that such use of narrational voice and point of view is ‘primitive’ or unsophisticated.

Folklorists recognise traditional storytelling lacks specific rhetorical and literary devices such as flashback, stream of consciousness, detailed character descriptions, psychology of characters, non-sequential narration and the like. These are conventions of modern and postmodern literature. As mentioned, Pliejj, Adams, Rubin and others have been able to advance their theories regarding integral, mutual influences of oracy and literacy
through studies of how these conventions evolved, being absent in early printed literature and only gradually appearing in print over the past two centuries.

Storytellers also choose narrative voice, usually non-reflectively. Beginners, as we have seen, tell a story as first heard or read, with no conscious change of verb tense or narrational point of view. What storytelling does share with contemporary literature is the manipulation of narrative elements in whatever way the teller (as opposed to character) narrator chooses consciously or not. Some experienced contemporary tellers consciously play with these elements of para- and narrative texts. This experimentation comes from both literary and theatre axes, depending upon the contemporary storyteller’s own background, inclination and interests. Contemporary tellers’ experiments with text and performance styles or out of a desire to be seen as particularly ‘professional’, or ‘slick’ in the sense of commercial standards of entertainment by delineating more self-consciously and purposely use of narrational point of view, verb tense, and voice. How successfully depends on context, and their skill and talent: if intrusive, artificial storytelling occurs. As performance art, specific audiences in certain venues, especially audiences strongly influenced by literacy and literature, find it aesthetically and emotionally effective.

There are qualitative differences here, I believe, from Thomson’s personation style for the actor and that for the teller. These differences are most apparent when considering the literature axis in contemporary storytelling. The examples from drama he provides, soliloquies and asides, are performed with the actor as himself or herself, in the present of the performer and in the present context of the theatre shared with the audience. There is no liminal state of ‘this’ and ‘that’ in that moment. Actors are usually not narrators reporting past events, whether their performances are representational, presentational or personated. The actor presents a character or himself or herself in first person, present tense. The actor might report stories in character using third person, past tense but do so while maintaining a character with little or no ‘slippage’. Some performances do emphasize third person past tense voice but in such cases the actor usually presents or represents a narrator persona. Traditional and contemporary
storytellers play more with the liminal states, slipping from ‘this’ to ‘that’ via digressions, parallelisms, and so on.

Gianni Celati, the Italian novelist and critic, recognised connections between real identity, embodied language and narration. Rebecca West’s translations and critical studies of his work explore intersections of orality with literature, specifically basic elements of language.

The ‘matter-of-factness’ and correctness of the dominant language of today’s fictional narratives ‘does not evoke any human voice, any specific tonality of a way of speaking of the “others-than-us”.’ Celati sees this orientation in terms of the way in which today’s ‘industrial’ or market-oriented fiction has replaced the narrator with the figure of the ‘so-called writer’, who feels called upon to impersonate the official role of the ‘writer’ understood as a highly specialized and socially sanctioned profession.

(West, 2000, 184)

What Celati refers to, others identify as the bourgeoisification of language generally and narrative specifically. A focus on ‘being’ a writer and ‘being’ a storyteller makes one more easily marketed and commercially protected. For Celati this is not storytelling.

Instead, a genuine (‘vero e proprio’) narrator is not a ‘professional,’ but at the most some one who occasionally practices a trade (‘mestiere’), just as in the past tellers of fables, balladeers, and even those old characters who told their life stories for the pure joy of telling were genuine narrators.

(West, 2000, 184)

Contemporary tellers, particularly those choosing to be professional and commercial, making a living from their art, have more in common with modern authors, who are idolized, feted and rewarded financially. This affects storytelling significantly if we agree upon the importance of self, identity and role in both cognition and telling. Modern and postmodern literature distinguish themselves from literature and oral narrative of the past, based upon their interpretation of ways oral and written language differ, which ignores how they are mutually influential and related. In Celati’s case he

26 Appendix I. 47.0 Journal observation—Chris Wood’s seminar at National Folk Festival Education Conference, Sutton Bonnington, Leicestershire, April 2001.
identifies narration with orality, in the same way that he identifies the very acquisition of speech with listening to voices of others. And, of course, writing understood as a trade or craft is placed in contrast to the more dominant view of writing as a profession, the former is carried out by ‘artisans’ of words while the latter is typically related to concepts such as ‘master’ and ‘social position.’

(West, 2000, 184)

Developing mega-identities to sell themselves in order to survive, rather than subsuming them in service of narrative art, tellers strive for ‘mastery’ and ‘social position’. Such use of mega-identity comes from a non-reflective state, brought on by the society we are in, affecting all cognitively and emotionally.

The tension is recognised by many, and Birch repeatedly states the importance of presenting the true self in telling. ‘The most important qualities shared among great storytellers are that they are present. They are natural while possessing great depth of feeling for stories or listeners. Their enthusiasm is contagious and affects listeners’ (Birch, 1996, 107). To avoid the negative use of a constructed identity suited only for power play, rather than genuine storytelling, the storyteller must be truly subversive. Zipes claims ‘genuine storytelling is not only subversive but magical in that it transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary and makes us appreciate and take notice of the little things in life that we would normally overlook’ (Zipes, 2001, 134-5). But it must stay grounded in the ordinary, and the literature axis provides means to embed storytelling performance with identity, text and context. The contemporary storyteller’s over-emphasis of theatre and/or oratorical axes suggests the story or act of telling as overly important, as too precious, endangered or unique. This overwhelms the story and the audience’s perception of it. Such an act makes the story, act of telling, and storytelling event start at the extraordinary with effectively no place else to go.

Desires to resist conformity, commercialisation, and alienation are what revival storytelling is purportedly about (Sobol, 1999) but subversion must be not only about challenging cultural, social and economic systems. A story merely criticising, mocking or defying establishments may be worthwhile and achieve immediate personal satisfaction, but is not enough.
Both those who narrate and those who listen to and read narratives are adversely affected by the current mass-medialogical, educational, and professionalized environment in which an idea of narration as 'an imaginative way to speak to one another in a circle and in friendship' has been substituted with an idea of narration as 'explanations of the world, products for a general public, and material for “people of culture”'.... We can begin to get out of this prison of deafness and achromatism first by recognizing that we have indeed lost abilities of perceiving the subtleties of language, and then by learning to read well.

(West, 2000, 193)

Contemporary storytellers and storytelling can help achieve that chromatic subtlety of language through verbal play in altered mental states. To do so the cultural, social and economic status of tellers and listeners themselves must be subverted, with commercialisation and professionalisation of contemporary storytelling constantly challenged and questioned.

This is not to say one cannot or should not make a living from storytelling. Understanding the modern social situation we are in, and the part storytelling plays in it, however, will provide the voice tellers need to make subversive storytelling by keeping the storyteller’s position in modern society precarious and protean. By taking the ordinary and making it magical, and at the same time making the magical ordinary, storytellers and storytelling help participants regain certain abilities of perceiving, so that narration again becomes an imaginative way to speak to one another in community circles and friendship. This is what contemporary storytellers believe they are achieving. To be sure they do so requires continued, informed criticism and a satisfactory critical language evolving to include all interested in storytelling and such goals.

Summary

Non-reflective practices cause unawareness of mega-identity’s development and use in performance, and of responsibilities entailed in roles taken on by contemporary tellers. Heckler points out inherent danger in contemporary tellers not realising performances have potential to develop intense relationships, however brief, with audiences. ‘Do we raise...expectations we cannot fill? While we, the tellers, go off to our hotel rooms, do
we leave members of the audience unfulfilled because they cannot relate to us more personally? (Heckler, 1996, 32). As a social art, if storytelling models itself too much on modern commercial performance art habits and does not allow personal interaction during and surrounding performances, the result can be disastrous. This does not imply storytelling is a quasi-religious or mystic vocation, nor an intense form of therapy, though some practitioners would think or make it so and actively exploit that potential. Religious or therapeutic storytellers are kinds of mega-identities, validly found in contemporary practice (Weinker-Piepito, 1993). Heckler’s point refers to a broader concern.

Contemporary tellers sensing these issues reflexively appeal to or use Romantic notions of storytelling emphasising definitions of traditionalism and ethnicity. Used in performance, these strategies are effective when submerged, and un- or under-stated. Forced and obvious they create artificiality, a theatrical style of performance. Contemporary storytelling takes traditional storytelling out of its context, into new events influenced by mainstream activity, often without realising it. Believing the new storytelling the same as its origins, contemporary tellers bend tellings to meet new mores and values in mainstream society, such as literacy, multi-culturalism and therapy.

This not only shapes their storytelling, but also their identities as tellers. ‘Can the prism of our lives distort the stories we tell? Yes. So we need to follow a vigilant and vigorous course as we filter stories through our intelligence and integrity’ (Birch, 1996, 88). Some tellers and writers insist one may never tell material outside one’s own tradition. Others say one must, and have the right to do so if the narrative moves the teller, speaking to him or her and showing obvious importance to one’s audiences. This argument is important, and taken up more in the final chapter. A correlative of it is when tellers risk becoming too self-important, with the teller the focus rather than the story. The belief in the storyteller as a unique, precious artist, even a genius, who should be the focus of any revival is clearly an attitude inherited from the Romantics and makes the storyteller anything but invisible.
Incorporating the relevant aspects of Alexander and Govrin’s ideas regarding axes and modes, combined with Thomson’s theory of personation, provides deeper understanding of what happens in contemporary storytelling cognitively as well as socially and aesthetically. I have demonstrated how these theories can identify what is genuine storytelling, achieving flow and the storytelling experience, and, alternatively, they can contribute to artificial storytelling and making storytelling mindless entertainment or ego gratification. The tendency to focus too much on text and/or teller makes storytelling a product rather than a process.

Contemporary storytelling, particularly ‘revival’ events such as platform storytelling, festivals, and storytelling networks and organisations, represents continued bourgeoisification of traditional storytelling. They do so by these distortions arising from emphasis on personality and/or texts. Participants are not always conscious of this happening, as it is part of wider socio-cultural and philosophical-psychological developments. This must be recognised and alluded to in explaining the formation and use of contemporary tellers’ mega-identities. It must also be considered in any examination of audiences and spaces for contemporary storytelling practices, since these two aspects provide important components in the context of the contemporary storyteller. More than any other elements, audience and space establish and reinforce the transformation of storytelling from being a democratic, anarchic, subversive practice among working, artisan and/or tribal classes into a commodified activity serving bourgeois mass markets.
CHAPTER 4. AUDIENCE—ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF LISTENERS, AND THEIR EFFECT UPON COGNITIVE PROCESSES

Part I. Audience Engagement: Mental Activities During Storytelling and Listening

The Necessity of Listeners for Storytelling

As an art of social interaction storytelling requires two people, there must be teller and listener (Wilson, 1997, 25). Silently remembering, or expressing a story orally when alone, is an exercise but not artistic expression. Some consider a storyteller playing his or her own audience an act of storytelling; at best this can be rehearsal. 'The presence of an audience is a defining characteristic of the person becoming performer' (Read, 1993, 93), otherwise the act of telling to one's self becomes therapeutic or religious ritual. Views that tellers can be their own audiences are irrelevant, in that even if a storyteller telling to him/herself achieves flow, or anything like the storytelling experience or hypnogogic trance, then it is a meditation. A liminal state is achieved, with the 'this' of immediate surroundings transformed into 'that' and the contemplated narrative becoming immediate; it is, cognitively, similar to storytelling in the way dreaming, daydreaming and other kinds of reverie are. It will therefore be closer to mental and emotional processes, and flow, exhibited by the modern or postmodern writer when composing than the traditional or contemporary storyteller when performing to audiences. When genuine storytelling is achieved, storytellers should enter flow and the storytelling experience through interaction with listeners. The teller brings listeners to, and the listeners' reactions bring the teller to, liminal states. If the teller brings him or her self to a liminal state in front but without the help of the audience, the listeners are not participating, they are observing, and it is not genuine storytelling.

When learning or practising stories, tellers must have some knowledge of how people think, requiring a concept of audiences and their reactions. Listeners also have viewpoints of others' mental processes so as to understand stories and comprehend acts of storytelling. Storytelling requires that all participants have some theory of mind, with active participation a form of meta-cognition. Listening extends the listener's concepts of
his/her own and others’ consciousness. ‘The storyteller is only half...of an intimate transaction. Without the listener’s participation in helping to bring the story to life...[the teller] would be speaking into a languorous void of night without echoes’ (Lane, 1986, 4). Genuine storytelling, in essence, exists solely among interactions of teller, listener, text and space, with interaction leading to qualitative transformation involving all participants’ cognition. Transformation, that is, an altered mental state such as liminality, flow and/or storytelling experience, is required if storytelling is truly an art form and genuine. There is a temporary transformation, the aforementioned ‘this’ to ‘that, etc., but there can also be a permanent transformation, with cognitive processes of accommodation and assimilation leading to new schema and scripts.

That storytelling requires a theory of mind suggests narrative is crucial in cognition. Narrative seems a natural form of discourse established early and revealing itself when, and even before, babies begin to articulate speech (Bruner, 1990, 11). The abstract sense of self and others—theory of mind and meta-cognition to support it—has been demonstrated by cognitive experiments, demonstrating linguistic and emotional development through social interaction.

This observation compels us to recognize that the listener...of necessity takes an active role in shaping the utterance, evidenced by the addressee in agreeing or disagreeing wholly or in part, augmenting what is said, applying it, preparing for what it predicts, and so forth. Every good storyteller, therefore, enables a “creative” audience response, because understanding a narrative utterance is an evaluative process that constitutes the utterance, (Kroeber, 1992, 50-1)

Novice storytellers, particularly those never having self-consciously performed higher up the performance continuum, of necessity imagine audiences and audience reaction, relying on their ability to understand and use theory of mind. Any teller relying too much upon imagined audiences will have limited theory of mind and lack the range of abilities to perform successfully and genuinely. Naturally, the more one gains experience with audiences, the greater the theory of mind and attendant strategies for telling to various groups. Seemingly ‘natural-born’ storytellers possibly acquired talents from life experience or innate personality traits to attune to others. Where experiences of tellers
are limited, or storytelling events are narrowly defined following strict codes, tellers perform to a limited range of audiences, resulting in less developed theory of mind.

Tellers reliant on ‘imagined’ audiences, while learning or practising, or even performing, or not taking account of real audiences while performing, and when rehearsing after experiences performing, results in little chance of transformation or genuine storytelling. Certainly if there is no change in tellers’ cognisance there is little chance of it among listeners. ‘Without [audience] presence in time that transformation would not take place as expression but would remain in the therapeutic, private domain. It would be meditative rather than expressive’ (Read, 1993, 93).¹ Cognitive and emotional processes arising from interaction equally affect listeners and tellers, and all their interactions affect text which correspondingly affects all participants. The model below suggests some of that potential (See Figure 4 below).

As we saw in chapter two, semiological viewpoints see storytelling involving roles of signified, signifier, and perceiver. The folklorist Robert Georges identifies these semiological terms as encoder (teller) and decoder (listener) when looking at oral, traditional storytelling (Georges, 1971, 317-21). People begin narrative acts, moving spoken language from conversation to aesthetic expression. Semiology, as already stated, is simplistic when assuming encoding and decoding go in single directions like one-way streets. During any storytelling, but especially contemporary storytelling higher up the performance continuum, the storyteller encodes para- and narrative texts and paralinguistic acts while decoding audience and space. Listeners decode texts, and teller and space, but encode responses and judgments, communicating these to tellers.

Narrative is intrinsically evaluative. This does not mean that stories should conclude in summarized formulaic judgments. Rather, an effective story appeals in some way to its audience’s judgment process: the story seems to matter, to be worth hearing or seeing. A good story is one that deserves telling. .... In short, it evokes some kind of evaluative response from those who hear or heard it. That assessing response which demonstrates the audience’s vigorous participation constitutes the wholeness and

¹ Appendix I., 48.1. – 48.5., Journal Observations: Examples of ‘clashes’ between tellers and audiences because of false assumptions, suggesting the possibility of limited theory of mind

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Narrative text / paratext

Schema/Schemata/Scripts
Cognitive frames
Memories: Direct Experience and Mediated Experience
Memories/understanding of sensations:
Emotional, Kinesthetic, Visual, Aural, Sensory
Theory of Mind regarding Self (Mega-identity of teller)
and of listeners (preconceived notions)

All this is in abstract form in teller's brain

TELLER

Narrative text (actual words)
Vocalisations
Facial expressions
Gestures
Paralinguistic expressions
Social Dynamics
Paratext

Facial Expressions
Body Language/physical attitudes
Vocalisations
Exclamations/Interjections
Eye contact

LISTENER

Expectations
Preconceived Notions
Memories: Experienced and Mediated
Theory of Mind: Sense of Self (ego) and others

All abstract, varied and different in each individual listener’s brain.
Some preconceived, and arrived at independently by individuals.
Some preconditioned by previous knowledge and/or experiences arising from circumstances of immediate environment and socio-cultural conditions surrounding event

Items within the boxes represent transcendental/abstract concepts held within each individual's mind. Those outside the boxes are physical manifestations affected by and/or affecting physical organs of the body: the tongue, lips, jaw muscles, facial muscals, the ear, the ear drums, body language and the arrangement of limbs, gestures, and the physical matter of the brain itself. The act of producing and receiving these physicalisations is part of the transformative processes that make the real world experiences link with the transcendental/abstract concepts within the brain, transforming both reality into memory and imagination and the elements of these—script, schema, etc.—into new arrangements.

**Figure 4, The Interaction of Physical and Transcendental Elements in Storytelling and Story Listening**
completeness. The total meaningfulness of a story, its "point," how it transforms the situation that was the originating context for the telling.

(Kroeber, 1992, 32)

Oral narrative performance remains dialogic—tellers may have control and responsibility, but listeners also have responsibility and influence. ²

The higher the risk and intensity on the performance continuum, the more storytelling consciously relies on delineation of encoder and decoder roles. Social and cultural rituals establish these, often subconsciously or quasi-consciously.

In all forms of Western Theatre the gathering phase is designated to produce a special attitude of reception, to encourage the audience to participate in the making of the performance in a particular frame of mind. ...(T)he conventions of gathering for a performance are intended to effect a transition from one social role to another, namely, the role of audience member as spectator. A crucial element in the formation of the role is the 'horizon of expectation' which performance conventions create for the audience.

(Kershaw, 1992, 24)

No matter how heightened and defined roles are, genuine storytelling necessitates 'decoders' (listeners) becoming 'encoders'; not tellers, but contributors to narrative and para-texts, providing responses and interactions guiding tellers, leading all more deeply into the storytelling experience.

The totally passive audience is a figment of the imagination, and practically impossible; the reactions of audiences influence the nature of the performance. It is not simply that the audience affects emotional tone or stylistic nuance; the spectator is engaged fundamentally in the active construction of meaning as a performance event proceeds.

(Kershaw, 1992, 16)

Within contemporary storytelling there has been little examination of the dual identities of encoder/decoder present in each participant. This is because much of contemporary

² Appendix I., 49.0. Journal Observations and Interview Transcripts: Example of audience evaluations, with audience viewpoint differing significantly from teller viewpoint
storytelling relies on traditional western models of commercial performances with the performer as dominant, and...

...this implies that, provided a performer has performed, the performance has been successfully realised. But in any case this may need questioning, if only because the bad performer's actual (or presumed) aims may not be the whole story. It cannot be presumed, either, that those labelled 'audiences' from one viewpoint always consider themselves so in every sense, and the relations between participants may not be smooth or straightforward.

(Finnegan, 1992, 110)

In contemporary storytelling, audiences often consist of those individuals wishing themselves to be more prominent, successful storytellers higher up the continuum. There is a culture of envy, and emulation based on that envy. Their attitude and aims often involve gleaning all they can from 'successful' storytellers' repertoires, mannerisms and techniques. They do (sometimes) enter the storytelling experience, but because part of their consciousness is involved with aspirational aims double liminality occurs, that overly self-conscious awareness of taking part in the event. Without greater recognition and understanding of the listener's crucial role in achieving the storytelling experience and genuine storytelling, contemporary storytelling will appeal only to a limited audience, one too susceptible to this double liminality. Only those storytellers capable of seeking out and actually reaching and interacting with audiences new to storytelling will refine their skills so that listeners define the identity of the teller, what a story is, and what storytelling is for: this is the basis for a culture of storytelling.

**Participatory Cognitive Processes Identifying a Story and Defining Storytelling**

Associative memories and thoughts trigger parallel subconscious and conscious mental processes that initiate and are initiated by telling and listening. These mental processes allow multiple interpretations of the same text, by one group at the same time, or by one individual over repeated hearings. When hearing a *Märchen*, depending upon the age or stage of development, child listeners interpret and understand tales in certain ways, different from adults' perceptions of the same story heard after years of life experiences leading adults themselves to different developmental cognition and/or metacognition.
That several individuals listening to the same story at the same time can come away with different associative thoughts, an obvious observation, suggests complexities not entirely accounted for or still being explored by psychologists. Freud and Jung centred theories on limited interpretations of literary versions of myth and fairytale. Bettelheim's and Piaget's works demonstrate the potential for different, narrowly focused interpretations (Bettelheim, 1976; Piaget, 1952, 1955, 1970). This vagueness permits storytellers and audiences to make their own use of psychological theories in interpretation and promotion of storytelling, over-relying on Freud or Jung and their followers. Kroeber reminds us 'stories are phenomena so profoundly cultural that all explanatory analogues to natural processes...are destructively misleading. Until we give up Casaubon-like faith in a single, universal (because organically founded, "natural") plot as the key to all storytelling we undervalue not merely the diversity of stories themselves but also the significance of the diversity of response that stories call forth' (Kroeber, 1992, 9) [my emphasis]. As already stated, cultural criticism makes little use as yet of cognitive science. While agreeing with Kroeber that storytelling is cultural, I argue the mental and emotional processes, more clearly understood by cognitive science, are natural. These enable us to tell and listen to stories and develop and understand contexts where storytelling happens. Stories and contexts are cultural, processes allowing responses to these are natural, and both are required for genuine storytelling. While in agreement with Kroeber, it is misleading to assume one organic meaning for a story or the act of telling. The very fact that storytelling constantly triggers different associative memories and images in different individuals, and in the same individual at different hearings and tellings, means that meaning is constantly created, re-created, and evolving.

Studies of responses leading to suppositions of mental processes based on such phenomena reveal to cognitive scientists conscious and subconscious cognition in narrative acts, oral and written. These provide contemporary storytellers and other participants with useful understanding of the art. Most research to date sees scientific focus on storytelling lower on the performance continuum, and future scientific studies of cognition in contemporary telling and listening higher on that continuum would be useful.
This thesis is, one hopes, one step towards applying those studies in the humanities. Examining behaviours during storytelling and listening reveals cognitive phenomena, giving clearer understanding of listener-teller-text dynamics, particularly when exploring transformation and transcendentalism in storytelling. The following descriptions, of activities I use when teaching beginners to tell, help one see cognitive processes involved.

One of the first activities I introduce to workshop participants I call the 'Memory Game'. Many storytellers, authors and creative writing teachers use variations of it. Paired participants are asked to think, individually, of an event that truly happened, either recent personal experience or something from one’s distant past. Each relates the memory to the other. The aim is to discover whether sharing a personal experience through informal conversation takes narrative shape or not. While storytelling takes place, most observers see distinctive body language, and facial and vocal expressions, indicating storytelling is happening. Body language is different from that in normal conversation. The listener sits still, concentrating on the speaker, absorbing nuances of 'performance'. The teller is animated, with facial expressions reflecting emotions in the narrative, and gestures imitating actions in the story or describing abstract notions inherent in or supportive of text.

Afterwards, participants are asked whether they thought they were telling a story when it was their turn to relate the personal experience. Usually ten percent or fewer think this was so. However, when asked how many thought they were listening to a ‘proper’ story, almost all, in fact, 90 to 100% each time, indicate they were (Verbal Arts Centre, 2001). Each participant’s chosen related event, no matter how common or banal, was necessarily imbued with significance for the teller which is acknowledged by the listener. Even with memories relating common experiences, expectation is tempered with some surprise, provided by:

- the personality (mega-identity) of the teller
- unusual events (the context or situation where the exercise happens, as well as the context of the event remembered and related)

and, at the same time,
the content of the memory related.

These are noted and processed simultaneously by teller and listener, though 'surprises' and common recognition are more obvious to listeners. Tellers can be surprised, however, by the listener's reactions and interactions, both verbal and paralinguistic: these confirm their identity as a person as well as a teller, providing a sense of acceptance, and so on.

These natural, participatory activities initiating mental and emotional processes appear innate.

Our central nervous system seems to have evolved in a way that specializes our sense to deal differently with the expected and unexpected versions of the world. .... If what impinges on us conforms to expectancy, to the predicted state of the model, we may let our attention flag a little, look elsewhere, even go to sleep. Let input violate expectancy, and the system is on alert. Any input, then, must be conceived of as being made up not only of environmentally produced stimulation but also of accompanying markings of its conformity with or discrepancy from what the nervous system is expecting. If all is conformity, we adapt and may even stop noticing, as we stop noticing the touch of sensation produced by our clothes or the lint on the lens of our eyeglasses.

(Bruner, 1986, 46-7)

This could explain Tannen and Labov's observations, referred to in Chapter Three (Storyteller Identity inside Performances), of tellers with different backgrounds (Tannen, 1982, 8-9). Those middle class narrators, too self-aware of the act of telling, the context in which they tell, etc., will, when telling, externalize more, providing unnecessary details and intellectualising their commentary. Ethnic and working class narrators, imbued with more relaxed internalised attitudes towards narration, tell in a more integrated manner. They and their language for storytelling, as well as acts of and events for storytelling, are embedded in a social milieu so the teller and storytelling verge towards conformity, and are almost unnoticed, or rather, taken for granted by participants, accepting the act as normal and embedded in social routines. This is different from the performance continuum, for formal storytelling with higher risks and rewards can happen in this internalised style.
Surprise comes not only from events within a tale but also narrational viewpoints inside and outside the story, as well as the physical 'real' context where narrational acts happen. Tellers using less literary language, internal processing as opposed to external, develop cognition differently, affecting viewpoints during the act of and event for telling, as well as changing viewpoints of characters within the story told. Some contemporary tellers, consciously or unselfconsciously imitating other tellers, will assimilate behaviours they witness internalised tellers using, without internalising these themselves. In both instances, however, the element of surprise is primarily neither within the story nor in how the teller tells it. Surprise must be in and arise from teller's and listener's cognitive processes, those shifting, evolving viewpoints: genuine storytelling demands these responses. All participants possess and make use of real and transcendental mental images in their cognition, though it is assumed traditional participants rely more on real remembered mental images—that is, those derived from life experience rather than abstract studies. During storytelling mental images are re-configured for new understanding, applying what is heard to listeners' and tellers' remembered experiences.

Contemporary storytelling participants, involved in events where mega-identity and actions of tellers and participation of listeners are constructed conscious actions, often based on imagined or idealised models of storytelling, look for different expectations and surprises. Their cognition can be based more on transcendental images than lived experience. Contemporary storytelling participants have life experiences but experiences with storytelling may primarily be mediated: learned from books, television or film and imagined from or extrapolated out of other life experiences or arts such as drama or literature. Their storytelling is once or twice removed, externalized. Traditional tellers and audiences use direct experience in stories' content and the act of telling. Admittedly, traditional participants maintain and use transcendental images but there are measurable differences in how these manifest themselves with contemporary participants. Specifically, the fact that traditional tellers tend to answer abstract questions about storytelling with stories and metaphor rather than exact, direct replies, and also in their
performances incorporate gestures, mimetic actions and phrases arising from their primary identity being other than a storyteller: as a farmer, housewife, sailor, etc.  

Bruner suggests the more predictable, or ‘conforming’, stories are, the less involved the listener, and, conversely, the more surprises, or ‘discrepancies’, in narrative or para-texts the more involved. But potential for conformity and discrepancy exists in the event and the act of telling as well as the story. Certain conventions and rituals, conformitive practices, aid engagement for audiences expecting storytelling. Even narrative and para-texts possess conventions (conformity) and surprise (discrepancy), required for language acts to be understood and used socially.

As an example already mentioned, genre can be a ‘mega-frame’ recognised cognitively: how it is used or deviated from in performances engages or disengages listeners. Tellers expect certain conformity in listeners. Contemporary tellers anticipate standard, western audience behaviours: attentiveness, stillness, quiet, and focus as exhibited by adults in theatres and children in assemblies or classrooms. Successful, experienced contemporary tellers finding audiences without such behaviours adapt to these groups, transforming them into listeners. Some contemporary tellers are unable to, floundering when encountering unruly audiences or avoiding them altogether. Bruner is right, but simplistic: conformity and discrepancy happen at the same time, and must for engagement. When they do not, cognitive dissonance results: that is, what some participants recognise as storytelling, or ‘good’ storytelling, others do not.

Many contemporary listeners, having more literal minds, externalise by over-reliance on strictly articulated definitions, codes of practice, and the like, consciously or semi-consciously developed through discussions, readings and imitations of other

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3 Appendix I., 50.1.–50.5., Interview Transcripts, Analyses of Video Recordings of Storytelling Performances, and Journal Observations: Examples of mediated gestures in contemporary tellers and mimetic gestures in traditional tellers

4 Appendix I., 51.1.– 51.3., Interview Transcripts and Journal Observations: Different kinds of audiences and coping strategies storytellers use to engage difficult individual and groups of listeners
contemporary listeners and tellers. Internalised processors, usually more traditional
 tellers and audiences, or those able to tell and listen intuitively, may have similar
 reactions to contemporary listeners, to a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ storytelling; they will, however,
 respond through cultural conventions that apply to many situations in their social strata. Simply put, contemporary listeners more often tend to react as they think they ‘ought to’
 while traditional listeners tend to react non-reflectively.

Within traditional contexts, participants performing and listening unselfconsciously and
 spontaneously look to different expectations (confirmations) and deviations
 (discrepancies). Confirmations of status quo are more important as an aspect of
 community than transformation. Subtle transformations do happen—often unnoticed—in
 realisations of individuals within social configurations. Courtships, deaths, births,
 weddings, crises, competitions, work habits, achievements, etc., happen in the real socio-
cultural context and within the narrations. All these, and stories and acts of telling,
 provide mental configurations putting social events and the narratives involved in a new
 light, even while maintaining a social status quo.

Cognition, and transformations engaged in or the end result of it, can be a difficult
 concept to grasp. This is because a ‘psychological characteristic of language is the fact
 that while it may be looked upon as a symbolic system which reports to or refers or
 otherwise substitutes for direct experience, it does not as a matter of actual behaviour
 stand apart from or run parallel to direct experience but completely interpenetrates it’
 (Sapir, 1949, 8). Storytelling consists simultaneously of symbolic system, cultural code,
 natural cognition, and social and natural experiences. All participants’ brains
 understand, respond to, and make use of these instantaneously.

The process of telling transforms reality into realms of thought and emotion
 communicated by symbols, turning direct experiences into indirect experiences. Besides
 transformation of participants’ cognition there is transformation of reality into

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5 Appendix I., 52.1. – 52.4., Journal Observations and Analyses of Video Recordings of Storytelling
Performances: ‘Good’ and ‘bad’ performances and how audiences tolerate or disengage from them
abstraction: the creation of transcendental thoughts about the stories and events producing them. Contemporary storytelling participants turn indirect experience into more indirect experiences. This may not be problematical but does produce qualitative differences. All storytelling creates indirect experience, that is, reported experience in the narrative and events surrounding it.

Most of our encounters with the world are not...direct encounters. Even our direct experiences...are assigned for interpretation to ideas about cause and consequence, and the world that emerges for us is a conceptual world. When we are puzzled about what we encounter, we renegotiate its meaning in a manner...concordant with what those around us believe.

(Bruner, 1986, 122)

Contemporary tellers and listeners, further removed from life experiences making up traditional stories, relate these out of context; within traditional contexts, participants more often have direct experience with subject matter and this differentiates use of mega-identity, language and paralinguistic features between traditional and contemporary participants.

Considering oral narrative events on different parts of the performance continuum, those experiencing the lower and middle range may find performances higher up do not conform to ideas of storytelling. Alternatively, participants of more self-conscious performances higher up the continuum may not see discrepancies between what they do and ‘ideal’ traditional tellers performing lower on the continuum. Transcendental ideas of what storytelling is or is about become strict definitions, with storytelling in reality going unrecognised or un-noticed. As a character relates in Love’s Labours Lost, ‘a jest’s prosperity lies in the ear of him that hears it, never in the tongue of him that makes it...’ (LLL, V.ii., Rosaline, Shakespeare, 1936, 312).

**Associative Thoughts—Engaging in Storytelling**

To occur, transformative properties of storytelling require integration of participants and elements through cognition, leading to and requiring associative thinking segueing into transformation. This is what happens in the hypnogogic trance, when the listener is in
flow, and enters the liminal state turning the heard story from ‘that’ to ‘this’ and ‘this’
and to ‘that’, resulting in the real and imagined being linked in the process.

This becomes clearer when analysing a workshop exercise called the ‘Legs Riddle’.
Listeners are told that solving the riddle relates a story.

Two legs sat on three legs eating no legs, when four legs came and stole no
legs from two legs. Four legs ran away with no legs. So, two legs picked
up three legs and threw three legs at four legs, to make four legs drop no
legs. And so two legs could get no legs back.

The solution is:

A person sat on a stool eating a fish. A cat came and stole the fish. The
cat ran away with the fish. So the person picked up the stool and threw it at
the cat, making the cat drop the fish. And so the person was able to get the
fish back.

Recited quickly, audiences usually ask the riddle to be repeated, slowly. Dissected and
solved, the teller recites it quickly again, as the first time. Audiences are asked to shut
their eyes and listen, observing, if they understand the quickly spoken nonsense, what
happens in their minds to help understanding. Listeners mostly report that they see
pictures. A minority understand but claim not to see pictures, sensing meaning another
way. Repeated a third time, listeners, with eyes shut, are asked to notice details about the
person, fish and cat. Then listeners describe these. Obviously, each gives very different
descriptions. Many see a person they know, their favourite or least favourite or usual fish
supper, and their cat.

While many are visual in their imagining— ‘seeing’ mental pictures while they listen—
discussion reveals participants ‘see’ detail and form in different ways. Some see videos
of narration, others comic strips or story boards, or a kind of mural or renaissance style
painting with all happening at once. Significant numbers ‘hear’ the ‘proper’ words as the
nonsense is recited, others ‘feel’ the cat’s fur or ‘smell’ the fish, and some imagine
numerical figures, stick figures, or written words. Many mental ‘sensations’ are in a
three-dimensional plane, with some images picked up from the ‘peripheral’ vision of the
mind, as mentioned in the discussion on text. Teller and listener may not ‘see’ the same
mental images *in details* but carrying out the same mental processes arrive to hold the same concepts from similar images.

This supports theories of multiple intelligences and learning, concepts developed by Howard Gardner identifying children (and adults) as visual, aural, kinesthetic, and/or symbolic learners (Gardner, 1993). Listening to and telling stories identifies, expands, and reinforces these intelligences. Oral narrative corresponds to how people think, feel and remember: the development of the mind. It seems crucial for the metacognition Bruner claims can be taught. Narrative meta-cognition plays a part in development of Goffman's roles, Kroeber and Gombrich's schemata, Rubin's schema and Schank's scripts respectively.

Understanding, for a listener, means mapping the speaker's stories onto the listener's stories. One of the most interesting aspects of the way stories are used in memory is the effect they have on understanding. Different people understand the same story differently precisely because the stories they already know are different.

(Schank, 2000, 57)

Schank postulates that the fictional accounts we hear, read, or see are internalised as schema for when we encounter new experiences—in real life and fiction. Accepting stories we hear in oral narrative events, or read silently, hear read aloud, or conveyed to us through media such as drama, cinema, television and so on, are internalized in the storytelling experience, then narrative patterns established gradually and incrementally have bearing on new storytelling and life experiences.

This is reflected in the craft of telling and listening. Mental configurations are involved in storytelling and listening, but so are verbal and rhetorical configurations reflecting and shaping them. This reflects back to discussion of conformities and discrepancies.

Verbal narrations are also configural.... Through configurations stories conceal as well as reveal, and conceal by revealing. Story hides itself by display, and through omissions and internal complication checks its impetus to progression. Narrative makes connections beyond those of simple logic; it even reveals value in illogical conjunctions by developing the sylleptic or self-contradictory character of much important experience.
Narrative tests conventional ways of ordering, calling into question, for instance, what we think of as “normal” cause and effect. 

(Kroeber, 1992, 25)

Talented or experienced tellers know how much to reveal, how much to hide through use of para- and narrative texts, paralinguistic features, and so on. Attuned listeners know how to ‘read’ these and reflect their understanding and associative thoughts back to speakers. Different listeners ‘read’, or hear, the signs differently, of course, though common ground is found when individuals share traits as a group, terms of gender, age, class, etc..

Further analysis of the riddle reinforces revealing/hiding configurations in mental associations so as to tell/understand stories. Listeners describe differently the same details of the story because they take descriptions from memories of personal experience. Mental images trigger various associative thoughts, both mental states and emotional experiences, demonstrating Schank’s work on scripts and indexing (Schank, 2000, 68). Matching fictional accounts with memories makes them meaningful, memorable and repeatable. There is relation here, also, to Bruner’s concepts of conformity and discrepancy in narration and cognition and how the attention of the nervous system is held.

Associative thoughts mixed with conforming and discrepant experiences make shared experience, so stories become as real to tellers and listeners as life experiences. A story can be ‘true’ even if never having happened. This is genuine storytelling where the imagined is transformed into reality, when tellers ‘know’ stories through cognition similar to, even the same as, knowing real life memories. Storytelling is genuine also because listeners experience stories as their own ‘thinking’ or ‘knowing’. Stories new to them are made familiar by matching elements in the narrative with their memories and knowledge. Narrative content may not be real: the experience of hearing it is. If fictional content of narrative can be reconfigured in participants’ minds so it matches configurations of reality, then stories are ‘true’, that is, revealing truth.
Responses afterwards are almost overwhelming, consisting of feelings of intense intimacy with the teller, even if he or she is a stranger. Becoming close to a religious experience, audiences effuse over tellers' 'talents' and a story's 'wisdom'.

...I've come to recognize that when people declare, "You were wonderful!" they aren't personally paying me a compliment, so much as saying that the truth was wonderful that we heard together. In that moment of telling, they may have been even more absorbed in the wonder of the tale than I had been as teller. In a sense they are actually complimenting *themselves* as good listeners—celebrating something that we had encountered in common through a shared experience.

(Lane, 1986, 4)

Conversely, artificial mega-identities do not allow this, since a teller performing memorized text, rigidly set narrative and para-text, along with paralinguistic features, or, performing by means of a rigidly constructed mega-identity, results in highly mannered performances. Gestures and vocalizations are choreographed, 'staged' and 'fixed' in memory as much as words of narrative and para-texts. Audiences respond negatively, there is disengagement, no transformation, in cognitive terms, and no genuine storytelling.

Part II. Physiological Aspects of Engagement and Cognition in Storytelling

Participants, especially Listeners

*Flow, Hypnagogic Trance, and the Storytelling Experience: Transformation and Transcendentalism in Storytelling*

The listener identifies a 'proper' story and determines if a teller is effective. (Bauman, 1984, 11; Birch, 1996, 107; Stahl, 1980, 2) Once listeners recognise and acknowledge what is heard is a story, they relax and that alternative mental state asserts itself. Becoming absorbed in the space and time of narratives, the aforementioned liminality makes narratives and acts of telling more real than the outside world. Mentioned already, this is Csikszentmihalyi's flow, recognised by Wischner as a key element in genuine storytelling where mega-identity of tellers and audiences' perceptions are congruent with text (Wischner, 1991). Sandra Dolby Stahl identified what creates the storytelling experience in her discussion of 'power of performance' which is mutual recognition by teller and audience of the animated state of performance. 'A storyteller... obviously
performs with great animation, but the meaning here is much more specific. The animated state of performance is always a physiological and psychological reality’ (Stahl, 1980, 43). Listeners enter an animated state with physiological and psychological elements as distinctively different from normal daily states, as is the teller’s, during performance.

What flow creates in listeners is a mild trance state, the hypnogogic trance, again, previously referred to. It is most obviously evident to those outside the storytelling event watching listeners, especially children: jaws slacken, eyes widen, listeners either lean forward, or stretch out and shut their eyes to concentrate. Involvement may become so great they remark or express emotions as though the narrative is completely real (Stallings, 1988, 7). Tellers are not hypnotists—though they do strive, consciously or unconsciously, to help listeners achieve this state via para- and narrative texts and paralinguistic features. In a study of self-hypnosis, researchers identified the importance of imagery, which of course has a major role in storytelling.

[This]...imagery in self-hypnosis is a multidimensional phenomenon. Vivid realism of the image on the one hand, and the fantastic quality of imagery on the other, emerged as key features. A significant correlation was found between vivid realistic imagery and primary process (i.e., fantastic) imagery, suggesting these two are intertwined in self-hypnosis, yet qualitatively distinct constructs.

(Fromm, 1991, 22)

Listeners, relaxed, put themselves into this state by active engagement in mental configuring, associating real and imagined images into new relationships. This partly explains why Märchen, myths and legends remain so popular in storytelling repertoires, since their fantastic imagery induces listeners to reconcile the impossible with what is known to be real. Conversely, fantastic metaphors and similes provide exaggerated imagery from real life in autobiographical tales, asking listeners to reconcile (judge) the truth of the teller in terms of physical and emotional realities.

The hypnogogic trance clearly relates to Csikszentmihalyi’s flow, at least in that the latter must be present for such self-hypnosis to occur.
Fiction not only focuses our attention on one action, assembling everything necessary for understanding it and rigorously excluding everything which is not; by marshalling its events so that they at once satisfy and stimulate curiosity it compels us to see them as parts of an emerging pattern. It keeps our eyes hypnotically fixed on the skein of plot as it unravels itself, on the moving tip of the storyline.

(Lesser, 1957. 166)

Flow is achieved when mega-identity and true persona of teller are harmonious with each other and text; audiences then find convergence with oral narrative events. When this happens, participants move up the performance continuum. Tellers take more risks, tell more challenging stories, and seek a wider circle of listeners. Audiences are more involved while listening, and afterwards remember more of the story, and less of the teller's mega-identity and role in telling. The latter is an important sign of genuine storytelling.

While listeners may appear passive, evidence suggests mental states in such conditions closely resemble, or are the same as, those for quite active pastimes. Bruner and Kroeber both emphasise the importance of emotion in engaging and developing cognition and the role narrative plays here. Kroeber finds support in Gallie's comparison of following a story to following a game or sport, who states

that with both we best follow the series of developing contingencies when our sympathies and antipathies are enlisted; what he calls the "basic directing feelings" are brought into play by worthwhile games and stories. That the intelligibility of a story, its meaning, is enhanced, indeed, is to a considerable degree dependent upon its engagement of our emotions, is perhaps Gallie's most lasting contribution to our understanding of stories and their functions. The observation frees us from being too rationalistic and too purely intellectual to do justice to the unique capacity of story to render without oversimplifying or reducing to too rigid a structure the complex adventitiousness of human affairs.

(Kroeber, 1992, 53)

Involvement of emotions is a major 'reward' implied on the performance continuum (Wilson, 1999). As discussed, for the teller this is not always financial but rather emotional satisfaction supporting teller ego and the mega-identity. Listeners provide this, yet when entering the storytelling experience also achieve an inflated sense of self: associative thought processes reinforce identities, beliefs, memories and emotions.
This is more easily accomplished in socio-cultural storytelling, such as traditional storytelling, where participants know each other and that knowledge can be incorporated. It becomes more difficult in modern circumstances with large groups of strangers. Such cases are more often psycho-philosophical or even commercial and/or ego-inflating in motivation. This militates against flow, the trance state and storytelling experience. The storytelling may be genuine for some but artificial for others. Each individual’s emotional involvement is at cross-purposes creating that self-conscious feeling Kroeber described as a feature of post-modern arts events and celebrations. The double liminality, described in chapter one, is evidenced here. One could be in the ‘this’ of the story but at the same time the ‘that’ of the storytelling act, event and surroundings can remain a parallel ‘this’ as a listener thinks various, contradictory thoughts whilst taking in the story. Examples of these are: how exciting it is to be at the venue; how easy that teller’s story to learn and incorporate the listener’s repertoire; how that individual listener is a better teller by comparison, and the festival should book him/her instead; and so on.

To be achieved, genuine storytelling must attempt a balanced mix of approaches through para-texts and narrative texts and tellers’ paralinguistic techniques. These must differentiate listeners, so each feels incorporated in the flow or trance state, and yet also bind them as one group, to provide feelings of security, community and shared values. This is the greatest challenge for contemporary storytelling. It is not a popular art, such as pop music or television, and to become one requires techniques, technologies and philosophies working completely against what storytelling is, and would make it something entirely different. As it is, the contemporary storytelling scene has created a community of a kind, but one rather enclosed and constantly self-reflective. In spite of successes contemporary storytelling organisational and institutional events, the conferences, festivals, concerts, workshops and publications these produce or sponsor continually include stories, discussions, essays, and exercises advertising how good,
important, healthy, and wonderful storytelling, stories, and storytellers are. This overwhelming self-adulation suggests an insecure community with very low self-esteem and lack of confidence in what that community has done and is doing thus far, without enough self-criticism in order to evolve in any lasting way.

**Heterogeneity and Homogeneity in Audiences, and Consideration of Differentiated and Undifferentiated Performances for Such Audiences in Contemporary Storytelling**

Emotions aroused by telling strengthen sense of self and use of identity. During a particularly effective performance tellers and listeners simultaneously ‘think’ the ‘same thoughts’. This is where transformative aspects of cognition occur. Transformation provided a source of interest to Freudians and Jungians, who used particular literary references without understanding of processes involved, before cognitive psychology was popularised. Earlier psychological studies with cognitive science theories of inter-relations between conscious and unconscious minds and narrative acts provide relevance to contemporary storytelling. They inform construction and use of storyteller identity, engagement of listeners’ conscious and unconscious minds and interchange of images, emotions, responses and shared mental processing occurring in, and between, tellers and listeners.

This comes from viewpoint, based on preconceptions, reconfigurations and so on. Whether referred to as schema, schemata, scripts, motifs, cognitive frames or genre, individuals maintain previous experience and knowledge held in mental configurations to which they compare new experiences and knowledge, as discussed previously in Chapters Two and Three. This allows sympathetic viewpoints to shift and be assumed while processing narratives through telling or writing, reading or listening.

Storytelling is distinguished by its capacity to compel its audience to adopt multiple perspectives in the process of comprehending it. To cite the most obvious example, any story allows its viewpoint to “wander” each time the speech of a character other than the narrator is represented. Although this is not the subtlest mode of shifting viewpoint, it contrasts usefully to what

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6 Appendix II, 16.1-16.3, Material Data and Journal. Examples of titles from NSN conferences. Statistical chart listing the average number of stories with the theme of the importance of stories and storytelling.
Happens in drama. The audience at a traditional play remains equidistant, imaginatively as well as spatially, from each speaker, but in a novel, or a told story, the audience, more dependent on its imagining (since there are no physical figures present) tends to adopt the attitude of each speaker as he or she speaks. To comprehend someone who speaks in a story we imagine ourselves into the utterance position that is evoked by a third-person narrative, the audience’s point of view, its position of imaginative response, may change as radically and as often in one form as in the other. For all storytelling creates a textured dynamic internal to the story being told—probably because it is difficult to conceive of a better way of bringing forward for shared consideration the complexities of human interactions in all their contingent specificity.

(Kroeber, 1992, 105)

Multiple perspectives are further complicated during storytelling, when complex interactions happening simultaneously. Listeners, and the teller, also, experience a multiplicity of mental configurations [multiple perspectives], consciously, unconsciously and subconsciously. These perspectives take place in physical space and imagined realms.

Lesser’s observations contribute to understanding complex cognitive dynamics in telling and listening to stories and how these achieve the storytelling experience. Those responding to fiction are involved in ‘conscious’ and ‘unconscious’ activities. Lesser asserts conscious activities are ‘quasi-automatic’, easily identified and described:

- Following the story and grasping its meaning
- Appraising the honesty of the story, its relevance to the reader, the skill of the telling
- Placing the story within a period, tradition or genre, its relation to other works by the author, and to any other points of references helping understanding and appraisal.

(Lesser, 1957, 195)

Listeners engage in these same quasi-automatic activities. Storyteller appraisal happens as ‘receptive audiences are actively evaluating the reliability and authority of the storyteller standing before them.... It affects their choices to stay or go, how closely they will listen, how fully they will trust the teller and the tale’ (Birch, 1996, 107). Listeners
relate the told story and act of telling, the total event, with other reference points, from other told, written, dramatized and mediated stories, and life experiences.

Listeners also grasp meaning from context: a listener’s relationship to the teller, the perception of the teller’s identity, role, and paratext, and the space, and socio-cultural situation. Audiences place the teller in relation to categories and definitions gained from actual experiences with storytelling and life generally, and shared experience, that is, told, read and other mediated knowledge, and by emotional responses to previously experienced tellers, texts and situations. This happens throughout the performance continuum. An added complexity to conscious processes is that not only audiences carry out these ‘quasi-automatic’ activities. Lesser, looking solely at readers’ response where the writer is not present, fails to mention tellers are conscious, too (Lesser, 1957). The teller makes sense of situation and, using text and paratext such as digression, appraises audiences, situations and his/her own performances. They compare reality of specific experiences to imagined responses anticipated during rehearsals and planning of events, or remembered from previous performances. For successful performance, it is crucial tellers realise audiences make assumptions and interpolations. ‘In episode after episode of the telling of a story, each teller and each listener participate in recreating the story by giving it life in his or her personal world’ (Lane, 1986, 4).

The teller’s advantage over writers comes from capitalising on the dynamics of performance situations. If audiences clearly are not interpolating, extrapolating, inferring, or contributing somehow, sensitive or experienced tellers change course. But any one who has participated in, or observed, oral storytelling situations will recognize that awareness by the audience of the heterogeneity of their community as listeners is usually acute. Often an esteemed characteristic of first-rate storytellers in pre-literate societies is their ability to tell a story in such a way that it affects differently diverse members of the audience. The modern novelist tends to appeal to an undifferentiated audience, defined principally by one quality only— aesthetic sensitivity.

(Kroeber, 1992, 100)
Traditional and contemporary storytelling are full of devices allowing and helping this, as outlined. But similarly, posture, facial attitudes, eye contact, vocalisations (gasp, laughter, giggles, coughs, verbal explanations, heckling and so on) of audiences indicate they are 'creating' the story consciously and unconsciously. Too often, however, contemporary storytelling develops the solely undifferentiated approach of the modern and post-modern novelists. The influences of bourgeois, mainstream and commercial practices, as well as the massive impact of specialised storytelling literature and new media, make artificial storytelling easier: easily replicated and marketed, with audiences marginalised or taken for granted.

**Listening Modes**

Acting modes defined by Alexander and Govrin, and the options of Thomson's presentational, representational and/or personational acting styles discussed earlier (Alexander, 1989; Thomson, 1999), may actually be inspired by the listening modes of audiences. Differentiated approaches to audiences, allowing for individual 'connection' and the feeling the teller speaks only to one listener, would come from teller reaction to listening modes — yet individual listeners retain this feeling of being spoken to directly, an experience well reported among storytellers and listeners. Listening is an inclusive process, and speaker recognition that listeners attend what is said reinforces the ego and is another aspect of reward.

Rodari recognised listening as a vital action in human development. Observing children listening to narratives, he reported: 'One senses that children both contemplate and create the structures of their own imaginations at the time, constructing an indispensable instrument for getting to know reality and mastering it' (Rodari, 1993, 94). This is an excellent alternative description of the cognitive processes. Not only children but also adults, when listening to stories or participating in other activities requiring a good ear find that: 'Listening is training. For children fairy tales have the same seriousness and

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7 Appendix I., 53.1-53.4., Interview Transcripts: Examples of the listener feeling the teller is telling directly to him/her, and the teller feels the listener is compelling/ urging/ encouraging the story to be told, and told to that listener
truthfulness as a game: they help them learn to become involved, to know themselves, to measure themselves' (Rodari, 1993, 94).

There is no chart of identifiable listening modes with which to compare audiences and individual listeners, the quality and type of the listening, and their effect upon and interaction with the teller, telling, and final form of a story. Most studies into listening to narrative measure affects after the act of, not during, storytelling. Barbara Baumgartner did conduct synoptic charts and ethnopoetic phrasings of traditional stories told to children, and though this looks at audience reaction during the telling, her study focused on educational and therapeutic not performance implications (Baumgartner, 1996). Sook-Yi Kim also looked at the cognitive effects of storytelling with children, but reported on children's enhanced cognitive skills after listening to stories on a regular basis, not during the act of listening to stories (Kim, 1996).

The interviews, as well as common sense and 'folk wisdom', indicate much anecdotal evidence for audiences affecting a teller and a telling. Obviously a rude, noisy, heckling audience will affect what and how a storyteller chooses to tell and whether that telling achieves flow and genuine storytelling. In the storytelling experience, it is more difficult to identify specific cause and effect due to the subtlety of responses if the storytelling experience is a mild trance state. Comparisons of listeners' reactions, especially of adults outside educational storytelling experiences, would discover any consistent, recognisable modes among listeners, and if these relate to, or are influenced by, or influence, tellers' modes. Different audience 'axes' may also contribute to or be affected by tellers' performances. But much of this would be subjective, arising from socio-cultural backgrounds and experiences of the audiences and each individual in the audience that a researcher must take into account. Again, new technologies, the MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) and so on, could reveal much but would be particularly obtrusive when considering their use with audiences of more than two or three. To be valid, one would want to use the technology to measure groups of all sizes involved in contemporary storytelling, from one or two through to the thousands at festivals.
Even so, it is possible to recognise common physical, linguistic and paralinguistic responses. There are consistent attitudes and expressions conveyed along a wide cross-section of listeners. Conscious activities like listening are ‘quasi-automatic’ because they happen quickly, with participants barely aware of them, particularly when accustomed to storytelling.

These activities can keep the conscious mind very busily employed. Even the task of following and interpreting the surface significance of a story often involves a great deal more than it may appear to. The events of a single story may be numerous, complex and intricately interrelated. Furthermore, they are not developed continuously; and certain things are left unexplained or are only partially explained.

(Lesser, 1957. 195)

Attending to these usually means the body of the listener is extremely still so as to take in all Georges’s ‘codes’ (Georges, 1971). No matter how quickly we speak, read or write, we hear and comprehend at greater speeds. Observations of spontaneous spoken language led scientists to notice we speak in idea units, approximately two seconds or six words each—a universal property of language.

If that is true, then when we speak we are in the habit of moving from one idea to the next at the rate of about one every two seconds. Perhaps that is even our normal thinking rate, if language reflects our rate of thought.

(Chafe, 1982, 37)

Although storytelling does not consist entirely of spontaneous language, it would seem from storytelling that we think faster than we speak. Tellers think of more than what they say, listeners understand, that is make mental pictures and associations, more than they reveal.8

If the temporal baseline for speaking and thinking is slightly different from our listening rate, and we read and write at even slower rates, the question arises what happens cognitively during telling and listening. ‘It is doubtful that very much of our cognitive capacity has to be devoted to the mechanical activity...’ Chafe states, since ‘...our thoughts must constantly get ahead of our expression of them in a way which we are

8 Appendix I., 54.1. – 54.2., Journal Observations: Imagery and thought processes revealed through workshop activities, and in storytelling performances
totally unaccustomed to when we speak' (Chafe, 1982, 37). Tellers are caught up in mechanical quasi-automatic activities—using audience responses to temper physical and content aspects of performance. Audiences, on the other hand, use extra time while listening since ‘...our thoughts have plenty of time to move ahead of others. The result is that we have time to integrate a succession of ideas into a single linguistic whole...’ (Chafe, 1982, 37) Rather than make conscious activities more difficult, tellers’ vocalisations and gestures aid mental processes for heard stories, accessing and using sub- and unconscious processes. Tellers’ quasi-automatic conscious, using para- and narrative texts and relying on motor-memories, etc., allows for rapid mechanical responses to audience reactions. ‘All of the conscious and unconscious responses of the active listener—whether verbal, kinesthetic, or paralinguistic—are far more significant than most of us realize’ (Lane, 1986, 4).

Spoken word, as sound, is internalized in a manner significantly different to silently read text. It is a physical internalization. Speech, and even more, storytelling, are the fastest link to, or most accurate reproduction of, simultaneous conscious and unconscious thoughts.

Of one or two of the characteristics of unconscious response we can also speak with reasonable assurance. If only from glimpses we occasionally catch of the unconscious in operation, we know that it often works at lightning speed. We know, too, that it is unbelievably perceptive, and prodigal in supplying us with impressions and associations. Certain peculiarities of the unconscious processes facilitate speed and prodigality. The unconscious does not have to work out anything in detail either to reach or express understanding. Unconscious understanding is immediate, intuitive. In expressing understanding, the unconscious employs either words or images, whichever are most suitable for its purpose, without regard for consistency. Sometimes it eschews both, so that the only trace of its activity lies in the alteration of our feelings. (Lesser, 1957, 196)

Bruner’s observation of conformity and discrepancy in consciousness applies to unconscious minds as well. It is more likely in the unconscious that unusual associations and observations are made, recognised, reconciled and communicated to the consciousness while listening to stories. This thinking happens too quickly to be sure where they come from and go to, all storytelling participants experience incongruent
associations, unexpected images, and 'Freudian slips'. This is also so in conversation and in writing and reading stories. For tellers and authors, finding these unconscious surprises contributes to creation of narration and performance. These unconscious surprises also occur in listeners and readers when actively participating (that is, in 'flow' or the storytelling experience), which is why listening and reading are active and creative processes for listeners/readers, for these construct the stories as they participate.

Ong's study of orality observed sound exists only while going out of existence; for cognitive scientists, looking for materialistic contributions in formation and development of thought, it is significant such an ephemeral physical manifestation is integral to an art form, narrative, associated with consciousness. Ong noted 'the unique relationship of sound to interiority when the sound is compared to the rest of the senses. This is important because of the interiority of human consciousness and of human communication itself' (Ong, 1982, 71). Sounds are inclusive, and para- and narrative texts in contemporary storytelling consist of parallelisms (repetition and rhythm, for example) drawing listeners in and reminding them of important points to facilitate understanding, causing mental associations. Vocal sounds are produced by, and arise from and within, the body and are heard, and literally felt, by organs within the body.

Although sound is a physical phenomenon and during storytelling the story exists in spoken words in the physical world, simultaneously a mental or imagined existence creating shared consciousness leads to a congruency of interiority and the exterior physical world. 'Interiority and harmony are characteristics of human consciousness. The consciousness of each person is totally interiorized, known to the person from the inside and inaccessible to any other person from the inside' (Ong, 1982, 72). Yet some of that interiority is accessible externally. Although creating mental visual images, and also presenting real and physical images by the teller's presence, both visual and aural, it is the voice that most involves audiences. 'By contrast with vision, the dissecting sense, sound is...a unifying sense. A typical visual ideal is clarity and distinctness, a taking apart.... The auditory ideal...is harmony, a putting together' (Ong, 1982, 72).
What Ong fails to acknowledge is that cognitive studies have found touch a required sense in creating visual cognition: acute sight in infants is slowly developed as they explore the world with their hands and mouths, developing hand-eye coordination and accompanying visual-tactile senses' parallel cognition. Touch is also allied with hearing, for in producing sounds the infant feels the vibrations in his or her own body, and the vibrations of the adult holding the baby as the adult speaks or vocalises. This physical experience carries on into overall cognition as we develop. Audiences do not passively receive and internalise storytellers' voices.

One advantage of storytelling...is that the human voice works both logically and magically to transmit knowledge from one person to another. The authority behind the knowledge becomes a human being and not “the word,” and the transaction itself has a living energy. Listening to a human being, we are much more inclined to filter, temper, and test the quality of the information we are receiving than we are when we read.

(Maguire, 1998, 7)

Audiences influenced by formal behaviour traditions in western theatre or exposure to recorded electronically mediated entertainment often give little reaction for tellers to play on. Audiences remain active mentally and usually only eye contact and relaxed body language convey information to tellers.

Tellers convey interiority through the act of telling, listeners through responses, of which they may not be conscious being so engrossed.

When we are engrossed, a great deal of evidence indicates, we imaginatively experience the entire action, ourselves act out every role. The experience is, of course, imaginary; it is elliptical; it utilizes energy which is at least partly neutralized. Despite all of these provisos, the experience is “real” and, in the view of its speed, astonishingly complete; it includes, for example, an understanding of the unconscious significance of the acts we perform.

(Lesser, 1957, 201)

Engrossment, often greater on the part of listeners than tellers, leads to real-life behaviour within the imagined world of the story: the gasps, exclamations, real emotions felt, mentally and physiologically. Medical research quoted by Stahl when discussing the power of performance shows that in performance the teller’s blood pressure and
temperature rise, listeners’ blood pressures and temperatures drop (Stahl, 1980, 43-4).\footnote{Appendix I., 55.1—55.3., Interview Transcript, Grace Hallworth; Transcript of Private Conversation, Taffy Thomas, Journal Observation}

Tellers and listeners experience emotions, a response to imagined characters, actions and narrative situations: the realm of the story is in the mind, while real physical sensations happen in a real, physical world. Such phenomena could be one point of entry for observing listening modes and the influence of these on storyteller performances. Part of what happens when we listen or read and are ‘surprised’ by concepts and words used in different novel ways is that more parts of our brain become active and involved (Matthews, 2003). Correlation between these scanned patterns and observable physical reactions in listeners and tellers’ responses to those would define listening modes.

I would suggest the following listening modes, identified by typical audience behaviours. These expressions are affected culturally and developmentally, in that all modes can be observed in all humans but some are repressed or controlled at earlier or later ages depending on what socio-cultural attitudes or practices inhibit or encourage them. Once more, this is expanding the Alexander/Govrin model of acting modes along the theatre axis, and my oratorical modes on the oratorical axis. If we agree the teller-listener-text relationship is dynamic and symbiotic, it makes sense to assume or identify listening modes that can be applied, later, to a listening continuum. The listening modes suggested here are themselves on a continuum, not opposites never meeting, ‘trapped’ on ‘two sides of the same coin’.

- The passive/active mode, in which the unmoving listener might well not be listening, or, conversely, may be taking in quite a bit; clues would be in how relaxed/tensed muscles are, the nature of eye contact, and so on

- The regressive/assertive mode, in which a listener unselfconsciously reverts to an earlier development level of listening, or displays an egocentric level of cognition, making the listener vocally and physically insert him/herself into the story or performance

- The social/ritual mode, in which listeners’ primary purpose for listening ranges between the social, that is, the intent of companionship and entertainment, to specific functional purpose, be it religious, political, legal, or similar intents
• The informal/formal mode, which is closely related to the social/ritual mode, and where body attitudes suggest purpose and attitude towards the event, the story (stories), and the teller and the listeners towards themselves

• The critical/tolerant mode, which verges on and is even an expression of that double-liminal state; while already stated that listeners appraise or judge a teller, the act of telling and the story told, this mode consists of an overly critical attitude, and the mode can also be dominant, making double-liminality

• The partial/holistic mode, which suggests the level of flow and hypnogogic trance, and how involved the listener is within the storytelling experience; the listener can move in and out of the different levels of this mode or be deeply within one the whole or most of the time

Needless to say these modes can function simultaneously or group to form sub-modes. They cannot be consciously taught or learned. I believe they develop experientially, and are contingent upon socio-cultural behaviours. The engagement of listening modes, however, is necessary for that exchange discussed between tellers and listeners to create flow and the storytelling experience, which leads to transformation in cognitive and emotional terms.

This is the transformation that occurs: stories become the listeners’, not the teller’s. New ways of thinking result—transformation in cognition making reality into something transcendental. In genuine storytelling, when listeners are in the hypnogogic trance and the liminal state we are calling the storytelling experience, stories, both in content and act, are internalised as real as true-life experiences. Tellers experience in real life audience reactions to tellers’ actions and thoughts while telling, carrying them away, consciously and unconsciously, to draw upon for future performances. ‘Human consciousness... is self-consciousness. We not only have experiences, we are conscious of ourselves having them, and being affected by them’ (Lodge, 2002) (: 14). We internalize real experiences and reported memory, conveyed in stories, of others. ‘Phenomena such as memory, the association of ideas in the mind, the causes of emotions and individual’s sense of self, become of central importance to speculative thinkers and writers of narrative literature alike’ (Lodge, 2002, 40). It is also of central importance to listeners and readers. Their sense of self remains active in the unconscious mind, making
connections and transformations necessary for hypnagogic trance to make reality transcendental. In turn the transcendental becomes real and remembered experience.

Part III. Socio-Cultural and Philosophical-Psychological Factors Defining Audiences

Genres of Audience: Types of Listeners and How They Contribute to (or Detract from) Cognitive Processes in Genuine Storytelling

The performance continuum might imply primary focus on risks and responsibilities of performers. Bauman, Georges and others define performance as the assumption of responsibility, but also stress that all elements, including audience and social context, are interdependent and carry interactive responsibility (Bauman, 1984, 11; Georges, 1971, 313-28). Having explored how this is so cognitively, one needs to see how this is achieved physically and, specifically, socially and culturally. Contemporary storytelling can be recognised by cultural and social dynamics observable in audiences. Audiences’ evaluative role, already mentioned (Birch, 1996, 107), is more than simple summary judgment and a decision as to whether or not to take part by listening (Kroeber, 1992, 178). Listeners, too, are on the performance continuum, taking risks, displaying different levels of intensity in participation, and playing a role making storytelling informal or formal. Listening is an action, fully engaging bodies, minds and emotions. Audiences expand storytelling beyond simple social exchange into significant cultural or social events.

Tellers’ mental judgments, cognizant or otherwise—philosophies, ideologies and opinions—influence interpretations, contributing to performances, engaged with mental constructs of listeners. ‘An effective storyteller demonstrates her vision in her telling, and her vision suggests how an audience might view the same events. But her vision cannot be so dogmatic and didactic that individuals...have no reflective powers or interpretative opportunities’ (Birch, 1996, 117). Besides what and how listeners think of specific texts, what they think of storytelling is significant. ‘Reading stories silently is a private act; hearing them is a public one. At storytelling events...teller and listener are partners. Although the range of partnership varies, the act is communal with all the
richness and echoes in that word of fellowship and sacrament’ (Birch, 2000, 12). What a listener is, and what differentiates listeners or group of listeners and how they view the story, teller, and act of telling, affects storytelling. Tellers’ awareness or lack of awareness of listeners’ nature and acts touches on social and cultural realms, and explains another facet of genuine storytelling.

Stories are told, and listened to, for a reason, with contexts providing reasons which may not be the same for tellers and listeners. Identifying contexts contributes to audience descriptions, since audiences arise from and exist in contexts.

People tell stories because they know others like to hear stories. The reason that people like to hear stories, however, is not transparent to them. People need a context to help them relate what they have heard to what they already know. We understand events in terms of events we have already understood.

(Schank, 2000, 15)

Reasons for telling and listening, whether conscious or not, obvious or articulated, allow classification of audience types. Obvious groupings, age, gender and so on, in contemporary storytelling are overridden by easy dichotomy between natural and artificial audiences. Which are different from genuine and artificial storytelling; either of the latter could happen whether audiences are natural or artificial. These two categories are defined by the creation of audiences and their expectations.

Factors Creating Audiences in Contemporary Storytelling

Contemporary storytellers had to find or create audiences, and their audiences are still being ‘discovered’ and developed. Contemporary storytellers and events organisers have freedom to experiment in narrative and performance options, including audience formation, but this necessitates

...developing a story-listening community and performance opportunities that performers in traditional contexts could have taken for granted. The potential audiences existed, products of the same socio-cultural environment that gave rise to the storytellers themselves, but each individual performer had to attempt to make himself the market’s choice.

(Peiffer, 1994, 42-3)
It is significant that Peiffer summarises an evolution as one ‘marketing’ storytellers, since this has direct bearing on teller-audience relationships and dynamics, on expectations and preconceptions—configurations vital in storytelling cognition, as discussed. Contemporary tellers define their own boundaries, not being limited to reservoirs of inherited tales as traditional tellers are.

Storyteller choice would be inhibited by what ‘markets’ (audiences) could or would bear. Peiffer further reports

...tellers could choose to decorate their narrations in any way they found effective; music, mime, dance, light show, slides, shadow play, balloons, costumes, props, puppets and fireworks could all be part of a teller’s stock in trade. The potential for creative expression was limited only by the talents and objectives of the performers.

(Peiffer, 1994, 42)

But limits on techniques and styles would also come from buyers’ (audiences’) tolerance and expectations. Any storytelling, including traditional, sees conventions outside historical/traditional storytelling imposed when commodified as a service or ‘raised’ as a ‘high art’. This affects how we think of, and actually ‘think’ storytelling as well as the reality of events incorporating story and act. Contemporary storytelling situations are formalized from the start, modelled upon commercial western entertainment practices, not traditional ones. ‘The new teller has had to develop his own storytelling situations. .... He has had to be creative in building an audience for his art. Tellers are hired in advance. A specific time and space is set aside for the occasion’ (Wischner, 18-9). Thus contemporary storytelling almost always starts higher up the performance continuum, with genuine storytelling potentially more difficult.

Alexander and Tamar suggested that the storyteller takes all roles, on stage and backstage, in performance (Alexander, 1989). Wischner contradicts this.

The storytelling event is a series of interactions that takes place among the participants. The audience is given the role of director...because it tells the storyteller what works and what does not, what is funny, and what is not. The kinesics of the performance—that is the nonverbal signals—constantly travel from teller to listener and back again.

(Wischner, 1991, 8)
Non-verbal signals include audiences’ contribution to paraperformance. Physical attitudes, formal or informal dress, and so on would indicate to tellers what standard of performance is expected and required.

As noted, intimacy, informality and spontaneity, and desires to recreate it appeal to contemporary storytelling participants even if conditions make them difficult to attain or appear genuine.

Storytelling’s success depends upon the intimacy created between teller and listener. When the teller is powerful and the story well told, there is often the feeling in the audience that the teller is “speaking only to me”—a palpable vulnerability is present. When storytelling fails, the audience member feels she is closed off from the story—that the performance would take place in the same exact manner whether the audience were there or not. As a result, the listener doesn’t invest in the story, and little is shared. (Harley, 1996, 130)

Rising up the continuum, with storytelling becoming a ‘high art’ cultural event, sees audiences consciously formed because of need or natural response, due to the intensity of the teller and/or situations. Financial exchange, behaviours associated with commercial entertainments, as well as pious or precious attitudes towards the act—beliefs one is ‘saving’ storytelling, restoring traditions, etc.—increase formality. These suggest risk and emotional investment while really merely demanding the status and respect of ‘high culture’ such as theatre or opera. Risk and passion, characteristic traits of mega-identity and/or inherent in the text or situation, can be charismatic, naturally drawing attention. Such elements create contemporary storytelling audiences, but at the same time militate against the ‘palpable vulnerability’ of ‘speaking only to me’.

Storytelling as high cultural performance uses language removed from conversational modes, becoming ‘ritualistic’. Narrative has a place in ritual, as does ritual in narrative. Some latch onto this, over-emphasising it in performances. What is meant by ritualistic language is that stories are repeated, so ‘...ritual language, like written language, has a permanence which colloquial language does not. The same oral ritual is presented again and again, not verbatim...but with a content, style and formulaic structure which remain
constant from performance to performance' (Chafe, 1982, 49). Ritualised orality, being more like written language, involves the same cognitive processes as literature. Oral storytelling is closer cognitively and culturally to literature, with the literary axis dominant. In cognitive terms, the permanence of ritualised language, and other symbolic systems, may be a vital connection between various art forms depicting narrative, e.g., storytelling, literature, theatre, opera, television, and cinema, and visual expressions in ballet, mime and art.

Ritualistic language affects audiences, predetermining responses and emphasising artificiality in the sense of craftsmanship, since

...the performer of ritual is removed from his audience in a way that parallels the solitude of the writer. In religious performance he stands before the assembled crowd and recites from memory, using stylized intonation patterns, having little in common with the intonation contours of colloquial speech. What he performs is a monologue, with minimal feedback and no verbal interaction. Thus the situation is one which fosters detachment rather than involvement, just as...the case with writing. (Chafe, 1982, 50)

Contemporary storytelling can resemble religious events. It causes listeners and tellers to assume that reader’s/writer’s detachment, because it is consciously performed higher on the continuum, in contexts including such spaces, specific times or certain conventions that raise expectations with audiences and performers. 10

‘Detachment’ suggests audiences’ suspension of disbelief for performances to succeed. It is a prerequisite for liminality, for entering the flow leading to hypnogogic trance and thus the storytelling experience.

Philosopher Suzanne Langer would agree that the listener must suspend disbelief. She believes that; “The function of artistic illusion is not ‘make-believe’, as many philosophers and psychologists assume, but the very opposite, disengagement from belief—the contemplation of sensory qualities without their usual meanings of ‘Here’s that chair,’ ‘That’s my telephone.’” (1953,49). This is how storytelling changes the use of language—it frees language so that the listener engages in metaphorical

10 Appendix I., 56.1.– 56.5., Analyses of Video Recordings of Storytelling Performances, Interview Transcripts, and Journal Observations: Examples of Ritual Language and when it does and does not ‘work’
thought. Whereas Paul Zweig called the “transport” of the story the “elsewhere,” Langer says: “Herein lies the ‘strangeness’ or ‘otherness’ that characterizes the artistic object. The form is immediately given to perception, and yet reaches beyond itself; it is semblance, but seems to be charged with reality.”

(Wischner, 115-6)

Tellers and audiences, using physical elements, events, language of storytelling and stories themselves, turn reality into something transcendent and make the transcendent ‘tangible’, in some way as easily contemplated as physical objects and real life experience. This may be another example of differences between representational acting and storytelling, with representational theatre and cinema demanding ‘make-believe’ rather than disengagement from belief. Rather than ask listeners to make-believe, the teller relies upon their suspension of belief and trusting the teller to present a new belief they can, during or after the telling, ‘wire into’ their cognition, that is, their meta-frame or belief system. For this reason storytellers regularly report relying on audiences to determine what they tell. Tellers may well consider what to share from their repertoire beforehand, then change performances entirely because of audience response to the first tale. Certain faces trigger a story, or emotions, arising from what happened outside previously to events, or upon audiences’ arrival, or because of stories told earlier within events, determine interaction and the teller’s next tale.

Judgmental processes in narration are in motion framing the entire event before performers appear. Paraperformance affects and reflects perceived ideological meaning, since ‘...ideological relativity of performance is a function of the potential variability of value systems inscribed in all aspects of its context’ (Kershaw, 1992, 33). Cultural context and social relationships provide meaning in storytelling, with ‘...cultural context, having to do with systems of meaning and symbolic interrelationships, and social context, having to do with matters of social structure and social interaction’ (Bauman, 1984, 362-3). Means for gathering, assembling, positioning and dispersing audiences have significance.

11 Appendix I., 57.1. – 57.5., Analyses of Video Recordings of Storytelling Performances, Interview Transcripts, and Journal Observations: Programme improvisation based on first encounters with audience
Gathering

Listeners gather independently and voluntarily or are gathered. In either case an identified, sometimes advertised, purpose exists: organisers or listeners, or both, have intent. In traditional storytelling where audiences are more often, though not synonymously, natural, the intent is usually not primarily for storytelling but wider social purposes. With contemporary storytelling where audiences are more often, but not necessarily, artificial, the main reason for gathering is the storytelling. School and library storytelling times for children are organised by adults for identified purposes of education or recreation. Festivals and concerts are arranged as advertised services to entertain while providing leading participants, organisers and tellers, income, social and/or personal satisfaction.

Aesthetic and cognitive engagement leading to transformation must exist for genuine storytelling, but gathering specifically for storytelling, with higher risks and intensity, makes transformation difficult. Actions required for creating, attracting and gathering audiences involve concert-like settings and formal theatrical and/or concert type behaviours. This contributes

...to the growing importance of the specific teller and the increased theatricality of the storytelling event. Paradoxically, the forces that embraced storytelling as a return to human warmth and communication in the face of mass media and machine culture have worked to put between the teller and the audience a distance that did not exist when storytelling was a marked but integrated commonplace of life. In spite of this theatrical and sometimes commercially driven distance between performer and audience, release from the constraints of...storytelling performance traditional in particular cultures has freed contemporary tellers to be responsive to large cultural trends as well as to situational audience vagaries.

(Peiffer, 1994, 43)

Though no doubt true, this decreases potential for genuine storytelling. Such gathering, ritualistic in its own way, arises from middle class customs enabling confinement, control of content, and commodification of the act and content. Ritual here confirms, rather than transforms, preconditioned thoughts and values.
To avoid its potentially stale, artificial nature, contemporary storytelling adherents might apply Kershaw’s models of alternative theatre. These categories conflict and overlap, with poles or axes indicating four motivations:

- **Making theatre for**
- **Making theatre with**
- **Taking theatre to**
- **Mounting theatre in.**

(Kershaw, 1992, 241)

Contemporary storytelling participants are not always simultaneously aware of or in agreement with what storytelling is for, and if stories are taken to or made with others, and if so, by whom, and why, when and where. Too often contemporary storytelling focuses on mounting storytelling in a specific environment, relying on venues to determine audiences and audience behaviour. If expressed, purpose is for the sake of the story and storytelling, specifically survival by preserving, reviving, promoting and saving a tradition. Rarely expressed, though usually inherent, is the purpose of inflating performers’ egos. ‘How an audience gathers for a performance, and disperses when it is over, may be as important to the ideological reception of the show as, say, the style of performing itself’ (Kershaw, 1992, 23-4). Not only is it important to ideological reception, it affects the style of and reasons for performing.

Confirmation means contemporary storytelling expressions satisfy bourgeois tendencies to control more potentially subversive agendas in genuine storytelling. Such ‘scripted’ storytellings and ‘choreographed’ events confirm beliefs that storytelling is ‘revived’ or ‘saved’, or that a community or sense of community is formed with real bonds of emotion and intimacy. This often ignores those excluded or given only token inclusion. The participants of such contemporary storytelling events believe themselves to be politically liberal, and do possess liberal values. However, when their sole action is manifested in bourgeois events with mostly white, middle-class participants these values are only expressed, not put into any real effect.
Genuine storytelling can and does happen in contemporary events. Community-based projects, including some festivals, may involve hierarchy in planning and execution, but provide greater chance of direction from and participation by all involved.\textsuperscript{12} Audiences then have an empowered role as the director. If contemporary storytelling arises from a need in dysfunctional modern society desiring the semblance of community, the very act of telling can change audiences' perspectives, of themselves as a community as well as comprehension of stories.

The presence of a storyteller, besides validating a narrative as belonging to a larger social or cultural context (that a story can be told implies some shared community between teller and audience), provides the most direct means by which changes in audience perspective can be effected.

(Kroeber, 1992, 108)

Assumptions and unconscious or unspoken states gathered up into storytelling are part of the engagement listeners must make to understand texts and situations, as seen. This also links storytelling experience to reality, with carry-over adding to that sense of identification and community. Without dictated instructions for gathering, participants will make assumptions and unconsciously gather in a way that makes most sense to them.

\textit{Assembling}

Once gathered, audiences assemble. How listeners position themselves collectively, or are positioned, also says much about them and the event. 'Paradoxically, storytelling which in many oral traditions invites the listener to be a responder and not a passive listener, is now placed in auditoriums, and proscenium stages' (Wischner, 1991, 84). How listeners define storytelling or see the event determines how they assemble. How they enter and the way they fill space influences mental constructs predisposing them (or not) to genuine storytelling.

Western, middle-class adult audiences behave for storytelling as in theatres, cinemas or concert halls. Children, acclimatized to school life, when brought to hear a storyteller automatically enter and sit as for assemblies. Teenagers, and adults unsure of a situation

\textsuperscript{12} Appendix II., 17.1.—17.3., \textit{Summary of Storytelling in Community Projects}
and their place in it, defy requests to sit close to tellers and remain in back rows. These are learned, culturally mediated behaviours. More experienced tellers, often self-appointed experts leading workshops, or young tellers who ‘found’ a traditional teller as mentor and absorbed the stories and style but not contextual elements, greatly influence contemporary storytelling participants’ beliefs and perceptions. Again, the language and manner of contemporary tellers and listeners are mostly externalised, arising from psychological/philosophical motivations. In contemporary storytelling ‘the new teller has had to teach his audience its role, and teach us how to participate in stories. We are being taught not just “story traditions” but “storytelling traditions’” (Wischner, 1991, 18-9).

Spaces—theatres, arts centres, libraries, school rooms, places of worship—chosen and used by tellers to teach or control audiences dictate participants’ behaviour as they enter, place themselves, respond, and leave.

Gathering, assembling, and the physicality involved in these actions consist of quasi-automatic conscious behaviours. Situations not matching previous mental configurations cause selfconsciousness: audiences then do not know how to act or react. ‘Various techniques are used to control the proxemics of a storytelling event as the new teller desires to increase or decrease the distance between himself and his audience’ (Wischner, 1991, 82). While admittedly tellers have responsibility for the success of genuine storytelling, too much control of situations inhibits audience participation rather than helps it. Inhibition is not conducive to natural or genuine storytelling, for ‘...no social situation within the possibility of telling authentic stories exists as a constrictive as one in which genuine storytelling is impossible. Wherever real storytelling takes place, an essential human freedom exists’ (Kroeber, 1992, 4). Tellers and organisers noticing successful assemblies, consciously or unconsciously mimic patterns to create such audiences. Rituals of voice, gesture, or space affecting group dynamics inspire manipulations by tellers and organisers resulting in affectations that, they hope, assure audience relaxation and receptivity. Manipulations inherently bourgeois do attract significant numbers of individuals or certain types of groups, while repelling others of a different social background. Contemporary storytelling has a significant challenge in audience dynamics. Georges did display this in his model, when discussing the role and
impact of encoder/decoder relationships in storytelling (Georges, 1971, 320-1) (See Figure 5, the following two pages).

**Physicality**

Physical proximity between tellers and audiences contributes to genuine storytelling, with physical relationships such as body positions and gestures conveying thoughts and emotions. Attitudes and behaviours based on social class and so on are expressed in physicality. Tellers and listeners must be comfortable not only in physical positioning (seated comfortably, avoiding bright blinding lights or distractions, etc.), but also in physical relationships between participants. Tellers state the importance of being able to see audiences and make eye contact. Audiences want to see and hear without straining. Distractions annoy all and attempts to avoid them are continual. Spatial arrangement and physicality contribute to or distract from intimacy and spontaneity, neither existing without comfort and security. Tellers and audience can ‘get it wrong’: either being ‘too close for comfort’ or too distant for intimacy.

Audiences influence the teller via eye contact, body language and vocalisations. The teller repeatedly mentions one listener’s visual focus affecting them, making the act easier or influencing choice of text.

Eye gaze is one of the most salient features of any storytelling event. When one is reading aloud, one can glance at the audience frequently. Actors normally make eye contact with one another, but rarely with the audience. The storyteller, freed from the need to read a text, and usually performing solo, has strong eye contact with the audience. Breneman and Breneman distinguish among three types of eye focus and visualization: “eye-to-eye contact in which the speaker’s eyes are focused directly on the eyes of the listeners as he sees them”; focus in space as though imagining something or “to suggest reflection or inner thoughts”; and character-to character contact as the storyteller focuses on an imaginary character. (Baumgartner, 1996, 38)

Audience gestures, too, helpfully feed back to tellers. Sometimes tellers ‘teach’ or ‘direct’ audiences to join in, formally or with a mere look. ‘Audience participation may include hand gestures and sounds to create an atmosphere for
1. Given: two or more people whose interactions constitute communication

2. One person (A) selects the social identity of the storyteller from among multiple social identities of his social persona; at least one person (B) selects the social identity of story listener from among multiple social identities from his persona.

3. In accordance with the social prescribed duties of his social identity, the storyteller begins to transmit a message to the story listener.

4. In accordance with the social prescribed duties of his social identity, the story listener begins to receive, decode, and respond to the message that the storyteller is formulating, encoding, and transmitting.

*Figure 5, Encoder/Decoder Relationships in Storytelling (Georges, 1971, 320-1*
5. The responses of the story listener are communicated to the storyteller.

6. As the storyteller receives and decodes the responses of the story, the story listener interprets and responds to them as feedback, the interaction between the storyteller and the story listener intensifies and begins to shape the message.

7. The message itself generates maximum interaction between the storyteller and the story listener, and the tensions building up within the message as a result of the storyteller-story listener interaction reach a peak.

8. The storytelling event comes to an end.
the story, similar to devices used in participation in plays. But at its deepest levels, the story becomes inseparable from the manner in which it is told' (Wischner, 1991, 74). In a few instances, more so outside Western culture, such participation is culturally influenced, intuitive and quasi-automatic.

Audience participation provides tellers a ‘buzz’, the emotional and physiological impact arising from successful, genuine storytelling and listening. Part of the aforementioned reward, buzz is a physical manifestation of transformations, the new mental configurations, ego reinforcement, confirmation of status quo, and/or reality/transcendental exchanges. Although expressed colloquially, physiological studies provide evidence for it. Real emotions and attendant physical and physiological symptoms are involved, coming from text, style of telling and/or situation (Stahl, 1980; Stallings, 1988). The ‘buzz’ results in a sense of well-being coming from a happily concluded tale, in the sense that it transforms or confirms mental configurations. Endings could be tragic, comic, romantic or whatever, and/or being part of a greater whole, enjoying collectively, achieves that sense of intimacy and community. This leads to that semblance of community, at least during the telling. Emotional engagement motivates audiences to return and listen again, but is also an incentive for tellers to continue telling, taking greater risks.

Physical expressions in listeners reveal mental processes in genuine storytelling. Shallow observations of hypnogogic trance suggest listeners appear passive when eyes dilate, jaws are slack, bodies lean forward. In some instances, listeners actually stretch out, close their eyes or otherwise appear to sleep. This is where awareness and understanding of the suggested listening modes informs both teller and observer and, it should be pointed out, other listeners who unconsciously adapt to and imitate listening modes around them. Experienced tellers recognise such body language reveals deepest concentration, and

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13 Refer to Appendix I., 11.1-11.4
discussion afterwards proves involvement in and retention of narratives. The real and physical (acts of telling and listening, present in the physicality of participants, engaging real muscles, nerves, temperatures, breathing, circulation of blood, and emotional states) transforms cognition. If physicality is 'right', for certain narrative passages listeners mimic actions within the story, join in ritual language, and/or exclaim spontaneously, expressing emotions consistent with imagined actions and sentiments.

While a story is being told or read, a patient listener or reader is active, not passive, despite apparent surrender to the flow of narrator's words, for each member of an audience processes what he or she receives. Our minds continuously imagine future possibilities...suggested by what we are being told while reassessing what we have already learned, perhaps enthusiastically, perhaps with distaste or dismay. Narrative receptivity thus continuously unfolds simultaneously back into itself, transmuted by the very process of absorbing the meanings it has initiated.

(Kroeber, 1992, 60)

Simultaneously, listener physicality transmutes into something abstract, a remembered narrative and event that is physical and emotional, stored, recalled and used in the future. Reminiscing and predicting turn the physical and physicality into something abstract. Abstraction makes stories and experience transcendental, easily stored for future cognitive interactions.

_Audience Expectations and Ideologies_

Social ideologies, philosophical and psychological motivations, and bound up in emotions are intrinsic in contemporary storytelling.

It goes without saying that we bring to any storytelling a preestablished system of moral and metaphysical beliefs and a range of commonsense "prejudices"...which form the basics for how we assess a story. But in the process of receiving the telling, including our retrospective comprehension when it has been complete, these preestablished systems and prejudices are aroused—sometimes being reinforced, sometimes being challenged. Since our systems of ordering and moral belief are fortified by entrenched emotional commitments, storytelling/story receiving solicits powerfully our sympathies and antipathies to activate those systems so that we may participate in a transformative realization of what binds us as emotional individuals to our community.

(Kroeber, 1992, 58)
All participants' expectations and ideologies are engaged this way, audiences even more so than tellers. In contemporary practices, however, many place more emphasis on the storyteller, echoing the Romantic primacy of the creative artist.

Communities where almost everyone including the storyteller knows everyone else make natural audiences, with emphasis on the community as a whole. This describes traditional tellers and groups, but natural audiences can equally be found among contemporary storytelling participants. Storytellers performing to natural audiences have a good idea of what audiences think about the tellers, repertoires, and about life generally. Knowing this causes tellers to tell and listeners to listen unselfconsciously with subsequent cognition that is part of genuine storytelling.

Allowing for intracultural dissent, speaker and listener share basic understandings of that culture's definitions of satisfying storytelling. Whenever a storyteller comes from outside of the culture of a given story, there is a tendency to emphasize the universal at the expense of the cultural honesty and vigor. The people, who created the recipe, are all but forgotten. Metaphorically speaking, the tale can become so diluted as to become insubstantial; it can also be so inappropriately seasoned it becomes unrecognizable, unpalatable, or even putrid to those it once fed.

(Birch, 2000, 77-8)

Birch’s discussion touches upon contemporary tellers taking material from foreign cultures to perform outside those cultures. Similar effects happen when tellers comfortable and recognisable within one culture or social group step outside it, with their new audiences also finding the telling or story unsatisfactory, even while ostensibly professing support and idolisation of traditional culture. Contemporary tellers performing to traditional audiences, if insensitive to cultural mores, likewise produce negative reactions.

The more common experience for contemporary tellers is performing to those not a community. Tellers cannot possibly be aware of all influences affecting listeners nor anticipate their effect on performers. Unsure of listeners’ definitions, they make assumptions about audience expectations. Imagining audiences and their reactions becomes necessary. Over-reliance on theory-of-mind, as discussed, means performers
and audiences become disengaged. If the milieu tellers perform in are of a similar kind, their abilities, styles and repertoires become limited and overall appeal to new audiences (and eventually old ones) diminishes. Storytelling can then actually repel potential new audiences who perceive activities belonging to a self-selected elite.  

As contemporary storytelling evolved, created audiences formed temporary communities and/or 'mini' cultures, and events became cultural-social manifestations, rather than the philosophical-psychological initiatives first underpinning their raison d'être (Stone, 1986, 13-31). Even so, modern audiences seldom automatically share a sense of identity, community and common emotions. Unconscious 'bourgeoisification' of storytelling allows some audiences a sense of comfort, predisposing spontaneity and informality. Simultaneously it invites and repels different sectors, often without 'comfortable' participants realising. Ciaran Carson, traditional musician, celebrated poet and former arts concil literature officer, pointed out

> Because we're in an age when things have to be taught, we're in danger of losing spontaneity and the craic.... The places I've seen storytelling occur, new revival storytelling, are usually middle class places—libraries and schools and places like that. They're not right for telling in. What goes on is very banal.

(Ryan, 1995, 38)

Fastening onto easily replicable elements matching ambience of other storytelling events, real or imagined, does not necessarily achieve genuine storytelling.

This is not criticism but reported observation of more prominently and commonly referred to examples of contemporary storytelling. Western society has changed significantly, and storytelling arises from and reflects this, acknowledged by Tony McAuley, a writer, traditional musician and television/radio producer.

> Storytelling cannot be what it used to be—we cannot recreate the seanchi. It has to emerge naturally. There is nothing wrong with its being the activity of the middle classes. If that is what is now. We must accept the storyteller is affected by life today.

(Ryan1995, 38)
Elitism must be avoided, for this exploits sources of storytelling, committing cultural appropriation and disenfranchisement, while at the same time satisfying only a (self-) select group and excluding those who need it most. Genuine storytelling will cease to exist.

Audience responsibility is cyclical—choices tellers make cause audience reactions that feed into other choices by the teller, all carried out intuitively and/or quasi-automatically.

Styles can change...depending upon a teller's grasp of the nature, interests, and skills of the audience. None of these stylistic choices necessarily make a better storytelling or storyteller; stylistic choices can't predetermine aesthetic effects. Listeners, then, need to be aware of their own stylistic preferences so as to not let them predetermine or unduly influence critical judgments.

(Martin, 1996, 144-5)

Audiences fully within their role, as critical, knowledgeable and alert listeners, vitally contribute to emergent quality in genuine storytelling. Tellers must negotiate complexities, 'reading' audiences. Most prefer not to have set programmes of stories, like a playscript. Programmes rigidly set, popular with many contemporary tellers and organisers, work to an extent, but can alienate. Natural audiences used to genuine storytelling feel patronised. Conversely, listeners expecting formality, particularly middle-class and educated groups, possess preconceptions of storytelling more like a play. They may be put off by shambolic, improvisational or spontaneous styles or failures to keep to time, particularly of tellers outside their usual milieu. Experienced or talented tellers and listeners make allowances, varying performances to avoid negative reactions.

Audience aspects obviously affecting storytelling include their age group, and gender, ethnic, racial, linguistic and social backgrounds. Performing to young primary school listeners will or should predetermine choice of stories, language and style different from tellers' approaches to teenagers in youth clubs or secondary schools. Pensioners, business people and athletes expecting after-dinner entertainment in social or sports clubs, and adults at storytelling festivals or concerts require different uses of repertoire and styles.
Audiences of one predominant gender (or age, etc.) not only affect what is told and how, but also audience perceptions of the stories and event and their reactions. Perceptions by mixed-age audience may be affected by adults noticing reactions of children, and vice versa. This is also true of mixed ethnic, religious or racial groupings.

Tellers performing *primarily for* one type of audience will have more distinctive repertoires and styles exclusive to that group. When attempting to transfer to another type of audience (especially for commercial gain) often they are unable to achieve genuine storytelling. Failure may suggest limits to talent, but equally plausible is a lack of experience and consequent cognition means the teller has a smaller sampler of mental configurations from which to draw in terms of narratives or styles or both. Ideology limits both teller and audiences.

**Natural and Artificial Audiences**

Natural audiences accept storytelling as a regular, ordinary occurrence within social exchanges and cultural expressions. ‘There is nothing either esoteric or exotic about folklore in small-scale context, that is, material aimed at an audience reasonably intimate with the producers. It is often so deeply embedded in the lives and minds of a community that little discussion is considered necessary.’ (Brewer, 1994, 5-6) This also occurs regularly within traditional high-risk, formal and highly cultural events, such as in ceilidh houses and religious rituals.

It can be present in contemporary storytelling. As with mega-identity, distinctions between artificial and natural audiences may appear a matter of self-consciousness. Storytelling considered exotic or esoteric storytelling is likely to be artificial and middle-class, or perceived that way by the middle class. Self-consciousness arises from overt awareness of purposes and intentions for storytelling. When the primary purpose for gathering is storytelling, events can become artificial. Reality is, of course, more subtle and complex, since storytelling deals simultaneously with many individuals' cognition.
Contemporary storytelling appeals by asking participants to believe specific, agreed upon ‘recreated’ images of storytelling. However, the choice of models is numerous and complex for all participants. Different expectations, presumptions, and definitions because of unique experiences, editing, or reconfiguring goes on in each mind continuously before, during and after storytelling. Each individual, or self-identifying group, selects one interpretation as the ‘correct’ model. Ideology and consciousness influence this choice with conscious application of and strict adherence to ideology creating artificial audiences, performers and events.

Some contemporary tellers try predetermining listener responses. If something goes ‘wrong’ in performance, audiences are blamed as they are the variable least amenable to control. Placing audiences at fault indicates artificiality, as it is the teller’s responsibility to serve text and audience, with priority given to the latter. Here contemporary storytelling differs from the aesthetic and history of alternative theatre, though sharing its roots. Kershaw stresses the ostensible starting point of alternative theatre was always the audience and its community, with aesthetics shaped by the culture of audiences (Kershaw, 1992, 88-9). Although contemporary storytelling may have similarly started with interest in ‘the folk’ and ‘their culture’ and desires to ‘save it’ or ‘revive’ it, focus definitely shifted.

The nineteen sixties folk music revival and countercultural movements created an environment into which storytelling, a tradition-based art that emphasizes human contacts, could fit naturally and grow. However...there was no firm cultural definition for the role or actions of performers, who wanted to call themselves storytellers. (Peiffer, 1994, 42)

This led to a performer rather than audience driven aesthetic. Though participants may still express desires to ‘save’, ‘revive’, or ‘preserve’ storytelling traditions, in reality choices made to do this have unselfconsciously, and even consciously, too often put focus on the teller instead.

15 Appendix I., 59.1—59.2., Journal Observations: Means of determining listener participation
Tellers use and listeners hear only what is inherent in traditional texts and ways of telling when they are *useful* or *meaningful* to tellers. Contemporary tellers subconsciously, or presumptuously, rely on audiences to provide tolerance and manufactured participation to define an aesthetic. Folk aesthetic differs from art aesthetic, though sharing concepts borrowed from criticisms of both genres.

A crucial difference lies in the audience.... [The] narrator delivers his piece as the words pour from his mind, and even though he may have told the tale often, when they are literally recorded many imperfections appear—false starts, circuitous sentences, tangled grammar. Such faults little affect the response of the listening circle, for speech of the first rate folk narrator is fresh, clear, and vivid and the flaws that may vex the pampered reader vanish in the excitement of the living text. An added physical dimension enters into the element of folk style...and the whole human presence mold the recitation. The audiences, too, condition the performance, and so do external factors of time and place.

(Dorson, 1972, 101-2)

Contemporary storytelling participants, being middle-class and educated (particularly audiences), imbue texts and performances with bourgeois values without any conscious consideration of effect. One aspect of influence was heightened emphasis on oral interpretation and public speaking; the imperfections become less tolerated. Slick almost plasticised patter delivery becomes common. Like alternative theatre, contemporary storytelling is expansionist, seeking wider constituencies; seeking and incorporating these affects style and content of performances (Kershaw, 1992). Expansion requires compromise.

This is problematic if organisers or performers believe storytelling has messianic potentials, or want to share pearls of wisdom about sensitive issues: the environment, world peace, or relationships, etc. with 'preaching' or 'posing' the result rather than telling. If presuppositions of audiences and motivations of tellers and organisers are at cross purposes genuine storytelling does not exist, but this is not an 'either-or' scenario. Degrees of complexity exist both in presentation and comprehension of tales and tellings. 'Another aspect of cross-cultural differences in storytelling has to do not only with how

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16 Appendix I., 60.0., *Journal Observations: Imported call and response techniques to engage audience participation*
the point is communicated but what the point can be' (Tannen, 1982, 11). Transformation can and does take place in each individual, but differently. Any interpretations could be valid; art has a multiplicity of possible meanings. Ethnicity and class as well as experience within natural and artificial audiences, especially, influence cognitive responses.

Traditional tellers acknowledge this, mentioning how they must change stories for contemporary audiences found at festivals and concerts. It is a mistake to think of traditional storytellers telling traditional stories in a traditional way when contexts are not authentic (that is, their own environments). Dorson, Bauman, Tannen and others have long observed this. (Dorson, 1972, 101; Bauman, 1986, 17; Tannen, 1982, 13) Genuine storytelling does not necessarily happen with traditional tellers in such situations—though audiences may think it genuine and enter the storytelling experience. If it does happen, the teller has changed the story or style to accommodate the audience (making, some would argue, the performance not traditional).

**The Audience Continuum**

Strict division of audiences into 'artificial' and 'natural' is a misrepresentation. 'To the extent that our intelligence is bound up with our ability to tell the right story at the right time, understanding a story means being able to correlate the story we are hearing with the one we already know' (Schank, 2000, 21). Audiences of any social class must correlate stories and ways of telling to what they already know. Similarities of stories and preconceptions about how to tell, listen to and make use of stories and experiences, knowledge of which comes from other experiences, place audiences between the two terms. 'Artificial' and 'natural' are two ends of another continuum of listening modes, a different aspect to the performance continuum. The terms are useful when describing listeners in contemporary storytelling and their role in the storytelling experience.

The audience continuum between 'artificial' and 'natural' sees the latter with listeners so
informed and attuned to teller's personality, style of telling, text and context they are almost unaware of these, and the acts of telling and listening are taken for granted and incorporated into regular socio-cultural occurrences. Informal, anecdotal storytelling lower on the performance continuum might take place as daily routines, but formal storytelling higher up the performance continuum can still incorporate natural audiences, taking a place as part of wider socio-cultural events that could be anything from a weekly visit, monthly ceilidh, or annual calendar custom. The listeners, not making a major, conscious issue of the acts of telling and listening, enter the storytelling experience quickly and deeply but also leave it more easily and quickly, entering into conversations arising from the telling.

A natural audience can, but need not, be aware of storytelling going on. Traditional storytelling is not necessarily natural, and it is a mistake to idealise tradition, assuming it fixed and always natural.

Traditional communities almost everywhere in the contemporary world have undergone rapid and radical transformations that have resulted in the loss of artistic forms and expressions like oral narration. We should remember, though, that changes in social and technological patterns have always been a natural part of human existence: tellers who wished to keep their art fully alive have met challenges with innovative responses. I emphasize this to avoid the stereotype of oral tradition as unchanging, "pure" expression that suffers from innovation. Quite simply, active narrators cannot survive without good listeners, and when their audiences change they must respond without losing the rich heritage upon which they depend. It may even be necessary to seek out new audiences in unfamiliar contexts.

(Stone, 1996, 168)

Given this state of flux, with audiences always changing and requiring performers to respond, what once was artificial can become natural.

Taking into account, then, the listening modes, which are in themselves on a sliding scale or continuum, one can begin to envision an audience continuum, a mirror to (or intersecting axis with) the performance continuum (See Figure 6). What I hope is shown by this model are the shades of overlapping listening modes and potentials for making a performance natural or artificial. Regarding risks in terms of the audience, the greatest
risks, of course, are that a listener is bored, insulted or offended, or manipulated into believing something detrimental to their well-being or society's well-being. Of course they bring their own opinions, feelings and perceptions, a point repeatedly stressed in this chapter, and have some responsibility for what they risk. The rewards are, on the surface, entertainment, beguilement, enlightenment, and/or education; deeper, within cognition, as already explored, are those transformations that may be either temporary or permanent.

Artificial audiences are always self-conscious, aware telling and listening are conscious efforts. Whatever mental configurations are applied, only when transformation takes place does the situation become natural and/or genuine storytelling. These states can exist side by side in the same event. One listener can be actively engaged, accommodating and assimilating cognitively what comes from text, teller and overall experience. The listener next to him or her can remain untouched. Psychology, and the personal, social and cultural dynamics involved, has as much to tell about contemporary storytelling as it has potential to learn from it.

**Summary**

Some scholars argue that natural and/or traditional audiences were never so, with audiences today no different to those of the past. Doc Rowe, a folklorist, believes
historically traditional acts in and of themselves—storytelling, music and song, dance, ritual, calendar customs, and so forth—brought individuals together; with active participation forming community after or as a part of the process of the acts. Joseph Sobol’s historical analysis of the North American storytelling revival describes it not as a revival of storytelling traditions but of individuals’ talents and self-worth, and the sense of community within modern society (Sobol, 1999). Additionally, some critics assert counter-cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s developed into communities, providing natural audiences for ‘revival’ art forms such as storytelling and traditional music (Weinker-Piepito, 1993, O’Giollain, 2000). Even so, and the arguments are convincing, revival communities differ greatly from those developing slowly where people live cheek-by-jowl, taking for granted everyone knows each other’s business, and with relationships evolving over several years. Folklorists recognise this setting for traditional storytelling, finding discomfort in contemporary manifestations.

Contemporary storytelling participants may object to the terms artificial storytelling and artificial audiences. These are not meant to be pejorative, describing rather than defining phenomena recognised by any experienced participants in and scholars of contemporary and/or traditional storytelling. Clearly audiences contribute to whether storytelling is artificial, natural, and/or genuine as much as to whether the storytelling is traditional or contemporary. A more clear, physical pointer to these descriptions of storytelling is in the management and manipulation of space in contemporary storytelling.
CHAPTER 5. NARRATIVE SPACE: THE DIFFERENT TYPES AND THEIR ROLES IN LIMINAL STATES AND THE STORYTELLING EXPERIENCE

Part I. Materialism and Physicality Defining Space and its Uses in Storytelling

*Physical, Textual and Cognitive Domains Making Narrative Space*

Storytelling happens somewhere and at a particular time. Place and time interact with teller, text and listeners and therefore ‘spatial analysis is important to begin to take the specifics of place, rather than the idealised empty space, seriously’ (Read, 1993, 159). Storytelling does not require specified, unchangeable aspects of place in which only storytelling acts are found. Storytelling space can be created or transformed by selection, change or rearrangement. Perceiving storytelling as action and event, the action including telling and listening, and the event being the total context: performance, audience, setting and reasons for these to come together provides means to specify place in two ways (Bauman, 1984, 11). There is *space* for telling and listening, the action, and *place* where cultural and social expression provides meaning and purpose for the action, making actions events. Different specifics in both domains contribute to aspects of Wilson's paraperformance and identifying storytelling in terms of the performance continuum (Wilson, 1997, 27-8, 30-1), as well as storytelling axes and modes, and the audience continuum with listening modes.

Folklorists studying traditional tellers recognise the importance of place in the storytellers’ formation. Patricia Lysaght’s study of a traditional Irish teller is one example. ‘Certain aspects of her local environment were of fundamental importance for Jenny’s later emergence as an active bearer of tradition. Circumstances in her home milieu contributed to a climate in which beliefs and narratives were transmitted and the affairs of the time, both family and local, social and economic, were broached and discussed’ (Lysaght, 1991, 24). What creates *space for*, as well as space’s contribution *in*, any storytelling comes from social, cultural, psychological and philosophical contributions as well as mere physical aspects of place. The mistake many in contemporary storytelling make is to assume traditional storytelling in the past existed
as an event and in a space as it does for them now. Embedded within material and social existence to the extent it was almost unremarkable, traditional storytelling often sees stories merely alluded to or summarised in snatches of conversation during mundane activities shared within the community. Changes in environment contribute to transformation of cognition in all participants, changing the status, styles, repertoires, and opportunities for traditional tellers when they actively enter spaces for contemporary storytelling. Individuals provide socio-cultural and psychological-philosophical contributions informing and forming storytellers and acts of telling and listening.

As individuals and actions are embedded in materialism, with all maintaining transcendental elements in a cyclical informative process, cognitive theory has potential particularly to explain the uses and effects of space. Little has been done to see how environment creates contemporary storytellers and events, nor how environments sustain, inspire or provoke these in and outside of performance situations. Given potentially infinite variety of types of storytelling, storytelling events, and storytelling spaces one must first identify common elements of physical spaces for oral narrative acts and events, and the actions dealing with space that contribute to or arise from storytelling within it.

Already it is clear that physical environments maintain and are maintained by transcendental influences. Another form of space for consideration is that within the story. Settings, created by words of texts, exist as imagined spaces for tellers and listeners. Physical expressions of tellers and listeners in the real world—words spoken and heard, paralinguistic expressions, body attitudes—interact cognitively and emotionally within participants creating that liminal state, making story settings 'real', a place 'other' than the one wherein physical acts of telling and listening happen. Physical expressions lead to negotiated, agreed upon imagined settings: abstract, and transcendent over physical settings. These abstract images consist of both remembered real and imagined places and events that participants relate to specific spaces: where the story happens, but also real places participants remember and associate to provide meaning to described settings with which they are not directly familiar. For those
listening to a *Märchen* featuring a castle, if they have never seen or visited a castle the image they hold may come from mediated images (film, cartoons, paintings, etc.) or a real building that sufficiently represents a castle to that listener. Although transcendental or possibly abstract, story settings have emotional and physiological impact.

The reality of imagined space suggests a third domain, cognitive space, where mental processes of narrative are created, remembered, produced, or monitored in the minds of tellers and listeners. Scientific studies state this is simultaneously a physical place, the brain, and a theoretical one. We develop physiologically and socially to possess and use a theory of mind and other immaterial mental processes that help negotiate natural and cultural worlds. Crane delineates physicality of mind in her assertion of cultural and literary criticism based on cognitive theory:

>(C)o(n)ceptivist mental concepts seem to be “material” in three ways; (1) they emerge from and consist in the neural matter of the brain; (2) they are shaped by perceptions in the physical “reality” and by the experience of living in the body; and (3) they use metaphor to extend concepts derived from material experience to immaterial abstractions .

(Crane, 2001, 17)

Bruner emphasises that emotion and social interaction are necessary for developing theory of mind (Bruner, 1990, 21). Immaterial abstractions, both theory of mind and oral and written narrative, of necessity intersect in physical and social reality (and in the physiology of participating individuals). This then expands Crane’s theory, since the experience of living in the body includes cultural and social experiences in that body, to which the use of metaphor expands concepts. Narration, as extended metaphor, is integral to this process.

How mental spaces, physiological and abstract, contribute to contemporary storytelling is significant, and seldom addressed in performance or folkloristic theories. Bauman hints at such when discussing situated behaviour. Storytelling is situated behaviour, moderated by regular and identifiable mental processes. Developmental theories, indicating consistent growth in human imagination and intelligence throughout life, mean cognition benefits and is benefited by all types of oral narrative art at all levels of
the performance continuum. Cognition begun, nurtured, and maintained through storytelling and listening enables us to process narrative meaningfully and purposefully.

It would be misguided to separate physical, temporal, textual and cognitive domains in studies of contemporary storytelling. Natural tendencies have been to focus on the most immediate, such as the physical, the most pertinent to certain researches, the cognitive, or the easiest to understand and analyse, such as text. Focused study is useful, so long as the overall make up of narrative space is remembered. Some delineation of domains is necessary so what is meant by narrative space remains clear and complexities of interactions and connections are understood. To some extent, if one remembers Piaget's and other cognitists' description of universal domains, narrative space is that nexus where mathematical and linguistic domains are one, or at least in dialogue with each other.

**Physical Space**

Physical space is easily observed and defined. In ideal physical space storytelling happens naturally, or it is hoped to happen naturally. Physical space can be affected by participants, managed or manipulated by tellers or listeners to correspond with their mental images of what storytelling is, what a story is about, and where ideally it (both act and narrative) happens. Physical space affects textual space in stories and/or cognitive space when telling or listening happens. Interactions of participants demarcate action and event in all storytelling, with special aspects of interaction complicit in contemporary storytelling. Physical space provides specificity for interactions, and can be divided into observable sub-categories:

- ideal and antagonistic spaces
- manipulated or changed space
- managed space
- culturally specified space

Subcategories here are not diametrically opposed, but exist on a kind of palette, with elements of each sometimes bleeding into one or other depending on the nature of the event and traits of its participants.
Ideal and Antagonistic Space

Ideal space exists for storytelling, though not necessarily a particular place or specific kind of place: various storytellers and listeners have different preferences. Radically different spaces share elements contributing to ideal conditions for storytelling. Interviews, observations and direct experience confirm ideal spaces are comfortable for all, creating or suggesting intimacy and informality while structured to provide focus and eliminate distractions. They are adaptable for tellers and/or listeners to meet those terms, defined by:

- shapes of space
- ratio of distance
- sizes of audiences and of spaces.

Such elements delineate areas between performers and listeners, with demarcations suggesting both event and action. Consistent priorities define ideal space. The first keeps audiences within a teller’s peripheral vision and the teller within listeners’ direct focus. The second is positioning that allows the teller to make meaningful eye and vocal contact with the greatest ease, including those furthest away. Both the visual and aural are important cognitively and must work in harmony. Intimacy and spontaneity or a semblance of either or both is achieved by maintaining these priorities: comfort, however, is not only physical but psychological.

Antagonistic space obviously displays elements counter to achieving physical and psychological comfort in telling and listening. Being less comfortable hinders informality and intimacy, creating physical and/or psychological distance between participants and prevents focus. Few spaces are utterly antagonistic, and manipulation or management makes the worst spaces workable for genuine storytelling.

Spaces are ideal or antagonistic not only because of physical attributes. Different emphases on specific priorities reveal something about the cognition of participants,
influenced culturally, socially, philosophically, and/or psychologically. Cultural influences, purposes for events, and predispositions of participants make spaces ideal for some and antagonistic to others. While priorities remain consistent on the teller’s and listeners’ terms, variations making spaces ideal or antagonistic depend on participants’ opinions or reasons for events. When storytelling, participants’ abilities to use or endure a space—abilities that are innate, acquired through experience and/or cultural conditions—also reflect antagonistic or complementary aspects of that space while simultaneously revealing participants’ foibles derived from those innate qualities, and/or socio-cultural conditions.

**Shape**

No single shape of space is ideal, shape being the element that reveals cultural influences as well as an event’s purpose more than others. In contemporary storytelling two shapes predominate. One, primarily for performance, delineates performer and audience areas allowing tellers to dominate. The other is for equals where no one teller predominates, usually a space for sharing or learning. Delineation is not absolute; shapes sometimes combine due to the nature of events or character traits of participants or both.

Performer and audience areas are variously defined, always in relation to each other. Performance areas may simply be a chair, or chairs, or a chair and table facing what is clearly the audience. They may be raised, on a platform, stage or by means of a high stool. They may be decorated, with curtains or drapes, props, or scenery or lighting effects. Architectural features, especially in purpose-built performance spaces such as theatres, demarcate performer/listener areas automatically. Audience areas are delineated by the arrangement of chairs, carpets or cushions, facing performer areas. They can be predetermined by participants’ habits (as in the case of children entering school assembly halls automatically taking usual places on the floor, or for

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1 Appendix I., 62.1.—62.5., *Journal Observations and Interview Transcript: Examples of decorated storytelling space, performer and/or listener areas, and reactions to them.*

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performances in churches or pubs with listeners gravitating to their normal places for other activities in those venues).

A space for equals usually takes the form of a circle or semi-circle. If a teller does take focus it is for a short time, willingly giving way to other narrators a majority of the time. Workshop leaders might dominate slightly by leaving more space on either side of the chair, standing in place or walking to the centre. Any participant breaking the equality of the circle and taking focus would do something similar. This supports the definition of performance, stating ‘there must be both a separation and an interaction between the performer and audience…’ (Peiffer, 1994, 9). Those accepting responsibility for storytelling take ownership by staying seated on the same level as others, sitting higher up or straighter, standing, or moving in. Other strategies indicating momentary separation from the rest come through vocal quality and/or body language.

With no definite, semi-permanent performer/audience areas tellers themselves sometimes break the barrier between performer and audience. Cultural influences mean either they unconsciously do so, or may consciously decide moves with calculation for anticipated effect. Occasionally listeners encroach upon performer space, again, unconsciously or consciously, by invitation or by their own initiative. ‘If the storyteller is himself, it is still a performing self, a self who meets the audience with the skills of a performer. This center is a place to come back to between stories, between playing character; it is a safety zone’ (Wischner, 1991, 82). Here Wischner suggests the teller has a mega-identity—a ‘character’—which is itself established by demarcation and use of areas in space. How developed a consciousness of mega-identity is determines stylistic techniques affecting this interplay or disruption of performer/audience areas.

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2 Appendix I., 63.1.–63.6., Interview Transcripts and Journal Observations: How traditional and contemporary storytellers react/adapt to difference environments.
3 Appendix. I., 64.1.–64.3., Journal Observations: Tellers using audience space, and tellers sharing space in performance area.
Consciously or not, participants prioritise conditions for areas, setting the aforementioned requirements for ideal space. Listeners need to be at least within the teller’s peripheral vision. Tellers require visual, vocal and aural closeness to facilitate closeness and contact, resulting in spatial relationships with angles that are usually softened, so a rounded shape appears or is suggested. Even in the equality of the circle shape for sharing and workshops, certain angles assert themselves so one narrator can briefly take responsibility for proceedings. The teller’s area shape, if ideal, suggests natural allowances for the best display of Alexander and Govrin’s acting modes.

Audience’s area shapes support or disrupt ‘listening modes’ communicated to tellers and initiating different acting modes creating the audience continuum, as suggested earlier. Certainly physical attitudes of audiences, or specific audience members, affect the teller’s enjoyment of a telling and how effective the teller is, since the teller is easily distracted or put off by non-attentive or antagonistic listeners. This recognition of the importance and use of linked performer-audience areas within space certainly supports Thomson’s theory of actors using personational styles. In Renaissance theatre, more amenable performer/audience ratios in terms of distance arose from or required integrated areas with a space that relied on or encouraged a physicality of performer/listener interaction, similar to that found in traditional storytelling.4

The development of representational styles of performance necessitated evolution in theatre, and later cinematic, technologies, so that performer space was demarcated in the extreme making audiences voyeurs rather than participants. There can be a difference between performer space and performance space, in the sense that participants view a particular area and the performance that goes on within it as being separate from the space the audience inhabits: the audience is then passive, disengaged and having no effect upon the performance. Performance spaces with less or little demarcation, and with audiences encompassing and even entering performer area and/or the performer entering audience area, mean that the symbiotic relationship of performer-audience interactions also incorporates audience in the performance and depends upon audience

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4 Appendix I., 765.0., Journal Observation: Conversation with Mark Rylance regarding audience responses and actor/audience interaction at Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre.
interaction. If another listener is within one’s peripheral or direct vision, reactions and comments are incorporated into each listener’s cognitive and emotional responses, in the same way a teller incorporates these. Conscious and unselfconscious communication also goes on *between* audience members before and during storytelling, contributing to the quality of the event and making a space ideal or antagonistic.

**Ratio and Distances: ‘Proxemics’**

Spatial ratios between tellers and listeners contribute to making ideal or antagonistic spaces. Wischner applied Edward Hall’s coined term ‘proxemics’ to explore areas and spaces where contemporary storytelling happens. In proxemics there are four zones of person-to-person communication:

- Intimate distance (6-18 inches)
- Personal distance (varying from one-and-a-half feet to four feet)
- Social distance (four to twelve feet)
- Public distance (twelve to twenty-five feet or more)

(Hall, 1982, 113)

The nature of proxemics varies culturally, socially and individually. ‘Various techniques are used to control the proxemics of a storytelling event as the new teller desires to increase or decrease the distance between himself and his audience’ (Wischner, 1991, 82). In contemporary storytelling, affected as it is by bourgeois conventions, commercial considerations and modern technologies supporting various performance arts (microphones, stage lighting, amplifying systems, and so on), proxemics can be enormously different but aim at similar effects, usually the ideal of intimacy. However, the underlying objectives either maintain personal distances for storytelling while suggesting intimate distance. Storytelling at festivals and in large concert halls, with large groups, means tellers, consciously or not, develop styles that achieve or suggest intimacy across social and public distances not always successfully, meaning genuine storytelling is achieved with difficulty in such environments.

In ideal situations, listeners seem never more than one to two metres away in relation to tellers. Sitting closer usually proves no problem, while sitting further away—three
metres or more—can be problematical without artificial means to project the telling: e.g., electronic amplification, a platform or proscenium, stage lighting, etc. Tellers seem happiest within performance areas of 1.5 to 2 square metres. There are exceptions, especially for tellers with physical styles incorporating large mimetic gestures or dance. Ratio of distances also exists vertically, with the height of tellers or performance areas affecting acts and events. Some tellers perform on the same level as listeners. Most work at a slightly higher plane by standing or sitting on a seat above the listeners' level of sitting, or by standing or sitting on a platform or stage, or by asking or requiring listeners to sit upon the floor. Tellers too high above listeners experience the same negative affects by being too distant, experiencing discomfort through voice strain and lack of intimacy. Proscenium arch stages with high platforms are potentially antagonistic, creating too much separation between teller and listener areas.

Some instances require audiences to stand. Such space suggests antagonism to genuine storytelling, but much depends on circumstance. No chairs and an unpleasant surface might mean listeners are more comfortable standing. Corridors or outdoor space pose challenges yet can be workable and natural. In all such circumstances all participants, particularly the teller, have responsibility to make the space ideal for genuine storytelling. Tellers' uses of ratios regarding distance and height come into play. Determined by tellers' styles, area definition is altered in performances as tellers respond to various conditions, including the space. Using body and voice as well as technology, tellers adapt telling style and techniques to space so as to create a real or semblance of size, distances, angles and ratios contributing to intimacy. Size and nature of space partly determine size and nature of audiences, with all determining the physicality of performances and the employment of angles and ratios.

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5 Appendix 1, 66.1–66.3., Interview Transcripts and Journal Observations: Problems storytelling in formal, or difficult, spaces.
6 Appendix 1, 67.1–67.3., Journal Observations: 'Found Space' or Unusual Space working for storytelling performances.
Size

Many tellers indicate an ideal size of audience, usually preferring smaller groups to achieve that sense of intimacy, but also for practical reasons. Size is relative, however. While 'small' audiences lower on the continuum or in traditional settings means two or three listeners, or even a dozen (automatically suggesting intimate and/or personal proxemics at work), contemporary storytellers making a living through financial requirements define small as thirty to sixty or even a hundred listeners. Groups larger than one hundred necessitate exaggerated use of voice, potentially causing stress, or requiring amplification, a distancing device that contradicts intimacy, giving only a semblance of this state. Many contemporary storytelling events, such as festivals, see audiences of hundreds or even thousands. Electronic amplification is then required, much affecting the nature of storytelling, and tellers' styles, choices of text, and audience interaction.

Intimacy can be achieved, even genuine storytelling can happen; but, of necessity, of a different quality. As Birch pointed out, storytelling is a continuum, not a hierarchy, and whatever place it holds on that continuum does not guarantee the storytelling is either automatically 'dull' or 'glorious' (Birch, 1998, 312-3). While physical space clearly contributes to 'shifts', 'perceptions' and other elements Birch describes there are still philosophical and psychological contributions to what space is and what storytelling is within it. Socio-cultural values are also reflected in physical space and tied up with these perceptions regarding space and storytelling.

Contemporary storytellers labelled as professional discomfort some, not only because of mannerisms, styles and attitudes of the professional tellers, but because of spaces performed in, which alienate by the size and nature of the space and audiences attracted to such venues. In these spaces '...heightened intentionality and distance from the audience make some people reluctant to tell...from any platform outside their immediate circle' (Birch, 1998, 315). As made clear in Chapter One, Birch re-defined the professional teller as a platform storyteller to suggest a kind of storytelling not culturally bound. The term is removed from an 'emotionally charged and politicized
history of value judgments' (Birch, 1998, 316). This definition also allows the contemporary storyteller automatically to assume, seize or create a mental and emotional distance from listeners, which of course has bearing on our understanding of cognition in contemporary storytelling. Space can neuter both the act and event of telling. Doing so means one can ignore important cultural and political contributions to any storytelling or listening experiences, thus preventing a true understanding of cognition in storytelling, dependent on all these things. To divorce contemporary storytelling from the cultural and political is dangerous.

'Platform style' mannerisms rely on exaggerated vocal and paralinguistic techniques and, often, the use of amplification. Physical interaction with microphone stands is a common example of this, or its use for creating sound effects. It becomes a common, even cliched style. When participants then imitate each other, as has already been observed, mannerisms useful in communicating to audiences of hundreds or thousands are carried over meaninglessly and uselessly to smaller intimate performances. The result is artificial, militating against the storytelling experience and genuine storytelling. Work in a certain space combined with non-reflective practices based on unconscious imitation of the platform storyteller leads to social, cultural, political, and aesthetic phenomena defining contemporary storytelling. Cognizantly or intuitively, the teller uses space to assure communication of narrative between all participants. When cognizant, manipulation and management of space can dominate the teller's practices.

**Manipulated or Changed Space and Managed Space**

Some tellers impose their will upon spaces, others adapt to spaces as they find them. Both approaches affect, for good or ill, performances and listeners' receptions and perceptions. Those seemingly oblivious to space intuitively adjust performances in relation to it, with performers aware of some spatial elements at least and consciously reacting to them. In responding tellers change or use those elements to enhance

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7 Appendix. 1., 68.1.—68.2., Journal Observations and Interview Transcripts: Use of electronic technology in storytelling, especially the standardisation of vocal styles and the use of microphone as a prop.
performance. Change is manipulation of space, using the space as found is management.

Common manipulation of space finds listeners put into long, slightly curved rows, a 'third of a circle curves' (Schimmel, 1992, 35) [See Figure 7]. Such assembly brings the ideal sized audience into intimate, workable defined teller/audience areas. This arrangement can easily incorporate a hundred listeners comfortably, achieving the atmosphere of smaller groups.

![Figure 7. Ideal configuration for audience area in contemporary storytelling event (Schimmel, 1992)](image)

Listeners not assembled in this arrangement force different manipulation and management solutions. If sitting in straight lines, extending beyond a teller's peripheral vision, or divided with aisles between rows, eye contact with all listeners is impossible. The teller may stand up to walk back and forth while telling rather than remain seated or standing in one place, if those are the teller's usual postures, or stand further away to create intimacy through eye contact rather than physical closeness. The teller surrounded or tightly hemmed in by listeners may constantly turn round, or twist round at the waist, neck and shoulders to address listeners, or even raise his or her body above the crowd by standing on a stool, rail, chair or table to achieve vocal and eye contact.
If listeners are too far away or standing, the teller may ask them to draw in or form a close circle, or the teller may move towards listeners. Another manipulation involves not only arranging audience/performer proximities to each other in terms of ratio, distance and angle but also the choice of the overall space used to hold both teller and listener areas. Both the contemporary storyteller and the event organiser make conscious, planned efforts changing environments that are chosen for that purpose or specifically constructed. Tents of various kinds—from traditional benders to yurts, teepees and large expensive marquees—are purposely set up, or permanent architectural or landscape features selected for storytelling events. [See Figures 8-14: photos showing examples of the variety of storytelling spaces and how storytellers manage them.] Some contemporary storytellers and organisers make conscious decisions choosing such arrangements. Others copy them, carrying them out without conscious choice but assuming such arrangements necessary for storytelling as they perceive it.

Cultural and social influences come into play, affecting cognition which determines ways of telling, texts, and participant interaction. Assumptions about space and how it is used determine the nature of contemporary storytelling, even, perhaps, creating it. Reasons for manipulation and management of space should be ‘...ultimately designed to enhance the status of the spectator, to place her in a more ideological efficacious position vis-à-vis the show, project, and company—in short, to empower her’ (Kershaw, 1992, 24). Space contributes greatly to liminality, placing contemporary storytelling participants ‘betwixt and between’ permanent social roles and modes of awareness, transforming everyone into a listener. This can and does happen, and ideally must for genuine storytelling. However the best of intentions in contemporary storytelling can find manipulation and management detracting focus from audiences and onto the teller, retarding interactions necessary for genuine storytelling. Large spaces, such as theatres or open-air festivals of storytelling, can have the tendency to transform audiences from every-day social roles into mere spectators rather than listeners.

In contemporary storytelling emphasis and empowerment too often fall not upon listeners, nor on the physical space nor the social event but, primarily and most usually,
on the teller. When non-traditional entertainment models are used to create space for contemporary storytelling events, the status of the teller is enhanced. This inflation of ego, discussed earlier, attracts many to take on inappropriate roles or roles they are incapable of maintaining responsibly. Space is a prominent part of this attraction when it makes listeners into observers instead of participants. For genuine storytelling space must do the opposite, achieving Kershaw's ideal. Foley recognised this in his imagined 'ideal' museum of folk arts in the future.

For living traditions, we thus need nothing less than...an interactive environment in which visitors are urged not just to view but also to become involved..., to change their status from observers to participants.

(Foley, 1998, 23-4)

Folklorists recognise the evolution of their discipline led many non-specialists to view storytelling as an object, with practices in some form of stasis (Foley, 1998, 27-30). Contemporary storytelling, inheriting without question, as mentioned in Chapter One (Folkloristic, Romantic, and Nationalistic Influences) and Two ('True' Traditional and Folk Narrative Texts in Contemporary Repertoires), Romantic attitudes regarding traditional stories as 'dead', 'objects' in need of reviving', results in storytelling events similar to the museum specimen in the glass case rather than a lived experience.

Many tellers change space (by management or manipulation) ostensibly for the audience’s benefit, but performers’ own considerations come into play, too. ‘There is also something in altering the space to suit myself that feels good’ (Schimmel, 1992, 35). Even if a space automatically suggests itself for storytelling, tellers will impose themselves somehow, or all participants try to demarcate the space as the place of a specific event. Again, mega-identity and ego-satisfaction come into play.

While initial motivations for contemporary tellers and events organisers was a love of story and storytelling, the necessity to create audiences to listen to and support (or 'revive') storytelling followed, as noted by Peiffer, Wischner, and others (Peiffer, 1994, 42-3; Wischner, 1991, 18-9). They sought tradition-based art that would arise naturally and grow organically, emphasising human contacts. Yet, while using a traditionally
Figure 8. Storyteller Billy Teare telling stories to a family group of mixed ages in a large hall. Note how children sit on floor, parents on chairs lined up behind, that the set up is provides a ‘shallow and wide’ listener area as opposed to a ‘narrow and deep’ one, and that the storyteller does not use the microphone and manages to get all listeners to participate in the story. (From the private collection of Liz Weir)
Figure 9. Storyteller John Campbell and singer Len Graham, performing in a pub in Limavady, Northern Ireland. Notice that there has been little or no re-arrangement of the room, but the two performers have managed the space so that the area, distance, ratios, etc. are ideal for performing stories and unaccompanied songs while making good contact with the audience. The setting is informal (typical for socialising) but by standing the performers take the focus. Note also that the listeners include people of disability, and the space is conducive to this. (From the private collection of Liz Weir)
Figure 10. Patrick Ryan telling stories in the National School in the Ulster Transport and Folk Museum, Cultra for the Ulster Storytelling Festival. This is an example of storytelling in a 'found' environment, one reminiscent of the 'traditional' venue for storytelling (e.g., thatched cottages, firesides, etc.). Note the open fire. Also note that the space is not ideal for storytelling: posts block the view, seating is rigidly set in rows and fixed to the floor so that some listeners are behind the teller or hidden from view, preventing eye contact. Even so, the majority of listeners are focused on the teller. (From the private collection of Liz Weir)
Figure 11. Storyteller Billy Teare performs on the Seacat, as it ferries people from Scotland to Northern Ireland. Seacat sponsored the Ulster Storytelling Festival for several years, and storytellers engaged for the festival performed not only at the Ulster Transport and Folk Museum, but also in various community venues and on the Seacat ferries. Note that this is a very unusual venue, but the same techniques and arrangements for managing the space, making it as ideal as possible for storytelling and story listening, are taking place. (From the private collection of Liz Weir)
Figure 12. Storyteller Michael Harvey performs at the Cape Clare storytelling Festival. Cape Clare is a small island in the Gaeltacht (Irish speaking area) of the coast of Baltimore in County Cork, Ireland. Most of the venues for this festival are the pubs, a community village hall, the boat coming over from the mainland and, when weather permits, outdoor venues such as this. Even though telling stories outside can be challenging, again note that the techniques, positioning of teller and listeners, and other arrangements make the entire space as ideal as possible for storytelling and story listening. (From the private collection of Liz Weir)
Figure 13. The National Storytelling Festival, Jonesborough Tennessee, USA: Storyteller Kathryn Windham performs in one of the 'big tents' [marquees]. This festival, one of the longest running festivals in the world, regularly attracts audiences of 10,000. (Photos courtesy of the International Storytelling Centre, Jonesborough, Tennessee.)
Although most events at this festival take place in marquees holding hundreds or thousands of listeners, there are still plenty of small venues (porches, squares, grassy areas, etc.) where storytelling takes place, formally and informally, as scheduled activity and spontaneously.

(Photos courtesy of the International Storytelling Centre, Jonesborough, Tennessee.)
based art (the act of storytelling) and traditional contents (folk texts), the events and venues were non-traditional. Methods implemented to adapt traditional with non-traditional, and vice versa, placed unrecognised pressures on traditional storytelling. The use of non-traditional methodology led to an over-emphasis on control of the environment and the targeting of specific groups for commercial gain. This led to some of contemporary storytelling's more rigid practices, particularly in terms of deciding what space is used and how it is used, and especially in uses of space emphasising performers which prevent 'a participating audience, and interactive community' (Foley 1998, 22).

When the storyteller or event organiser's manipulation or management of space makes sense to listeners, then an ideal space is accomplished with genuine storytelling achievable. Intrusive manipulation or management makes space antagonistic, and overt manipulation or unquestioned acceptance of manipulated space can prove counterproductive. If the narrator's skills do not match surroundings, no amount of manipulated space will serve him/her, but will only militate against a successful performance. Listeners predisposed to certain kinds of stories and/or conditions for listening may be put off by manipulations.

Storytelling space may be created specifically for storytelling events, a range of performing arts, general use, or may never be intended for performances of any kind. Observations of experienced performers—whether amateur, professional, traditional or contemporary—suggests less is more. Those adapting to or using space with minimum effort, relying on content, skill and talent, generally prove more successful than those putting more effort into manipulation. More experienced or astute tellers manage physical space rather than manipulate it. Tellers relying on skills and talents manage what they are given. Accepting space as found, adapting to it through choice of texts, style, skills and techniques, tellers successfully achieve genuine storytelling.

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8 Appendix I., 69 Journal Observation: Comments on set decoration and elements gone wrong in storytelling.
9 Appendix I., 70.1.- 70.2., Excerpts from private conversations with and observations of other tellers: Examples of managing space.
their eyes, sometimes, as well as the chance to tell spontaneously somewhere lower on
the continuum—a place they might actually move up a bit by joining in.10

As interesting as cultural performances are, performance occurs outside of
them as well, and the most challenging job that faces the student of
performance is establishing the continuity between the noticeable and public
performance of cultural performances and the spontaneous, unscheduled
optional performance contexts of everyday life.

(Bauman, 1984, 28)

 Experienced tellers, contemporary or otherwise, recognise Bauman’s distinctions,
meaning those with more nuanced cultural perspectives manage rather than manipulate
space.

Cultural specificity becomes obvious when comparing common contemporary
storytelling activities such as festivals and concert clubs. For large-scale festivals,
nostalgic rural and/or historical settings, or very formal purpose-built arts venues are
chosen in North America, Britain and Ireland and Europe. Concert clubs are usually in
‘found’ spaces appearing ideal for storytelling: pubs, historic buildings, community or
arts centres, etc. Even so such spaces are overtly manipulated and at least managed, so
as to be very different from spaces with spontaneous, informal storytelling activities.

Kay Stone has observed that contemporary storytelling activities are motivated by
philosophical and psychological reasons, resulting in dramatic performances and the
separation of tellers and audiences. ‘Thus the teller as an individualistic performer often
became more important than the tale. Concerts and festivals aimed at adult audiences
encouraged the further development of storytelling on a theatrical model more
appropriate to a public familiar with mass entertainment rather than traditional
storytelling’ (Stone, 1986, 22). Having acknowledged and explored influences of
audience expectations and perceptions on storytelling, pace has similar influences.
Venues that are ‘middle-class’ determine participants’ levels, or lack, of comfort,
spontaneity, speech content, and interpretations and interactions.

10 Appendix I, 71.1.—71.2., Transcript of Conference Proceedings, Interview Transcript: Doc Rowe’s
experiences with and views on ‘finding’ storytelling in unusual places.
Given societal changes this process is likely to be inevitable. The point is, many participants believe in recreating a kind of storytelling which either never existed, or existed in a socio-cultural context so different that it is at odds when placed in settings chosen for philosophical and psychological purposes. Space becomes crucial here, making storytelling and audiences artificial simply by organising events in alien contexts. Placing traditional storytelling in a middle-class space changes the very nature of tellings and styles of tellers. This is not to deny genuine storytelling can result, with good storytelling experiences and related consequences. However, participants' delusions regarding what really happens could result in long-term achievements not to their liking.

Folklorists recognise cultural change and its effects when traditional performing arts transfer to 'middle class' settings, e.g., festivals, from informal 'natural' venues, such as working, rural class, or ethnic or urban minority domestic settings, to formal spaces such as school halls and theatres.

Such programs may well provide folk artists with opportunities for a fuller exercise of their artistic virtuosity than they might enjoy in local more traditional settings, but their act and their lives might also be irreversibly transformed in the process. The assumption that public display of authentic folk tradition fosters its maintenance and preservation is ideologically appealing, but dangerously simplistic.

(Bauman, 1983, 106)

Contemporary storytelling participants, including organisers of events, possess a passion for the art predisposing certain assumptions based as much on imagined and reported experiences as reality, as we have seen. Such emotions established a heightened idealism, influencing decisions and actions. Jan Caspars, a storyteller, puppeteer and community artist working in Northern Ireland, articulately summarises typical feelings of contemporary storytelling participants:

You're working on a kind of mission—it's idealistic, promoting storytelling. We do it because it's good for humanity. It is not a product. The aim is to build up
structures that withstand time and build up over time. If it can be owned by the people it can be risky, but it can also be more fruitful and it will be stronger in the end.

(Ryan, 1995, 128)

Idealistic sentiments are not always shared by event organisers, who pay lip service to them while knowingly or opportunistically developing events for financial gain or promotion of a personal agenda. Whisnant outlined similar conflicting developments in his study of folk festivals in the Appalachian region of the southern United States (Whisnant, 1983). Even when ideals are sincere, they can lead to problems.

Preconceptions affect how participants feel about a space, act in it, and about the act of storytelling. This leads to choices and/or uses of space in contemporary storytelling emphasising the Romanticised and exotic over the familiar and mundane. Storytelling in the latter setting, particularly higher up the continuum, becomes more genuine, nearer to aspirations of many contemporary participants. British, Irish, North American and European contemporary storytelling events display interest in the exotic through their manipulation of space when using scenery, props and set dressing as well as making special reconstructions and/or choosing sites matching Romanticised idealised images. Seeking to present or recreate socio-cultural storytelling, their philosophical and psychological motivations achieve only a semblance of socio-cultural storytelling in contemporary events, even while ignoring their own socio-cultural conditions.

However, as culture and society change and part of the psychological/philosophical motivations of contemporary storytelling participants consists of implicit and explicit desires to express and determine those changes, contemporary storytelling events could become popular enough to be a norm. It is not at that state currently.

There seems satisfaction with enough of a ‘community’ within contemporary storytelling as there now stands. This has been identified by many, including Peiffer’s
study of one contemporary storyteller.

She learned that, although there was not a natural community within which a storyteller might fit as a performer in contemporary American life, there was a large community of storytellers brought together by their intention to tell stories.

(Peiffer, 1994, 2-3)

This constructed community has grown enough to span national boundaries, with local, national and international events including many of the same participants, particularly performers and events organisers, and to some extent listeners. The events, being regularly repeated, become both social and cultural. They are, however, limited in nature when compared to modern populations and societies as a whole, which do not maintain a culture of storytelling as did some past societies. It is these vaguely remembered, perhaps more imagined than real, cultures of storytelling in the past that contemporary storytellers wish to go back to or believe they are recreating. To succeed in a culture of storytelling, however, they must begin with the society and its culture in which they already exist.

Within this context socio-cultural reasons become manifest, and contemporary storytelling becomes an expression of post-modern, post-industrial, multi-cultural capitalist society. They are not necessarily the same as socio-cultural reasons for storytelling in the past. If contemporary storytelling has reasons for its existence built upon assumptions that are exotic, abstract, Romantic, or whatever, then these provide social and cultural expression for a limited number of participants. However, contemporary storytelling will remain divorced from the idiosyncratic terms of traditional or genuine storytelling they strive to preserve, revive, or recreate and certainly it will be disconnected from the wider public. The storytelling community becomes ghettoised, there will be no relevant culture of storytelling in modern society. Whether past and current storytelling exists for the same socio-cultural reasons or not, and where past and present practice and motivations intersect, provide much speculation that will provide for future research as contemporary storytelling develops, or does not.
For the moment, political and professional influences on perceptions of participants of contemporary storytelling show an implicit but non-reflective and even unconscious tendency towards this 'bourgeoisification' of storytelling previously discussed. The contemporary storyteller or participant from education or library backgrounds, for example, will be happy with storytelling in any space, so long it can be arranged in a specific way echoing those original settings and the aim remains utopian in terms of education or community enrichment as well as entertainment. The contemporary teller from a theatre or literature background, on the other hand, may view act and event purely as commercial entertainment and rely too much on manipulation and use of specific spaces, such as a theatre or lecture hall. Traditional tellers in the field seem capable of effective narration in whatever space is a recognisably comfortable environment; taken out if it and placed in venues formal or foreign for them inhibits abilities to achieve genuine storytelling. Maartje Draak found this when encountering renowned Hebridean teller Duncan Macdonald. She witnessed two performances, the first at a conference, the second in his home village.

Duncan—for all his professional technique—had to fight some diffidence facing this big and unfamiliar "learned" audience. That too must have been the reason why he sat in his chair, his hands on his knees, looking straight in front of him, and speaking in an even flow of words without great modulation. He gave us his valuable text, but he did not act the story.

How different things were when I heard him a few days later in a small room before an audience of seven! He looked from one person to the other—did we understand the point?—, he rapped on the table, he gestured, his eyes shone, his voice rose and fell. Here was the real story-teller of South Uist, glad of his art and of the pleasure he gave us.

(Draak, 1957, 48)

Tellers with set expectations of a 'proper' space are easily daunted by space not meeting their definitions. Performing without any effort, or, conversely, too much effort, to manipulate or manage space creates highly artificial telling. Ignorance of socio-cultural factors associated with certain spaces or that surround or make events happen also detracts from genuine storytelling, affecting listeners, making them uncomfortable or hindering attentiveness.
This has always been so, with storytelling, as already noted, evolving, changing or disappearing in all social and cultural contexts. C. I. MacLean's study of Hebridean traditions focused on a family of storytellers tracing their pedigree to the 1850s. The latest, Duncan Macdonald (again),

maintains that the disappearance of the 'black house' was one of the very important factors leading to the decay of story-telling and the 'ceilidh' in his district. The old 'black-houses' with the fire in the centre of the living-room could accommodate more people than the modern houses or even thatched-houses with hearths at the gable end. In the old 'black house' they had the proper, accepted traditional setting. In the new house the same atmosphere was lacking. 

(MacLean, 1956, 32)

Cultural priorities can actually differ greatly between generations of the same community, as well as different ethnic and economic communities. Participants determine much about what space is for storytelling and what storytelling happens in what style. How individuals place themselves and move through and use space throughout their lives does much to determine cognition, and, in turn, their narrative art (Crane, 2001, 42-3).

Wider contexts 'bracketing' actual physical space have bearing on the storytelling. Participants bring experience, knowledge and cultural aspects to storytelling events, as we have seen. These preconceptions include attitudes and knowledge about spaces, and the places that spaces come from outside the performer/audience areas. Such factors may, or may not, be conducive to their enjoying the event and entering the storytelling experience.

Part II. Transcendental Aspects of Physical Space in Storytelling

Wider Contexts: Place and Time

Wider contexts affecting physical storytelling spaces consist of space and time, while incorporating socio-cultural and philosophical-psychological factors simultaneously with neither predominating. As with other elements of storytelling (text, teller, audiences), the interactions are complex, direct and indirect, obvious and subtle.
Contextual influences outside immediate physical storytelling spaces include:

- Places surrounding physical spaces for storytelling
- Attributes of places in relation to physical spaces and other domains in narrative space
- The greater environment, usually unrelated but potentially influential (weather, world news, etc.)
- Purpose—for the overall event holding the storytelling event (a festival, a seasonal holiday, etc.)
- Chronological time (the length of time when the act of telling actually happens)
- Nature of the period of time (whether day or night, part of the day or night, day of the week, the month, season or holiday)
- The amount of time given and taken for events and acts of storytelling

Traditional storytelling performances, and informal or spontaneous contemporary arising out of socio-cultural contexts, take space and place for granted, even if these two elements inform the event, until either socio-cultural context and/or space and place alter significantly or disappear. Birch calls this situational storytelling when it is lower on the performance continuum (Birch, 1998, 315). Storytelling higher up the performance continuum still relies on the situational, that is, socio-cultural contexts, to be genuine. ‘Stories live and grow out of a landscape and its peoples. The roots are tangible and potent...all of these contribute to a culture and its manifestation in story’ (Birch, 2000, 74). The manifestation is not solely in the story but also ways of telling and listening, of gathering, assembling and dispersing, and through dissemination.

One need only look at evidence gathered by folklorists, where traditional Irish and Scottish tellers informed them the old storytelling died out when certain kinds of housing disappeared or electricity/central heating/radio/television arrived, depending on the generation reporting on tradition. As we have seen, it did not necessarily die off but rather evolved and was transformed. What such statements make clear is the importance of place in maintaining at least a semblance or quasi-automatic
consciousness of what contributes to that individual’s perception of genuine storytelling. In such instances, place inhibits or facilitates processes.

**Place**

Wilson’s discussion of *paraperformance* summarises the ‘wider context of place and time’ bracketing physical space.

Paraperformance is ... all those elements which are not part of the performance itself, but surround the performance, shaping and influencing it; event, venue, nature of audience, time of day, time of year, weather, to name a few. When paraperformance is combined with performance the result is total performance.

(Wilson, 1997, 31)

Paraperformance does not specifically delineate elements arising from philosophical and psychological strands, focusing primarily on socio-cultural aspects. To understand contemporary storytelling participants’ cognition fully, as well as affects of storytelling and listening acts and events upon cognition, philosophical-psychological and socio-cultural aspects must be considered together. To show how both strands influence and are influenced by cognition in contemporary storytelling, the aim of this study, a few examples will be given.

The most common public manifestations of contemporary storytelling are folk and storytelling festivals. Both are good examples of paraperformance. Why and where festivals happen, their histories and their settings’ histories, as well as festival’s aesthetic philosophy for programming all influence what storytelling happens, when, and by whom. Festivals witness storytelling all along the performance continuum. Past situations influence paraperformances\(^{11}\) but so do concurrent, unrelated events, either on the world stage or from local gossip. Knowledge, or its lack, of outside events can change signs and symbols within texts, represented by tellers’ techniques and styles, found in interpretations by listeners, or manifested in the physical space participants and events are in.

\(^{11}\) Appendix I., 72.1.—72.3. *Journal Observations: Emotional impact of space upon performance.*
Physical spaces and places convey meanings. Places where an area storytelling happens with symbolic resonance, such as a castle, a reconstructed historically correct thatch-cottage, graveyards or battle grounds, or an historic church or pub, have bearing on mental and emotional processes of participants. All these examples, and many others of a similar nature, have been and are used in contemporary storytelling events. Spaces communicate signs initiating and guiding cognition in storytelling and listening, inspiring tellers to relate one story over another, and affecting listeners’ hearing and interpretations. On the most basic level, space signals how audiences are to gather, assemble and behave generally, creating in people’s conscious and unconscious an acceptances of roles in any endeavour. Semiotics of place contribute much in establishing genuine storytelling, whether consciously noticed or not.

Organisers and tellers might bring them to listeners’ attention forcefully or subtly. Listeners may attend and incorporate such symbols in understanding stories and events, while signs remain unnoticed by tellers. Niles’ study of balladry emphasises that in a broad sense ‘attention to context also implies an appreciation of how a body of traditional figurative language, including metaphor, is activated in particular social circumstance’ (Niles, 1998, 285). Tellers and organisers of contemporary storytelling seek particular places for telling, or manipulate space, so as to highlight symbols emphasising meanings. Places with culturally specific signs are used to attempt genuine storytelling. Misused, or overused, places detract, leading to misunderstanding and artificial telling.

While participants may choose a place considered ideal for storytelling, actions alien to both the place’s original purpose and traditional storytelling, and storytelling lower on the performance continuum, inevitably appear in contemporary storytelling. A seaside fishing village, historic mountain town or castle garden were never originally intended primarily as venues for festivals hosting thousands of participants and hundreds of performance events. Practicalities making such events successful on this scale require

12 Appendix I., 73.1.—73.2., Journal Observations: How settings inspire storytelling programmes.
modern, urban, industrial and commercial practices. ‘When the storytelling occasion shifts from one listener to a small or a large group, both the content and style of the delivery can be dramatically affected. What is said and how it is said often change as people move further apart’ (Birch, 1998, 314). Not only do tellers and listeners change, organisers, too, are involved.

Decisions made prior to events, usually by months, are meant to aid spontaneity in the programme but do the opposite. Posters, brochures and leaflets communicating information graphically, are consciously chosen, reflecting organisers' and performers' definitions of and attitudes towards storytelling or traditional arts. Costs are decided and budgeted, tickets are produced, performers' fees, food and living spaces as well as performance spaces are organised and paid for. While undoubtedly economic factors played, and still play, a role in traditional storytelling and storytelling lower on the performance continuum, it is questionable how much they determined cognition of traditional tellers and listeners on that level. To a large extent modern economic practices do have great potential to determine cognition involved in contemporary storytelling at events such as festivals. Those choosing to take part in contemporary storytelling by purchasing tickets or accepting invitations will be more predisposed to listening to and telling stories. They also expect higher standards, and, possibly, particular styles of performance. Organisers, expending considerable time, energy, effort and finance to create contemporary events, expect specific standards from performers and behaviours from audiences. Again, these are middle-class activities, contributing to that bourgeoisification of storytelling begun with the popularisation of literary fairy tales.

Participants with no expectations of storytelling, or of storytelling associations with a particular place, could either be antagonistic and scornful of or pleasantly surprised and eagerly receptive to contemporary storytelling happened upon by chance. In traditional and lower-intensity contexts, with storytelling a common and expected occurrence, the nature of reception depends more on social and psychological factors with cultural and
philosophical ones taken for granted.\textsuperscript{13} When considering physical space influencing storytelling, one assumes less suitable space makes for informal storytelling, while formal space designed for performance automatically turns storytelling into formal, highly conscious cultural events. The wider contexts, however, of place and time do more to determine the nature of the event and storytelling’s place on the continuum.

To demonstrate this, Bauman describes Ed Bell, a traditional teller who moved into a late career as professional performer.

Freed from the contextual pressures that favoured relative brevity in storytelling at the hunting campfire or fishing camp, such as competition for the floor or the lure of fishing, and singled out to perform at festivals and other public events because of the folklorists’ recognition of his great talent as a storyteller, Bell has cultivated that virtuosity. At the same time, he has become more distanced from his audience, both interactionally and by culture and background, in the performance situations and themselves. (Bauman, 1983, 106)

Analyses of other traditional performers in contemporary situations, as well as interviews, confirm similar behaviours. Duncan Williamson displays noticeably different styles when one studies video recordings of his work at festivals, small clubs, and his home over the past twenty years. John Campbell also mentions the need to explain, and the necessity of telling shorter stories in public while relating long wonder tales to one or two visitors when telling in his own parlour. Francie Kennelly has a style markedly different depending on whether he performs on a festival platform to a general public or a conference of academics, or to visitors within his kitchen. The latter situation finds him most natural, animated and direct.\textsuperscript{14}

Observations expressed here are not critical but observant of phenomena in highly publicised contemporary storytelling events, such as festivals and concert clubs; if this is how storytelling is meant to evolve and will become its most common form, they must be accepted and critiqued on their own basis. Focus upon these examples comes

\textsuperscript{13} Appendix I., 74.1 – 74.2., Journal Observations: Clash of socio-cultural and psychological/philosophical views in contemporary storytelling events.

\textsuperscript{14} Refer to earlier descriptions of traditional tellers performing in ‘their own’ spaces: Appendix I., 4.2., 9.2.
from a desire to understand cognition common to all storytelling: on all levels of the performance continuum and in all wider contexts. When contemporary storytelling becomes too focused on physical manifestations of events and material aspects of performance, transcendental aspects of storytelling—which usually motivated participants in the first instance—are lost and difficult to regain. Then particular forms of contemporary storytelling become easily exploited and commodified, and eventually unfashionable, i.e., no longer useful to modern society, and abandoned. If genuine storytelling has been lost through this process, it then may not again be achieved over time.

**Temporal Space**

Time affects narrative space. There is the length of time storytelling events take to happen, as well as when they happen. There is the period of time in which events are set: times of day or night, seasons, and holidays such as Hallowe’en, etc. There is also the time, or various periods of time, within narrative text’s setting. Specific phenomena regarding the passage of time during and outside of storytelling are reported. One significant experience is when participants lose themselves in the story, entering the liminal state where they become unaware of the passage of real time.

Beginning storytellers ask, ‘What is the right length of a story?’ They mean, how does one know a story is too long, thus boring listeners, or short, thus confusing or making little impression so as to achieve those liminal states described. A story is as long as it takes to tell—‘it’s as long as a piece of string.’ With many aspects of storytelling, answers are relative depending on contexts, purpose, cultural influences, and expectations of participants. It is too long or too short when listeners are aware of real time and find themselves outside the storytelling experience, when there is no ‘flow’ for teller or listeners.

Technical aspects of the relative nature of temporal space can be traced to physical realities. As already observed, speaking is faster than writing and slower than reading, and reading and listening, related activities, mentally, as already shown, also function at
different rates. Speakers also interact with audiences directly, whereas writers and readers usually do not. Hence, storytellers and listeners exist in the same time frame whereas writers and readers exist in different time periods (Chafe, 1982). If there is an average, ideal rate of speed for speaking and listening, as Chafe suggests, that is the temporal baseline, though as he goes on to discuss, since these actions all are processed mentally at different rates, what cognition is going on when it does not need to attend the mechanics? Space, or space-time, rather, is what the teller’s and the listener’s brains are engaged with during those moments the mind works faster than it needs so as to comprehend what is said/heard. If what the teller does in telling a story fails to immediately draw the listener into the tale, distractions in the outer world, the physical space, occupy the listener’s associated thoughts, memories and imagining. On the other hand, the sooner the listener is drawn into the liminal state of the hypnagogic trance via the teller’s words, voice, gestures and so on, the more that listener’s mind is then occupied with associative thinking inspired by and connected to the story. Listeners can comprehend meanings of tellers’ words more quickly than tellers can speak them, and so integrate several ideas from listeners’ imaginations and memories with the tellers’ words. All these associated thoughts, much referred to so far in previous chapters, are expressed in listeners’ gestures and vocalisations. Reactions feed back to tellers, whose mental capacity allows ‘thinking ahead’, integrating more of the story with the act of telling, and the space, and place, of the action.\textsuperscript{15}

These numerous complex mental activities create temporal dissonance. When participants of a storytelling suddenly notice that more real time has passed than they realised as a tale finishes, it is not just that they were so engrossed in the story that they experienced the abstract time of the tale’s setting. They were, but they also were judging, comparing, making all these mental associations to keep the storytelling experience going. All these mental activities contribute to liminality, and when flow and hypnagogic trance lead to the storytelling experience, the listener is working at a temporal rate different from physical actions in reality. This means the brain senses a different time frame than that in which the body exists. However, even the body has

\textsuperscript{15} Appendix I., 75.0., Journal Observation: Parallels with physical and mental space (map reading, etc.).
been pulled into this dissonant time lapse as demonstrated by physiological expressions—heart rates, body temperatures, emotions, etc.—as discussed, being cued by content of the story and acts of telling and listening.

Chafe stresses the important difference between speakers and writers is their relationship to audiences, where speakers have instant feedback. If a defining aspect of storytelling experience is temporal dissonance, a lack of awareness of real time passing, experienced tellers will be ‘in sync’ with audiences, and listeners synchronised with tellers also. ‘To make a story compelling, it is not necessary to have been present when events occurred. What matters is at the time of the telling, we are fully present’ (Birch, 2000, 19). Participants share a temporal space that may be different, but concurrent, to actual physical time they exist in. They are within the story’s time and outside of, or surrounded by but detached from, the real time it takes. Such temporal space contributes vitally to wider contexts creating genuine storytelling. Tellers in different time frames from listeners commonly cause bored, inattentive listeners: for them, real time drags. This is another aspect, or rather, the inverse of the hypnogogic trance, as well as Csikszentmihalyi’s flow. Once the event finishes and current ‘real time’ is compared to subjective time that is sensed during the telling, dissonance is recognised.

Tellers are within the storytelling experience during a liminal state that is slightly different to listeners’. Though usually not conscious of the exact amount of real time passing while telling, experienced narrators intuitively know approximately how long a story, or series of stories regularly performed together, as well as all the constituent parts, particularly paratext such as digressions, runs, etc., take to perform. This allows them to extend and compress time, thinking about audience reactions, how to incorporate them, and so on. As Lesser pointed out, much happens unconsciously or quasi-consciously (Lesser, 1957). ‘The teller uses this “art of time” to create a space in which the listener creates his own images’(Wischner, 1991, 67). Wischner stresses real and subjective time contribute to the point where audiences and tellers are cognizant, mostly or only, either of the story (in the case of listeners) or of the storytelling event (in the case of tellers). This is her definition of the storytelling experience, distinct from the
storytelling event. The former takes place within the latter. ‘The storytelling experience lies in the shaded region where the teller and listener interact’ (Wischner, 1991, 71).

Time, or more accurately timing, in common performance art terms, is an element, a tool or skill that tellers must have so genuine storytelling takes place. This metaphorical language, a kind of lying, denies real space and time while simultaneously making connections to it or tricking senses to believe something different. ‘Paradoxically, it is this ability to lie well which can lift the story from the page and turn it into an object with which the storyteller can play; the storyteller is playing with the notion of time and space. He is saying, “We are here and we are not here”’ (Wischner, 1991, 78). Playing with time and awareness of time, as well as wider contexts of narrative space such as place and performer/listener areas, has significance for cognition. Elements within para- and narrative texts, tellers’ vocalisations and actions, audience reactions and interactions, and physical space contribute to displacement of real time and space.

Two physical aspects of time existing in the real world are used in narrative space. The first is light, the second sound. The repetition and rhythm, of words, sounds, and actions, the vocal dynamics, and the manipulation and management of space, including light and dark, are the tools the teller has to bend reality, including reality’s most obvious aspect, physical space. Sound is the most vital. ‘A story cuts through time and space, reshaping the room with sound. The pause causes rhythm and tensions of the story’ (Wischner, 1991, 22). This comment of Wischner’s is incomplete, since Ong pointed out that sound does more than shape the physical space, being uniquely associated with individuals’ interior spaces. Coming from within the body of the teller, sound is experienced within bodies of tellers and listeners nearly simultaneously. ‘Sound exists only when it is going out of existence. Other characteristics of sound also determine or influence oral psychodynamics’ (Ong, 1982, 71). Experienced contemporary tellers concern themselves more with acoustics of a room or area than visual arrangements of spaces they do not know well. Reverberating rooms distort meaning, preventing storytelling experience: a delay of a few milliseconds prevents
comfortable listening and a teller's quick, quasi-conscious on-going assessment of performance. Consciously or intuitively they recognise relationships of sound, interiority and consciousness. Sound measures time, twists it, and takes away participants' awareness of real time and space, refocusing it on time and space in the story.

Storytelling has more in common with musical concerts than with theatre. The latter, though also playing with time, depends also upon spectacle as much as spoken word to convey and invoke imagery. Music and storytelling rely upon manipulation of sound, making it into symbols, in the case of stories, and emotional and intellectual impressions in both art forms. 'By contrast with vision, the dissecting sense, sound is thus a unifying sense. A typical visual ideal is clarity and directness, a taking apart.... The auditory ideal, by contrast, is harmony, a putting together' (Ong, 1982, 72).

Symbolic aural systems allow participants in contemporary storytelling to cope with dissonances of time, gradually synchronising shared mental images with focus upon the story, not others or physical space and real time. Sounds from tellers to listeners, and listeners to tellers, signal a sense of communal consciousness for all involved.

Light, a component in physical space, makes manifest temporal space. The interplay of light and darkness suggests passage of time. Experienced tellers assess sources and nature of light in all spaces, especially those not suitable for performing, with awareness of time coming into play. So sunlight does not blind listeners or place tellers in silhouette, performers arrange space, even rearrange it through the day, so light sources remain opposite tellers. Similarly, tellers avoid sitting in front of windows, and if finding artificial lighting unpleasant dim it or find an alternative. Light shining on the face of a teller, no matter how dim, assists listeners. A shaded face suggests, psychologically to listeners, they cannot hear because they cannot see the face, lips and eyes of the performer. Most tellers insist on being able to see listeners, especially their eyes. Narrators dislike theatrical lighting, avoiding performances on stages with dimmed house lights.
An equality of light, with a space lighting tellers and audiences evenly, supports aural space and establishes temporal space. ‘The centering of sound (the field of sound is not spread out before me but is all around) affects man’s sense of cosmos’ (Ong, 1982, 73). Managing or manipulating space so listeners are within peripheral vision of the teller also places audiences within a comfortable hearing range, so all feel centred in that field of sound. This also contains participants as a unit, so a hypothetical bubble insulates them from sounds and lights of the wider context. If the latter intrude during hypnogogic trance the storytelling ‘spell’ is broken, unless the teller is experienced and quick-witted enough to digress and incorporate the sounds of kitchen crashes, bar lounge laughter, summer tempests or whatever so as to return to liminality. Such sounds and lights are what participants become aware of as they come out of the flow of the storytelling experience when a story ends, suddenly noticing an hour has passed or the day as turned into night during the story.

Textual Space

Paratext and narrative text relate setting and time period within stories, establishing textual space. Beginning outside narrative, with tellers framing a tale, key words and phrases—‘Once upon a time...’, ‘long ago and far way...’, ‘one day when I was walking...’, ‘That reminds me of a time when...’, ‘Back in college she...’, etc.—suggest place and time: setting. Tellers’ words, vocal dynamics and gestures, along with props and scenery, musical interludes, and other paratextual devices some contemporary and traditional performers use, interact with participants’ imaginations and other thought patterns. Mental and emotional processes separate textual space and time from real, physical place and time, somehow making tangible narrative in the mind’s sensory system. ‘The story is charged with reality for the listener and teller. The term “virtual space” would apply here because the room is no longer a room, but a space in which characters engage in their struggles’ (Wischner, 1991, 116). This, especially, is evident in narrators from traditional backgrounds or contemporary tellers linking stories via associated memories based in real-life experience. Iconic imagery also plays a part. Some mental imagery, for all tellers, comes from listening to or reading stories in childhood. Much mental imagery comes from picture book
illustrations, cinema, electronic media, and, in some cases, life experience and travels. Not only do traditional tales use stock phrases describing places—‘the dark forest’, ‘a haunted house’, ‘a gloomy castle’, ‘a graveyard’, ‘an enchanted garden’, etc.—so do autobiographical stories and other genres, including paratext—‘my local pub’, ‘when my mother was in primary school’, ‘the Eiffel Tower’, ‘Wembley’, etc. Evoking shared experienced places and spaces sparks mental associations in tellers and listeners.

Scholars of literature and semiotics may define textual space as arrangements of print, images on the page and the setting of lines or verses. Typefaces used, spellings and punctuations agreed upon, and other visual codes may be ascribed to studies of textual spaces. However, entirely oral and aural symbolic systems have similar distinctions. Pauses, breaths, speaking tempo and rhythm, rhyme schemes, and figurative language all make a textual landscape orally, creating narrative space. These vocalisations contribute to creation of temporal space but also allow periods for participants to build visual, specifically spatial, images.

As much discussed, early literary approaches to traditional storytelling made stories artifacts, easily analysed as literature. Modern folklorists’ performance theories emphasise storytelling as process, a combination of action and event. Acknowledging both frees one to recognise and explore textual space in linguistic and mental processes. Many contemporary storytellers coming from literary backgrounds do not consciously recognise connections between textual and real spaces in accomplished traditional tellers performing in their own settings. Contemporary performances become artificial, relying on abstraction and cliché, when they fail to connect imaginary setting to real places. Different symbolic systems in oral and written narratives convey temporal and spatial images and meanings establishing narrative text space.

**Cognitive (or Mental) Space**

Consistently similar states of cognition are common to successful narrative processes, spoken and heard or written and read. Listeners’ hypnagogic trance and the flow all participants experience in telling and listening, already mentioned, are enhanced
cognition: created, specialised states of mind. Many if not most tellers rely on text, techniques and skills to bring audiences to these mental processes. Place, and use of and manipulation of space within it, play a part, too.

Creating a physical space generates mental states supporting or guiding participants. Storytelling art of any kind achieving enhanced cognition lies primarily in the words and actions of participants. One dreams of a space and tries recreating or evoking it through words, settings and props, and/or choice of location. Dream-like or trance-like states can be triggered by:

- the use or choice of space
- the addition of lighting, music or sound effects
- appealing to other senses such as smell through burning incense or touch through use of comfortable cushions, carpets, and so on.

Relying on physical space to arrive at mental states conducive to cognition in storytelling can involve any or none of these techniques. The combination of actions, physical space and invoked mental processes assists in creating shared, agreed upon abstract spaces within which the story and its setting can be understood. If participants, particularly tellers, place too much emphasis on these physical elements then storytelling suffers. Manipulations of physical space must support the storytelling, not become the main attraction (or rather, distraction).

Actions leading to such cognition can be intuitive or conscious, subtle or obvious. Cognitive theory stresses that thought and mental states develop out of what participants take in from the material world and what manifestations result in the physical afterwards suggest mental processes in between, leading to hypothesization of cognitive theories (Crane, 2001). Taking account of all elements of narrative space and what impact they have on both act and event in storytelling provides glimpses of cognition in storytelling—of a cognitive space. Cognitive space is the part of the mind where participants’ mental processes during oral narrative take place, where simultaneously they are in the story but know that they are outside it too.
Common elements, all discussed thus far, contribute to participants' mental states. These, and meanings behind them, allude to common human conditions and traits. Innumerable tales, especially those adapted for children from European cultures, begin with these invocations of universality. Many more tales begin with universal reference to more ancient and diverse cultures.... All of these ritual invocations invite teller and listener to move into the dreamlike realm of story. The conscious mind is invited to give up linear processes so that the unconscious can freely make associative connections.

(Birch, 2000, 71)

This echoes Bruner's recognition of the importance of narrative in social and emotional development in cognition, as well as Chafe's discussion of repeated language in performed narratives being ritualised language. Ritualised language distances audiences to a role different from listeners of non-ritualised, conversational, language. Chafe is wrong if we interpret him to mean listeners remain distanced. Bruner's observation that narrative links social, emotional and cognitive realms means there must be involvement. Hypnogogic trance gives clear indication of this. On the surface audiences appear passive and distant; on the interior there is active engagement. Once physical reality becomes distant because participants focus on cognitive space, their mental associations are made so quickly that they are quasi-automatic or even unconscious. This causes textual space to become 'real', or more so, momentarily, than physical reality, and evokes real emotions and social solidarity.

This happens through socialisation in both cognitive development and storytelling art. 'It is apparent that discourse of all kinds, scientific and poetic, is composed of stories, that science, like the acts of dwelling, eating and walking, are in a social sense brought into being by narratives that are told of them' (Read, 1993, 165). Remember that Piaget's theory was weak because he looked at development in terms of accommodation and assimilation only on physical, materialistic levels, ignoring cognitive development derived from social interaction leading to emotional accommodation and assimilation. Acts and events of telling rely on social intercourse in discussion of paraperformance. Environment provides context, including physical space and wider contexts, i.e., place
and temporal space. Along with these, social interactions of participants, including speech, gestures, types of discourse, etc., conjure mental space, establishing in the mind where narratives happen. Unspoken agreement in the necessary suspension of disbelief, as discussed, is inherent in social transactions so as to achieve mental space.

Collected data regularly hint at cognitive space used in oral narration. Tellers and listeners reportedly think of two or more things at the same time. Tellers’ multiple images—actions of the plot, characters, and/or settings—exist alongside memories of sources—persons or books. Real-life experiences associated with a story appear mentally: the first time it was heard or learned, or other real-life images from later repeated tellings. Places stories were first heard or read, environments in which they were performed successfully, appear in the ‘mind’s eye’ simultaneously with primary images ‘telling’ (making) the story.

Besides associative memories in tellers, details of stories evoke associations in listeners. The act of telling a narrative, especially one heard or read before, by that teller or another, sparks mental and emotional associations in listeners. These too are all held simultaneously with the mental images of the story. Some predominate, but all lurk within a mental area that is real, almost tangible, the description most often given being a circle or semi-circle where dominant images are in the foreground while minor images hover on the peripheral ‘inner-vision’. Physical reality supports and provides images in this mental space. Tellers mention that certain elements, usually a person, or a person’s face or eyes or smile, or sometimes a feature of the room or landscape, were consciously noticed from immediate environment while telling, even focused upon or used to support the performance.

Weaknesses in contemporary storytelling come when it is not grounded in reality, in current or remembered real physical and social experiences. The result is artificial storytelling, with artificiality satisfying only the preconceptions and predispositions of some participants. This can be successful for a while, creating for some genuine storytelling, and storytelling experience. It will not appeal to all, putting off potentially
wider audiences. 'As storytellers ... we cannot be lulled into thinking that the realm of story is a bland, nonspecific, unrooted, artificial world. Firmly attached to times, people, places, and things, stories brilliantly display the details of their physical and cultural origins, celebrating time and place' (Birch, 2000, 111-2). With different cultural references and personal memories, contemporary tellers can fail to connect with listeners if stories portray bland non-specific realms, or are uprooted from original sources and placed in foreign environments. When storytelling events and actions happen primarily in the middle-class domain bourgeoisification neuters storytelling's potential ability to empower the powerless, making it easily manipulated, censored, controlled or propagandised. This can be, as discussed, for financial gain or boosting egos as much as for political purposes.

That different realms of reality in the physical world combine to create cognitive space suggests some contradictions. 'We may divide the broad range of contextual relations into the aspects of cultural context, having to do with systems of meanings and symbolic interrelationships, and social context, having to do with matters of social structure and social interaction' (Bauman, 1983, 362-3). This dichotomy, true and useful to an extent, is irrelevant in discussions of cognition and narrative. Cultural contexts start and guide mental processes involved in storytelling, but social contexts equally contribute, and consideration of neurological scientific theories suggests that physiological, materialistic contributions are involved also. Structures and interactions between social and cultural contexts constantly, consistently interact with meanings and symbolic systems, all using organs of the human body (the brain, mouth, tongue, arms, eyes, ears, lungs, heart and circulatory systems to name a few). These physical aspects provide clues to different mental spaces in existence within the mind.

Wischner aptly describes a physical, social and cultural 'constellation' between audience and teller. Whereas Bauman separates, Wischner combines, but without comment regarding cognitive states in play, or evident cultural and social norms:

The room itself is a constellation of the relationship between the audience and the storyteller. The traditional storytelling situation is a semi-circle around the storyteller. This arrangement sets the boundaries of the storytelling performance.
In a large auditorium, these boundaries are set by the storyteller himself, through his strong presence, and/or through the use of an opening formula or introduction.

In the next stage, the storyteller takes his place. He is now the center of attention and begins to speak. Within a few phrases the setting and conflict of the story are known to the Audience. As the absorption between teller and listener deepens, the focus is not on the teller or listener, but on the story.

(Wischner, 1991, 113-4)

As previously demonstrated, this is hypnogogic trance and storytelling experience, and the ‘flow’ or one-ness of participants in the experience. Experienced storytellers seemingly have intuitive skills in creating stories’ ‘reality’. Audiences do not consciously note what happens. Entry into mental space, and then, or at the same time, textual space, is semi- or quasi-conscious. As Birch and Lesser both stated in their own ways, those processes of narrative free minds to be aware of narrative reality shared by participants, while simultaneously allowing the individual to make free associations quasi-automatically (Birch, 2000; Lesser, 1957). Teller responsibility is to focus audiences on narrative text, not the performer or space. Doing so allows tellers to focus on story (action)—para- and narrative texts (and technical elements delivering them)—and event (socio-cultural and philosophical-psychological elements) simultaneously. In contemporary storytelling more thought goes into psychological and philosophical motivations for storytelling and less awareness of social and cultural implications. Lack of awareness leads to cultural appropriation, unintended, and unrecognised, offence to some or all participants, and other disasters erasing cognitive space for genuine storytelling.

Causality

Genuine storytelling, and the storytelling experience, is achieved not by manipulation of physical space. Real manipulation resides in knowledge and use of real life experience conveyed through use of language. Celati knew this, which is why he expressed the belief there could be no such thing as a professional storyteller. The storyteller must be embedded in a physical reality, a context providing causality: reasons for telling and with understanding for the actions narrated within the story.
Causality is the basis of storytelling, but it's not a scheme; causality is something incredibly subtle in normal language. For example, I refer to a number of real traditional story-tellers on the Po River.... When you read these texts what you find is that there are these people who are incredible story-tellers exactly because of their way of manipulating causality and what is called ‘reality’. (Lumley, 1990, 45)

Consciously or subconsciously, awareness of causes for human actions and emotions in stories, the act of telling, and the event, all inform the teller’s comments, descriptions, and expressions. Causality leads to effective choice of texts, words and gestures, and use of vocalisations and any other media. Listeners, too, require causal awareness, but also acquire it through participating regularly in story listening on all points of the performance continuum. Therefore young children are as mesmerised and fully part of the storytelling experience as elderly listeners, though life experiences obviously differ greatly in terms of the nature and length of what they have lived through. All bring understanding of causality to the story, taking away a new understanding of it to apply in life generally and stories particularly the next time. 16

There are stratifications, or levels of involvement, among participants in storytelling indicating the nature of cognition. In the storytelling experience, listeners and tellers are equally involved when the storytelling is genuine but in different ways. Tellers’ levels are indicated by digressions, described by Basgöz. He noted that, while the teller may be involved in a story, some narration goes on ‘auto-pilot’ while digressions connect with audiences, providing more detail in paratext if it is necessary to involve listeners and less if the teller sees their commitment to understanding in the trance state (Basgöz, 1986). A reassessment of acting modes and listening in storytelling in light of the concept of personation, looking at various tellers and listeners and noting what, if any, modes are employed, suggests enhanced cognition in all participants. Paratext, particularly digressions and audience responses to them, are a good indication of associative thoughts being made during a telling. It is the lack of digressions, and lack of responses to them, that suggest either the teller has not the skill or talent to achieve

16 Appendix I., 76.1. – 76.2., Interview Transcripts and Journal Obsevations: Evidence of Causality in Traditional and Contemporary storytelling.
genuine storytelling, or, possibly, the audiences are too conservative to participate, with the spectator role found in commercial theatre too ingrained.

This may be where use, or mis-use, of the representational style's device of the 'Fourth Wall', becomes clear in contemporary storytelling. Tellers so mesmerised by their own stories that listeners and place are ignored indicate how deeply within narrative performers are. A story narrated automatically, as from 'rote' or on 'auto-pilot' suggests a number of possibilities. If the entire performance is this way, there is a different form of cognition employed for the storytelling and little potential for the storytelling experience. Genuine storytelling sees a storyteller thinking automatically on one level, while at the same time accessing deep thoughts and 'monitoring' the situation. The latter's thought processes take quick note of who is paying attention, which listener still needs to be drawn in, what environmental disturbances are around and potentially incorporated or better to be ignored. These may or may not make for genuine storytelling; much depends on individuals and contexts. All can be conscious, quasi-conscious, or subconscious but the point is they occur at the same time. 17

Different stratifications among listeners are revealed in how they use, inhabit and manipulate physical space before, during and after the storytelling. How and where they sit show much about their mental states. Those least willing to take part, whether listening or telling, will likely sit at the perimeter of the listener area, keeping as far as possible from any clear performance area. They may even sit or stand apart from the main group. Listeners most keen to be involved—or even consciously or subconsciously desiring to be the focus, rather than the teller, text or event itself, will sit close to the teller, or whatever the potential focus is. Placement frees listeners psychologically, allowing them to be more active and vocal than other listeners in a disruptive way.

17 Appendix I., 77.1--77.2., Interview Transcript and Journal Observation: Ongoing thought, concurrent with thought process of telling story, and causes for these.
Audience responses discussed previously pointed out these are socially and culturally learned behaviours. Postures vary, but clearly indicate when listeners focus on stories, not the teller, setting or other physical elements of the event. If sitting on chairs, listeners lean forward, rest elbows on knees and/or chins on hands. Sitting either on chairs or the floor they may slouch and stretch while keeping eyes on the teller. Listeners may also close eyes, tilting heads upwards while clearly focusing on images of the story. Vocalisations ('Oh no!' and 'Yes!' for example), gasps and laughter all indicate levels of involvement. Even those listeners distancing themselves from the action and event, sitting outside the audience area or sitting stiffly and upright, will express themselves spontaneously, indicating how much they are drawn into the story and neither the teller or situation.

**Summary**

Narrative space, consisting of many components, must be managed more than manipulated. Those with the best ability to affect physical space are the listeners. How all participants use, ignore and/or place themselves within physical spaces for storytelling events reveals much about their cognition. Narrators must manage space and listeners—they must read these elements and respond to them effectively—to achieve genuine storytelling.

The sense of focus and obliviousness to everything but the story is a significant indication of cognition. Study of cognitive space for narration, and its links between physical reality and abstract notions creating stories in the mind, would be of value for understanding narrative as a primary act of the mind. However, cognitive states, while universal, are evoked and used quite differently. Much is revealed about cognition as well when storytelling is artificial, with genuine storytelling and the storytelling experience unachieved. The same teller, style of telling, and/or story can engross all listeners all of the time, or some listeners all of the time, or sometimes no listeners at all. Reasons for the failure of genuine storytelling, as well as a preponderance of artificial
storytelling, can be traced to social and cultural influences, with potentially political ramifications in the practice of contemporary storytelling today.
CHAPTER 6. THE CONTEXT OVERALL—CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Part I. Contexts—Distinctive and Combined Real and Mediated Experiences and Situations

The Reality of Mediated Experiences Upon Lives Today

The context within which the contemporary storytellers, and other participants, express themselves is more than the constituent elements of text, individual performer, listener and space. Since ‘...oral tradition becomes more meaningful if considered in light of the present political and social structure,’ so does contemporary storytelling. And as any ‘tradition is inevitably biased, the bias being inherent in the political or social context’ (Vansino, 1961, 14), such is the case with contemporary telling. As described here underlying psycho-philosophical and socio-cultural patterns determine true context as well as descriptions and definitions of contemporary storytellers, other storytelling participants, and storytelling. ‘Any cultural product needs to be set in its wider social and economic context for full understanding—including how it is produced, transmitted and supported’ (Finnegan, 1992, 112). As such there are inherent conflicts within contexts of storytellers and storytelling in modern society.

This is particularly so when contemporary storytelling participants minimize effects of the most common experiences for all in modern society. These include electronic media saturation, breakdown of institutions supporting communities where storytelling naturally occurs, and the predominance of bourgeois aesthetic, moral and commercial standards and practices. At the same time contemporary storytelling participants exploit common, especially commercial, modern practices to capitalize financially upon their chosen art form. Kroeber acknowledged that storytelling is a good tool for investigating, celebrating and changing the realities of human existence (Kroeber, 1992, 149). The individual may be initially drawn to storytelling for investigative purposes: when epiphanic it provides an individual with meaning and purpose to life, so individuals use storytelling and story listening to investigate and understand themselves. Perceptions of contemporary storytelling mean the public face of storytelling festivals and concert clubs predominate, and primarily seem to be about celebrating. Functional
and everyday storytelling is minimal in public and many contemporary storytelling enthusiasts' perceptions. That contemporary storytelling changes realities of human existence is an unstated or understated assumption, running counter to the conditions that are changing human existence.

Too often contemporary storytelling becomes a means to changing a specific individual's reality rather than humanity's reality as a whole. Contemporary storytellers who are successful possess opportunities to practice storytelling creatively, managing to earn a living by performing and teaching the art. 'The result is an enviable combination for personal satisfaction and comfort in economic productivity' (Peiffer, 1994, 101). Tellers not so successful in contemporary practice aspire to those successful tellers' lifestyles, emulating what they can and putting much effort into doing so. When contemporary storytelling participants put too much emphasis either on the story or the teller, or the lifestyles of its tellers, it forfeits its potential to change realities of human existence. This focus becomes too much on a material present exploring a highly controllable mediated cognition of past, present and future.

Remembrance and anticipation will disappear into an empty, depthless present. What will remain is a flat culture of electronically reproduced data based on instantaneous sensation: a cult of the immediate—the sound-bite, the video clip, the news flash. And so...we are witnessing the end of inherited culture with its specific aura of authenticity.

(Kearney, 1997, 185)

Many contemporary storytelling participants would be horrified to be associated with the effects of this flat, electronically reproduced culture Kearney describes, yet over-emphasising the event, individual or object (story) objectifies storytelling, makes it a commodity and flattens it so only mediated, rather than experiential, cognition dominates. These are the inherent conflicts for the contemporary storyteller.

These conflicts are personal and public, commercial and political and altogether determine an aesthetic, or lack of it, that does or does not make storytelling a valid and genuine art form today. Conflict is not necessarily undesirable, as the tensions produced potentially lead to better practice, higher standards and an aesthetic ideal.
It goes without saying that we bring to any storytelling a preestablished system of moral and metaphysical beliefs and a range of commonsense "prejudices"... which form the basics for how we assess a story. But in the process of receiving the telling, including our retrospective comprehension when it has been complete, these preestablished systems and prejudices are aroused—sometimes by being reinforced, sometimes by being challenged. Since our systems of ordering and moral belief are fortified by entrenched emotional commitments, storytelling/story receiving solicits powerfully our sympathies and antipathies to activate those systems so that we may participate in a transformative realization of what binds us as emotional individuals to our community.

(Kroeber, 1992, 58)

Lack of awareness or understanding these currents is undesirable, for if ignored, storytelling can be exploited or exploitative, practised purely as business for commercial gain and/or selfish ego-gratification, or even manipulation of others and/or events.

While many participants pursue storytelling practices with the best of intentions, pre-established structures and beliefs assert themselves as Kroeber describes, and in negative ways destructive of genuine storytelling.

The cultural values of a society are those ideas and feelings which are accepted by the majority of its members as unquestioned assumptions. They are the prejudices of a society. To its members, they give life its meaning, laying down the ideals to be striven for, the relative importance of things in relation to their strivings, etc. They are seldom formulated overtly, usually remaining unconscious for most members of a society, whose behaviour, however, is governed by them to a marked degree.

(Vansino, 1961, 95-6)

As we know, modern society is full of contradictions, with many groups’ and individuals’ cultural values in a state of flux. In some ways, mediated experience permits a tolerance or apathy enabling individuals to survive, though not with intimate, meaningful support structures. For contemporary storytelling to provide these support structures, or at least be a response to this situation, as Sobol purports (Sobol, 1999), contemporary tellers must become more fully aware of what happens in storytelling.

What I suggest is a greater awareness—a cognisance—of the different types of mental and emotional processes arising from interaction between mind, brain and the wider
world via embedded experiences, is needed. This is necessary if performances are to be genuine. It also requires tellers to realise any limitations. One thing that happens with a reliance on mediated cognition in storytelling is that it allies it with the postmodern concept of the fragmented subject and its construction by an ideologically charged symbolic order (Crane, 2001, 11). Since the motivation for many contemporary storytellers consists of inherited Romantic notions combined with self-actualisation theory of recent years, their practice is ideologically charged. Acknowledging genuine storytelling as consisting of experiential cognition will move contemporary storytellers away from these impractical philosophies.

As Crane points out, cognitive linguists have traced a number of ways in which word meanings and linguistic structures such as narrative are based upon both complex cultural knowledge and innate domains of mental and emotional processing all tied by social functions. Multiple meanings such as polysemy, metaphor, and metonymy are not exceptions to regular rules of meaning as postmodernists suggest, but manifestations of the ways structures of meaning normally work (Crane, 2001, 13). Only a full understanding of the relationship between cultural and cognitive domains combined with social interaction will effect genuine storytelling as the norm in a modern society with a culture of storytelling.

The messianic/epiphanic nature of some practitioners' relationship to storytelling ignores limitations and real contexts and ultimately contributes to more artificial storytelling. Other participants need not or may not be aware of this relationship between mental and embedded realities and wider contemporary storytelling issues in the same way as tellers. Listeners' reality may be more mediated and they will still realise the storytelling experience, the trance and flow: constituents of genuine storytelling for them. At the same time contemporary storytelling participants exploit common, especially commercial, modern practices to capitalize financially upon their chosen art form. There is more likelihood of genuine storytelling happening, however, when at least the teller's (but preferably all participants') experiences are embedded more in physical than mediated reality.
Contemporary Storytelling's Double Identity in Postmodernism—A Symptom of and Reaction to Postmodernism

Psycho-philosophical and socio-cultural elements, intangible as they may seem, arise from humans and human activities embedded in physical reality. This reality affects the formation and development of mental and emotional processes that also determine perception of that reality. The constituent elements explored in this paper, taking account of psycho-philosophical and socio-cultural elements and mental and emotional processes, provide means for understanding storytelling contexts cognitively. Acts and events of storytelling are ephemeral, creating when genuine altered states of cognition. Because these ephemeral actions turn physical reality into transcendental experiences, criticism of storytellers and storytelling based on cognitive theory provides better understanding of storytelling and its inherent conflicts and potentials.

One clearly observable agreed physical aspect of storytelling as an art form is its intimacy, dependent on social relationships. The appeal of contemporary storytelling is that it creates a semblance of intimacy, informality, community, and genuine social relations; sometimes it actually serves real communities and creates real intimacy. This sense of an ideal condition can and does become real for many, but equally can have a placebo effect without changing underlying conditions. Those recognising this are often repelled by many examples of contemporary storytelling. Some observers are more embedded in an experiential physical reality than a mediated one, so artificial storytelling will not attract them. With other individuals in modern society dwelling primarily in a mediated reality that mediation has tremendous impact on cognition.

This makes contemporary storytelling both an expression of and reaction or response to, and criticism of postmodernism.

To be a storyteller is by definition as well as conventional usage to be a master in the realm of what critics now call intertextuality. A storyteller
is someone who knows more than one story and is presumed to know a great deal about a great many.  

(Kroeber, 1992, 109)

Not only is genuine storytelling produced by a teller knowing a great number of stories; it originates in a teller with a vast and varied quantity of life experiences upon which to draw, or at least is presumed to be able to do this. This is why experiential cognition is vital to genuine storytelling and must be achieved in performance. The mediated cognition that was and is a focus of postmodernist cultural criticism is a phase contemporary storytelling must go through and move beyond, though for the most part it remains in this focus.

Simon Heywood's thesis observed that 'storytelling revivalism', while evoking nostalgic attitudes towards and beliefs in resurrecting texts and practices of a previous age actually constitutes a contemporary expression in reaction to the political and aesthetic status quo (Heywood, 2000). In this sense, contemporary storytelling appears very much to arise from the Postmodernist movement informing and/or defining other art forms.

Postmodernism arises in part from a broadening recognition that our culture demands newly complex relations between work and audience that require us to redefine most of the terms by which we have traditionally thought about art and its functions in society. This has often produced at least a superficial popularizing in recent art that makes modernism appear rather stiff and limited. But the popular culture modernists sought to separate themselves from has itself undergone startling changes: mass culture isn't what it was when moderns scorned it, thanks in part to the effects of modernist art.  

(Kroeber, 1992, 180)

The difference is that contemporary storytelling, like earlier forms of modernism, contradicts itself by on the one hand separating itself from high and popular culture while at the same time utilizing the language, structures, and even the same aims and objectives as popular and high arts. The desire to attract larger audiences, and win recognition in the multi-media—publishing, journalism, broadcasting, and electronic media—have been and are regularly used by contemporary storytelling participants to advertise or otherwise promote artists and events.
This is not to suggest that contemporary storytelling participants must now choose ‘where they stand’, and decide whether their art form will remain a vernacular one, or become a popular or fine art. This is the point—in postmodernism and what follows it, such distinctions have been shown to be unhelpful. Not to be aware of these distinctions and the crossovers in reality, however, is destructive to storytelling’s potential. As I point out, and Heywood, Zipes and others concur, much of contemporary storytelling practice seems to be a bourgeoisification of a vernacular art form to make it acceptable to middle class participants, particularly contemporary storytellers. These tellers are themselves mostly educated, middle-class or aspirationally middle class (in life-style terms). But I say ‘seems’, because the actuality is more complex. Kershaw’s parallel criticism of simplistic understanding of alternative theatre that was assumed to rise out of vernacular into popular, commercial theatre forms, supports this view:

It is a mistake to suggest...that forms such as pantomime and music hall once belonged to the working classes and have been appropriated subsequently by enemies of the class. These forms almost always were part of a complex dialectic through which conflicting ideologies, conflicting interests, have been staged. A major aspect of that dialectic has been the way popular performers and audiences engaged with ideological tensions set in motion by the interaction between rhetorical and authenticating conventions.

(Kershaw, 1992, 154)

Such dialectics have happened, and continue to do so, through all periods of storytelling throughout the performance continuum. Storytelling, by its ubiquitous nature, has performers and performances in every social stratum, with constant flux between all of them. Tom Brown’s study of the interactions between vernacular, popular and high art in the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth, particularly in materialistic and economic terms, also explains this complexity with supporting views (Brown, 2000).

A majority of contemporary storytellers and, even more, contemporary storytelling participants have not considered these complexities. This affects their cognition, their
understanding of their material, practices and events, and their practice. The cognition is not static, and greater understanding of cognitive processes leads to better storytelling and a greater understanding of its potential uses. Nor is it entirely contemporary storytellers and other participants who resist more complicated understanding and appreciation of their art form. Steven Swan Jones and others recognise the bias in more academic areas of cultural criticism and practice. They point out oral narratives, especially folktales, are devalued and thought of as juvenile, trivial entertainment; they do not see how such narratives, along with the acts performing them and events that provide their context, ‘serve important functions for their audiences’ (Jones, 1998, 293).

For some postmodernists, ‘narrative becomes a form of false consciousness and consensus’ (Kearney, 1997, 186). Much of contemporary storytelling could confirm this view and support the idea that it is a postmodern expression. The devaluation of oral narratives and oral narrative performances, a view assuming they are static, not dynamic, leads them to this definition. Much of cultural criticism dismisses the vernacular, that is, folklore.

There is nothing either esoteric or exotic about folklore in small-scale contexts, that is, material aimed at an audience reasonably intimate with the producers. It is often so deeply imbedded in the lives and minds of a community that little discussion is considered necessary. But in some quarters it is still common to assume that ‘folklore’ is a euphemism for moribund culture or that at best it constituted a set of false beliefs associated with primitive mentalities (fortunately) now on the wane in the march of civilization and that traditionality is an unfortunate condition that will soon pass.

(Brewer, 1994, 5)

This latter attitude—one held outside contemporary storytelling and other folk arts—is another force leading to commercial use of traditional genres and commodification of culture. Wells points out that

our present era of rapid social, political, economic responses including movements to rediscover culture traditions or re-define cultural identity, the growth of the cultural heritage tourism, “trans-ethnic folk
romanticism" (Blausteing 1993, 262), and various official and grassroots conservation and preservationist movements...

(Wells, 1994, 53)

also leads us to treating folk arts including storytelling as something moribund and static.

This fallacy suggests art can stimulate aesthetic reaction independent of its context, and apart from associations which the participants introduce in reaction to the art, be it object, performance, process or event. ‘When an individual writes or reads a story (or tells or listens to a story), he brings to bear upon this event associations derived from his own past experiences; an individual’s mind pictures only what is within the realm of his experience, and imagination. In this sense, the concept of an aesthetic, particularly a folk aesthetic, is dynamic, not static’ (Tallman, 1972, 121). Contemporary storytellers insist their aim is to enliven (revive) stories and storytelling, and I believe they are sincere in this and in many cases can and do accomplish their aims. But so long as stories, acts of storytelling, and storytelling events are objectified and commodified they will primarily consist of mediated rather than experiential cognition. This will have a bearing on the overall aesthetic of storytelling. No matter how much contemporary storytellers view their actions as a resistance to the mainstream, particularly the sense of alienation largely created and/or supported by media-and-entertainment saturation, there will be a greater resistance to storytelling by a larger proportion of members in modern society. As Delargy long ago pointed out, ‘The story-teller is a creative literary artist with a sensitive temperament, who cannot do justice to his material in an unfriendly or strange environment’ (Delargy, 1945, 191). At the very least, a greater lack of understanding of and appreciation for storytelling will be perpetuated among the public at large, those without detailed knowledge and understanding of contemporary storytelling.

Heckler acknowledged that electronic media, contributing much to mediated instead of real experience, is a challenge to tellers.
It is not only how we practice our art that is affected by this confusion, but the very definition of our roles as storytellers in a media-and-entertainment saturated age.

(Heckler, 1996, 17)

Media-saturated culture and reality means a detached mental state becomes the norm. These mental states differ significantly from altered mental states identified in this paper as indicative of genuine storytelling. Kearney observed that a cult of discontinuous experience epitomises a saturated media culture such as ours. Not only children but also most adults increasingly experience the world through television, computers and audio-visual machinery. Mediated cognition comes from dwelling primarily in a surrogate, simulated reality leaving us with discontinuous, fragmented experience (Kearney, 1997, 189). Contemporary storytelling experiences aspire to and can achieve that genuine storytelling with preferable altered states, counteracting this media saturation. But as already stated, such experiences, especially festivals and concert clubs, can provide merely a respite, a short semblance of intimacy creating those states. It is not that either the electronic media or contemporary storytelling events are inherently compromised and in conflict. With the former the problem is abuse of the system, while the latter sees problems arising from the relatively young nature of contemporary storytelling as a cultural form and the lack of contextual knowledge on the part of its participants. The danger, as Kearney says, is that we produce a pseudo-civilization devoid of real narrative memory and hope (Kearney, 1997, 193).

Postmodernism was an early response developed to study this state, which militates against genuine storytelling, since one ‘cannot bring an awareness to stories that is not part of your awareness of life.’ Birch reminds us of the aim ‘to make the story real and therefore more compelling to you so that it will be held in all of your senses and not merely as marks on a page’ (Birch, 2000, 1991). Contemporary storytellers criticised for rote memorisation and reciting stories with elaborately choreographed set gestures and vocalisations are not much different from contemporary tellers relying primarily on mediated experiences to convey stories. Just as stories can be related as mere marks on a page or mere flashing images on a screen, the cognitive experience from attending such choreographed storytelling is qualitatively different from listening to genuine
storytelling. The altered mental states of the storytelling experience, and so on, run counter to mental states derived from mediated entertainment. However, these altered states are usually now achieved with awkward self-awareness—more than that, a self-consciousness—that distinguishes contemporary storytelling from traditional storytelling.

Awkward self-consciousness exists because many who are most used to alienated and mediated encounters of real life find real, physically embedded social experiences startling or simply new, and so awkwardness is a natural response. Unfortunately, that awkwardness is then fixed upon by some contemporary storytellers, and other storytelling participants such as organisers. They place more effort on recreating that sensation as though such feeling was the main goal of a storytelling event, rather than pursue acts and events which move the whole ‘storytelling scene’ towards ubiquitous cultural expression in modern society: a true culture of storytelling. Too many contemporary storytelling participants, including many tellers who are successful and particularly those who aspire to mimic their success, are content with the relatively recently established storytelling scene ‘status quo’. Or rather, earlier ‘pioneers’ of what they and others identify as the ‘storytelling revival’ set certain practices and attitudes for storytelling; these are still being aped by followers, both new tellers and participants such as listeners and organisers. This creates a sterile ‘storytelling status quo’ that prevents seeing storytelling develop as a valid, lively art form beyond the current ‘storytelling scene’.

While the chapter on teller-identity recognised contemporary storytelling requires heightened self-awareness, too much self-consciousness leads to artificial storytelling. This self-consciousness arises from bourgeois aspirations combined with saturation of commercial entertainment, particularly electronic forms propagating and confirming bourgeois values and practices in modern society. Kroeber, Crane and others suggest that postmodern society had developed a highly self-conscious sense of experience, with true emotions rising out of faux experiences (Kroeber, 1992; Crane, 2001). Kroeber notes that
postmodernism's relative hospitality (vis-à-vis modernism) to popular and commercial culture expresses a self-reflexivity now—thanks to the effects of sophisticated modernism—deeply built into "popular" entertainments. Even our carnivals are no longer carnivalesque. This self-reflexitivity, however, is tinged with sinister implications in so far as it testifies to lives dominated by imagination-stultifying imagery, increasingly confined within stereotypicality. The frightening feature of TV sitcoms is the possibility that they accurately reflect a de-realized quality in the actual lives of most of their viewers. (Kroeber, 1992, 179-80)

Most people's experiences in life are often mediated through someone else. This other, be it mediator, artist, teacher or mentor, also derived knowledge from mediated experience. Storytelling in the past was, and now is, a mediation of physical reality and the transcendent—a sharing of experience, as Benjamin stressed. 'It has seldom been realized that the listener's naïve relationship to the storyteller is controlled by his interest in retaining what he is told' (Benjamin, 1992, 96). However, storytelling in the past arose from physical experience in reality, and real acts and emotions. Now far too much of what the storyteller conveys is from mediated knowledge. In the past, the physical presence and nature of the teller's character made shared experience, especially combined with the real, physically embodied experience of actions such as telling and listening, significantly different from electronic or literary mediated experience. which as Benjamin pointed out is knowledge, not wisdom. This is now dominating our lives.¹

If life is mediated, if knowledge and emotions are mediated and visceral, this has import on cognition and that cognition in turn impacts on narrative.

The job of a storyteller is fundamentally different from the job of folklorist, scholar, or researcher who may try to keep a clinical or academic detachment from her or his work. It is precisely the storyteller's work to explore a story and make a personal relationship with it. This isn't entirely an intellectual quest, but also a quest for an emotionally meaningful relationship with a story so we can tell it with conviction. A folktale, of any culture, in some essential way, must happen to us as much as any personal story we tell.

(Birch, 1996, 29) [my emphasis]

¹ Appendix I., 78.0., Journal Observation: The 'shock' of live performance.
Without this, and with an over-reliance on second or third-hand (or more) mediated reality, contemporary storytellers exhibit a limited performance range. Some possess ability on all levels and situations throughout the performance continuum. Some can only succeed with genuine storytelling lower on that continuum. Observation suggests some tellers are limited either through lack of innate talent or inexperience, and their storytelling fails when attempting performances too ‘high’ on the continuum. Equally possible and a viable explanation for the existence of so much artificial storytelling in contemporary storytelling high up the performance continuum are professional tellers who mostly, or only, perform high up on the continuum and not at all on lower situations, because they cannot. This makes for their highly theatrical styles and (generally) artificial (mediated, in the way of electronic media entertainment), not genuine, storytelling. 

Signs of this (as Tannen and Sapir observed, referred to in Chapter Three) (Tannen, 1982) are manifested in the language of oral narrative performances. As discussed earlier, significant (and aesthetically pleasing or alienating) differences in oral narrative speech is observable between working and middle-class narrators lower on the performance continuum.

There is an unavoidable parallel between the privatization of language and cultural discourse occurring through copyright and trademark bullying, and the privatization of public space taking place through the proliferation of superstores, theme-park malls and branded villages like Celebration, Florida.

(Klein, 2000, 182)

A homogenised, ‘branded’, cliched style of speaking and performing manifests itself in contemporary storytelling, that goes beyond the beginning storyteller mimicking the ‘voice’ of the mentor, discussed earlier. This is particularly exhibited higher up the continuum, with contemporary storytellers’ ‘bourgeoisification’ of traditional material taking on more abstract and literary language.

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² Appendix I., 79.0., Journal Observation: Elemental Storytelling.
Because most contemporary storytelling participants share performers’ limited real experience, being products of highly-saturated, electronic media and commercial entertainment cultures, the thought processes producing this narrative language style are reinforced.

Any narrator’s behavior will be constrained by various assumptions he will have made concerning his present or presumed audience’s motives for listening to him. Although these assumptions will usually be formed on the basis of the narrator’s prior knowledge of that audience, they may also be re-formed on the basis of feedback from the listener during the transaction itself. The efforts and ability of listeners to shape the tales they hear are evident from the sort of proddings and promptings that are familiar in face-to-face narrative transactions...

(Smith, 1981, 230)

Contemporary storytellers notice audiences of limited experience with live performances of any kind, particularly children and adults entertained solely by commercial, electronic media. Adapting to these sometimes means incorporating the very language of the electronic media that the storyteller aims to provide a reaction and/or resistance to.

Even dedicated storytelling audiences who desire to hear long, traditional tales are affected cognitively by these influences. Some contemporary tellers actively attempt to ‘train’ or ‘challenge’ such behaviours and change listening attitudes by purposely developing longer tales and skills and techniques to support them for performances.

Everything leads one to believe...that the canalization of an audience towards the “simple words” of storytellers as well as the search for an audience of “simple people” by the latter, are all part of an ideological project which aims to reestablish a close relationship to symbolic artifacts. This project, of which all protest movements against consumer society share in some respects (be they ecologists, model communities, biological food adepts, anarchists, etc) underlies the actions of both cultural organizers because public narration, even in an institutional context, appears to approach the closest to the ideal of an immediate esthetic relationship. There is no screen between the storyteller and his public (on stage, no separation), the content of the messages comes from common and accessible stock, the artists use relatively few specific skills which should lock them into the role of a particular “artist” and, above
all, the folktale deals with a different world, an "otherness" which is controlled by a different logic than that of the real social world.

(Görög-Karady, 1990, 176)

Such attempts may be futile, in that we have arrived at certain cognitive strategies through slow biological evolution and socio-cultural developments. Implementing the strategies described contributes to this self-consciousness and awkwardness hindering genuine storytelling and storytelling experience. Socio-cultural experiences within a consumer society are now so significant that, no matter how much participants reject them, they still have a major effect.

A predominant amount of activity in contemporary storytelling takes directly from consumer society's habits and systems (for example marketing, types of scheduling and expectant behaviour for performers and audiences). Contemporary storytelling participants 'canalizing' performers and audiences toward 'simple words' and nostalgic, simplistic and/or Romantic attitudes may be a major contributing factor to the rejection of oral narrative performances by the mainstream as much as these are an attraction to a minority. This is the manipulation discussed previously; the more reliant a storyteller and audience are upon mediated cognition, the more they desire to create an altered mental state artificially, the more different the storytelling will be from that which is managed, achieving altered mental states through experiential cognition.

One dominant factor in contemporary storytelling being more mediated than experiential is the role of institutions. Whether these be educational and library institutions, organisations that support and train professionals, such as teachers, librarians, social workers, religious leaders or performing artists, or associations and cooperative societies specifically created to support storytellers, enthusiasts and storytelling activities, all have done much for good and ill to make storytelling what it is today. The modern model of organised, bourgeois associative groups has done much to create and support storytelling as is recognised in all its forms in modern society today.

3 Appendix 1, 80.0. Journal Observation. Examples of contemporary storytellers putting the story first while ignoring the needs and interests of the listeners.
One must, however, say a word about the organized nature of this form of storytelling. It may be misleading to have referred several times to a "movement" when describing the new storytellers. Even if most of them know each other and maintain continuous relationship, through listening, encouragement, reciprocal criticism and even rivalries and jealousy, they only rarely act collectively as a professional corporation. Nonetheless, because of the specific nature of their practices, they are collectively distinct within the subculture of innovational and marginal artistic enterprises which have come to light in the last decades and within which they seem to fit because of their life-style and the market which they exploit.

(Görög-Karady, 1990, 180)

Ironically, in attempting to replicate admired models of telling, institutionalisation simplifies language while complicating events and processes that do not make storytelling concrete and genuine, but artificial. Simplified language and vocabulary, increased use of vocalizations and paralinguistic forms (sound effects on microphones, etc.) are be relied on more than articulate, descriptive speech using colourful modifiers, and specialised dialect with unique tonal qualities. Forced informal language, in an attempt to induce jocularity and intimacy, creates mediated storytelling: language that is stereotypical, bland, homogeneous. Any kind of storytelling can include simple or complex sentence structures and various levels of articulate success. However the noticeable differences between genuine and artificial telling, often observed but seldom described or explained, are what put many off contemporary storytelling, particularly those passionate about literature. Whether this is good or bad is a matter of taste but if not acknowledged and discussed it creates an incomplete understanding of cognition involved in contemporary storytelling, and how to use that cognitive theory in its criticism.

While lack of direct experience and dependence upon mediated experiences to inform performances contributes to artificial storytelling, there are additional reasons as to why artificial, mediated storytelling predominates in the contemporary storytelling 'scene'.

4 Appendix I., 81.1.—81.3., Review and Journal Observation: Poet's critique of storytelling, and other artists' encounters with contemporary storytellers and storytelling events

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Mediated storytelling, festivals, clubs, is easily marketed and commodified, controlled and controlling. The combination of simplistic, nostalgic, Romantic notions of storytelling, folk and tradition with post-industrial capitalist strategies of popularising and spreading certain entertainment forms creates a narrow cognitive model. Lacking intelligence because they are too divorced from embedded physical reality, they are reductive and therefore insufficient. This limits contemporary storytelling's potential so that it does not adapt and create anew in response to changes in society and could ultimately lead to its redundancy. Like the assembly-line of factories or the logic sequential programming of computer software,

the excessively mechanistic computer-driven model for thinking and the penchant for scientifically oriented test problems foreshadow long-term problems with this approach. For one thing, like most previous approaches to intelligence, the information-processing tack is studiously non-(if not anti-) biological, making little contact with what is known about the operation of the nervous system. For another, there is as yet relatively little interest in the open-ended creativity that is crucial at the highest levels of human intellectual achievement. The problems posed characteristically feature a single solution or small set of solutions, and there is scant attention to problems with an indefinite range of solutions, let alone the generation of new problems.

(Gardner, 1993, 22)

While contemporary storytelling thrives as a vernacular minority interest, making some minor impact on the wider socio-cultural *milieu* of popular artistic and commercial entertainment scenes, impacts are most likely to be short-lived. Popular culture has bigger impact upon contemporary storytelling, though it is more fragile and likely to be damaged if it either resists or denies popular culture's influences too much or takes them on too willingly. It could be a kind of 'fad' that becomes long established within one small socio-cultural group perceived as being increasingly eccentric and detached from the mainstream.⁵

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⁵ Appendix I., 82.0., *Journal Obersvation, Association of Festival Organisers Conference.*
Part II. Moral, Cultural and Social Ramifications in Contemporary Storytelling Dependent upon Mediated versus Experiential Knowledge

Self-Actualisation, Knowledge, and the Attainment of Wisdom

If contemporary storytelling is a more mediated form than traditional telling then there are consequences of interest to participants and sponsors of contemporary storytelling, cultural critics and also those concerned with human cognition and the effects of modern society upon it. Contemporary storytelling is consumed, for self-conscious and self-serving reasons; this makes it very similar to self-actualisation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and indeed some of its origins are traced to these (Heywood, 1998, Sobol, 1999, Heywood, 2000). When contemporary storytelling exhibits primarily those self-actualisation qualities and ignores its greater potential and purpose, it is rightly subject to criticism.

To an extent all narrative discourse is mediation. However, if taking Benjamin’s, Kroeber’s and others observations that the narrator viewed as ‘natural’, ‘genuine’, ‘authentic’ and ‘authoritative’ speaks (or seems to speak) from experience, this is significantly different from the contemporary teller speaking entirely from a basis of mediated knowledge. This is not to say all the former always speak from experiential knowledge, nor that contemporary tellers perform only by means of mediated knowledge. There is potential for a believable semblance of experientialism. Whether real or resembled, this experientiality as the basis of cognition in stories and acts of telling in language, is long apparent through psycholinguistic and cognitive studies. Examples of cognition appear in use of narrative voice, point of view, and digressions, as Livia Polanyi discusses:

When a story is told ... a story world is created with its own spatial and temporal reference points. The characters who people the world operate in the time frame of the story and move about their world from place to place. Likewise, the events and situations which occur are located in time and space within the confines of the created worlds. Tellers, as they recount their tales of other worlds, necessarily must assume a vantage point from which to describe what went on. Normally, narrators speak from one vantage point at a time, describing the goings on, sometimes as an omniscient narrator who reports only what a more or less invisible and
uninvolved character present on the scene might reasonably notice; and
sometimes as one or another character involved in the action at the time it
occurred. They are not wedded to one viewpoint but can switch from one of
these vantage points to another as they see it.

(Polanyi, 1982, 156)

As already discussed, storytellers' actor modes, personation styles, digression (and other
para- and narrative texts' elements) provide various solutions to achieve different
vantage points to convey viewpoints in oral narrative performances. To do so honestly
relies on a teller's experiences embedded in physical reality. This use of experiential
knowledge must not be self-conscious. This is the most difficult aspect of achieving
genuine storytelling by contemporary storytellers. Access to knowledge used must be
unconsciously performed. In normal mental processes most mental functioning is
unconscious for 'the unconscious mind is largely unconscious not because of repression
but because mental processes are simply too complex and swift to be registered' (Crane,
2001, 18). Within the unconscious it is unlikely we could register much difference
between experiential and mediated cognition. Discussions in this paper exploring text,
mega-identity and performance, and audience reception in the hypnagogic trance and so
on reveal that tellers and listeners experience the same real emotions and mental
revelations. Whether they are caused by physical embedded encounters in the real
world or imagined encounters conveyed in oral or other forms of narrative, in the mind
there is no difference. The teller who is capable of unconsciously accessing either form
of cognition and seamlessly presenting it in the performance will convey authenticity
needed for genuine storytelling.

This ability can come from real experiences applied to acts of oral narration, or innate
talents to persuade, convince, beguile, and to use guile and cunning, or from the simple
attainment of natural maturity. There may be verity in the cliched image of the ancient
storyteller by the fireside. The etymology of the Irish word *seanchie*, which popularly
means 'storyteller', has its roots in the word *sean*, meaning old. Literally *seanchie* is an
'old person' or, alternatively, 'one who knows of the old ways and/or things'. Having
lived a long eventful life, an older narrator presumably encountered or witnessed a
wider variety of roles, events, situations and mental and emotional processes than a
younger teller. The older teller’s skill and efficacy would have more in the way of schema to make use of in creating and performing narratives, and a wider range of strategies to do so when creating the storytelling experience. This explains the effortlessness in both older contemporary and traditional tellers, who usually are elderly, often observed and commented upon by admirers. It is possible that admired qualities of traditional storytellers derive not so much because they are traditional, but because they are old. The intense earnestness and over-abundance of energy seen in many young contemporary storytellers is over-relied on to compensate (inadequately) for fewer schemata upon which to draw.

The contemporary storyteller might provide an authenticity suggesting the oral narratives are verifiable by the mere presence of the narrator’s character, age and life history. This is achieved through means of diligent, exhaustive and continuous research, and an (admittedly) eccentric, varied lifestyle markedly different from the audiences’ ‘norm’, and the simple acquisition of age backed by years of such work. But the chances to do this are at best even odds. If the lifestyle experience upon which the storyteller draws is too bizarre and separate from the norm, or if research makes the teller more pedantic than merely knowledgeable, the effect has potential to repel listeners and make performances artificial. No matter how much one lives with, studies under, or reads about a Traveller or Native American storyteller and tries to absorb those storytelling cultures, one cannot become a Traveller or Native American, or any other ‘tradition’ one is not born into.

Too many contemporary tellers give the appearance of trying to do this—to be something other than themselves. Placing more emphasis on mega-identity, using mediated experiences rather than real life-knowledge to create the performance, informs and maintains this impression. As Goffman observed (Goffman, 1981, 1997), we play many roles, particularly within our working life. A contemporary storyteller entirely dedicated to living by study and performance of oral narratives may well develop a mega-identity militating against performance experiences desired for both teller and listeners. Over-emphasis, conscious or otherwise, on mega-identity and mega-
performance draws much from self-actualisation movements popular across modern societies, and too often merely serve to feed egos.

When contemporary storytelling represents a shift towards self-actualisation or, especially, self-aggrandisement then contemporary storytellers and storytelling participants commodify themselves, others, and the stories and story events. This more than anything differentiates contemporary storytellers from traditional storytellers and storytellers lower on the performance continuum. Most contemporary storytellers start from the assumption of universal properties in stories and acts of telling. As folklorist Dáithí ÓhÓgáin states, ‘Where you take folklore—from that, into art—is the local made universal. Culture is each person’s reaction to that person’s environment’ (Ryan, 1995, 9). Emphasising the universal over the local sometimes means sacrificing distinctive voices. It definitely contributes to a more abstract, mediated form of storytelling qualitatively different from genuine storytelling based on experiential knowledge.

**Synergy and the Appropriation of Storytelling Realms**

Contemporary storytellers and other participants claim to preserve and perpetuate marginalised and/or threatened genres as their raison d’être; however, forces within contemporary storytelling can threaten minority storytelling forms not fitting contemporary storytelling participants’ preconceptions. Much of contemporary storytelling takes from the same bourgeois, corporate-minded thought processes that objectify and exploit all discourse by standardising it. Cultural critic Naomi Klein has observed this problem.

We haven’t lost the possibility for non-synergistic art, and serious critical work has a greater potential to reach wide audiences at this time than ever before in the history of art and culture. But we are losing the spaces in which the noncorporate-minded can flourish—those spaces are there, but they are shrinking as the captains of the culture industry become more enraptured by the dream of global cross-promotions. Much of this is a matter of simple economics: there are limited numbers of movies, books, magazine articles and programming hours that can be economically
produced, published, broadcast, etc., and the window for the ones that don’t fit into the reigning corporate strategy narrows with every merger and consolidation.

(Klein, 2000, 188)

In a way, contemporary storytelling, particularly revival storytelling, has seen a rapid growth in the past thirty-plus years because of various synergistic elements. The structures evolved to establish, support and promote contemporary storytelling participants are primarily storytelling festivals, storytelling concert clubs, residential and community projects and institutions supporting storytellers and/or storytelling enthusiasts. Organisers of these events and the leading storytellers featuring at them have become captains of an international cultural industry. Many of these take methods, structures, practices and philosophies from a modern, commercial, corporate-minded model found in the wider world. Economics then plays a strong part. There are only so many storytelling festivals and clubs which prove viable, with a limited number of performance opportunities available. While this no doubt should raise standards to a high and provides storytelling to a select few, not only the tellers making a living from them but other enthusiasts as well, it excludes distinctive voices and many audience groups.

Contemporary festivals’ programmes offer a variety of traditional tellers, all affected by participation in such contemporary storytelling. Contemporary tellers with theatrical performance styles from around the globe make storytelling exotic, esoteric, and commercial. The intentions are good, for festivals maintain their purpose is to celebrate the art form, honour acknowledged leaders in that field, and educate a wider public in the positive aspects of storytelling. But how much educating of this kind is needed, and do we celebrate too early and too few real and lasting accomplishments? If the aim is to strengthen storytelling generally in society, as well as to expand and improve the practice of storytelling on all levels, then storytelling must become a common and easily practised art form, an accepted process, in fact, almost taken for granted.  

6 Appendix I., 83.0., Journal Observation: Insensitive or badly thought-out requests arising from well-meaning intentions.
Economics affect contemporary storytelling: funders, sponsors, potential sponsors, the practices they impose and disciplines they require affect what storytelling happens and how it is perceived.

The marketing of traditions, a concept which seems paradoxical and perhaps amusing on first glance, is a very serious business indeed. Highlighting and retailing a sense of shared tradition is often successful when used by individuals and political factions...to gain personal or collective influence, to advance policies, improve or undermine social cohesion for motives which may be either altruistic or selfish.

(Brewer, 1994, 5)

Going the commercial route with commercial sponsorship affects the telling profoundly, mostly by placing storytelling events very much within the milieu of commercial mass entertainment. This may be desirable: if we want a culture of storytelling in society, and that society is one most aware of and comfortable with commercial mass media entertainment and attendant brand name and homogeneous products and services, then such practices may achieve this goal. The danger is limitations within these forms exclude the very traditional texts and practices they purport to revive and popularise.

Arts councils' and charities' officers have inherited the romantic image of telling, focusing on traditional art being heritage and therefore often outside their remit for funding new works. Alternatively, they subscribe to still prevalent postmodern, semiologist and structuralist notions about narrative—they see storytelling solely as something multi-cultural, or of ‘minority’ cultures, or as a hybrid of ethnic traditions and modern theatrical, literary and mixed media forms. These attitudes blind arts officers to what really goes on in any form of genuine storytelling. Arts councils and other funders set their own agendas, which contemporary storytellers must yield to in the process of professionalising and commercialising a vernacular art form. By raising its status in terms of class consciousness and an aesthetic, complex social, political and personal mental processes all come into play.

It would seem natural...for postmodernism to revalorize storytelling. Narrative has been repopularized.... Yet if postmodernism looks to narrative for alternatives to some unattractive tendencies in modernism,
sociological obstacles to successful storytelling have become greater today than they were a century ago. 

(Kroeber, 1992, 172)

As successful as the storytelling revival has been (and as self-congratulatory as it is), it remains a minority practice. It is either unknown to practitioners of more prominent art forms as well as arts administrators or, if they are aware of storytelling, they view it as Brewer describes, a moribund and embarrassing hangover of a past life or of childhood. Yet as presented here, cognitively each story performance is a new creation, a new work and new theoretical criticisms based upon cognitive science place contemporary storytelling in a vital position for current and future arts activities. Arts officers are missing the enormous potential and possibilities of and for storytelling, though this is not entirely their fault when tellers perpetuate Romanticism by constant talk about preserving and recreating the past. In this storytellers have absorbed much from those living alternative lifestyles. Groups with especial interests in the occult and supernatural have been observed by folklorists: Jones, looking at books profiting from such groups, notes that ‘the authors expect that their readers are people who glorify in their social alienation as a symptom of their “specialness” and who may...be attracted to the idea of supernatural powers as a compensation for powerlessness in other realms’ (Jones, 1994, 137). Many contemporary storytellers, also, seem to glory in alienation and battling against bureaucratic funders so as to protect their own sense of specialness and deny any shortcomings in their own talents or chosen art form.

Within community practices there is more scope for genuine storytelling but problems here include contemporary storytellers bending aims and objectives of projects (aesthetically, financially and morally) for the sole purpose of providing themselves an income. Storytelling is not and cannot be the answer to all problems—though some desperate contemporary tellers try to convince funding bodies, arts officers, educators and the general public that it can when they are either looking to survive financially or show off to their competitors. This comes from the problem of making storytelling ‘special’, and ‘precious’, mostly mediated and divorced from real experiences, which then divorces it from a ubiquitous culture of storytelling where the art form is
appreciated and used but also taken for granted. Storytelling must be seen to be a natural and normal practice, which is not the case for the storyteller in modern society. Hence the overt self-consciousness of contemporary storytellers trying to maintain an idealised form while at the same time incorporating contradictory elements such as bourgeois practices. Contemporary storytelling then becomes like other corporate, commercial and/or mainstream art forms, which push out practitioners and close down alternative public spaces where the non-corporate minded practice: the storyteller with a unique voice and style alien to the established standards of the contemporary storytelling practitioners. 

Social and cultural conditions conspired to prompt individuals to find alternative means of discourse, such as storytelling, as means for expressing or exploring emotional and mental responses to those conditions. Technological developments—a part of the condition contemporary storytelling participants react to—ease dissemination of such responses and initiate new and related responses on a global level. Traditional storytelling is bound, as we have seen, in the localised, intimate and informal. Contemporary storytelling subscribes much more to ‘global culture’, and certainly aspires to ‘the universal’ in human conditions and values. Programming in festivals and clubs strongly features ‘world stories’, ‘universal stories’ and vague categories of tales (often inaccurate: ‘Celtic stories’, and/or ‘Mesopotamian stories’ are two examples). When ‘authentic’ and ‘traditional’ tellers represent their cultures at contemporary storytelling events, particularly at festivals, there is a tendency for organisers and audiences to view them almost as exotic specimens in a zoo, while at the time extrapolating the ‘universal’ aspect of such performances. They ruthlessly and enthusiastically absorb what can be appropriated from the authentic traditional performer’s material. Selective presence of certain types of traditional and contemporary tellers permits creation of false comparisons between ‘correct’ storytelling and stories and ‘lost, exotic and/or native’ traditions, or ‘bad practices’ of storytelling. The result is the storytelling equivalent of revival folk singing on concert stages criticized by Lord, who admitted they might possess an authentic manner of

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7 Appendix I., 84.0., Journal Observation: ‘Living’ and ‘dead’ traditions in contradiction.
representation and the material itself be real, traditional material; as he stated, those imitating the genuine and traditional ‘are mere performers’ (Lord, 2000, 13-4).

A corporate-world image of storytelling may supplant distinctive story genres and storytelling practices it means to support and/or popularise. So far, when a ‘culture of storytelling’ has resulted, it is an elitist culture made up of story-sharing through mediated rather than experiential cognition and supported by conventions more sympathetic with middle class participants that excludes or precludes storytelling lower on the continuum. It suggests contemporary storytelling is a private club, a social clique or mysterious professional guild into which one must be initiated and pass some sort of test. Many, if not most, contemporary storytellers and participants would deny this and certainly it is not their conscious intention. But means thus far used as the primary methods of establishing and defining contemporary storytelling and storytellers have at times created this effect. Again, it comes down to over-emphasis upon the individual performer and the need to create a mega-identity, and audiences to support those identities, combined with the Romantic belief in stories as objects under threat. The alternative is to view stories and acts of telling as processes, valid on whatever level of the continuum they take place.

Even while being higher up the performance continuum, where contemporary storytelling becomes both an artistic expression with professed altruistic and aesthetic aims and at the same time a form of self-aggrandizement, these super-mediated qualities lead to problems. West explains Celati’s viewpoint regarding this when they both observe that those who narrate and those who listen to and read narratives are adversely affected by the current mass-medialogical, educational, and professionalized environment in which an idea of narration as ‘an imaginative way to speak to one another in a circle and in friendship’ has been substituted with an idea of narration as ‘explanations of the world, products for a general public, and material for “people of culture”. We can begin to get out of this prison of deafness and achromatism first by recognizing that we have indeed lost

8 Appendix I., 85.1—85.2., Journal Observation Concerns voiced by librarian storytellers that the emerging professional storyteller as a model will dissuade teachers, librarians and parents from telling stories.
certain abilities of perceiving the subtleties of language, and then by learning to read well.'

(West, 2000, 193)

It should also be added by learning once more to tell and listen well. Tellers have attempted moving from this state by raising the profile of autobiographical telling. To some extent contemporary storytellers in North America and to a lesser degree in Britain, have resorted to autobiographical stories as performance texts for higher up the continuum. Yet this material, too, can incorporate much mediated rather than experiential cognition and be imitated by other tellers who are then telling someone else's reported experience rather than their own direct experience, making the storytelling increasingly a mediated reality.

Effective Storytelling Avoiding Mediated Experience

On an anecdotal level, lower on the continuum, some such as Miguel Oliveira see this use of autobiography as a more effective form of storytelling.

Narrative personal experience is thus viewed as a suitable opportunity for affirming one's positive self-image in one's social group. It follows then that the same cannot be true of narratives of vicarious experience. After all, how could someone evince her/his qualities by telling a story in which she/he did not take part?

(Oliveira, 1999, 35)

The answer to Oliveira's question is demonstrated in the case of genuine storytelling. The Märchen, legend, tall tale, myth, riddle or contemporary legend would all be vicarious experiences in any storyteller's repertoire, in that they are metaphors. The metaphors must have real connection to the narrator's experiential knowledge rather than mediated knowledge. I am not suggesting here that genuine storytelling is achieved by some variation of 'method acting', which in popular parlance leads non-reflective observers to believe the actor learns to 'become' a character and to use 'real' remembered emotions and express them to achieve a performance.

The metaphors have inherent meaning. (I disagree with postmodern and semiological opinions that meaning is always created.) Whatever meanings the narratives or narrative elements convey to the narrator and hence to listeners these must parallel or conform to
the individual's experiential knowledge. Cognitive theory shows us this develops through a combination of memories, included mediated—reported—experiences, and interaction with real-life, physically embedded events. The individual encounters something new and unusual, in this case, a story, and accommodates it and its elements to what is already known. Once understood it is assimilated—it becomes a memory, and transforms from active experience embedded in physical reality to become of itself something mediated. It becomes transcendental. It is then available for future encounters in physical reality and the imagination. If the meaning of the story and its elements are not related to reality in this way, the performance has little chance of becoming genuine.

If the meaning behind the metaphors is an abstract concept for the teller, then the telling is artificial and for self-aggrandizement. Self-aggrandizement is going on, the ego-gratification explored in the teller chapter is present. However, when real experience or memories of real-life experiences are behind the metaphors then the result is genuine. As Benjamin observed, 'It has seldom been realized that the listeners' naïve relationship to the storyteller is controlled by his interest in retaining what he is told.' (Benjamin, 1992, 96). Telling in a social context where the other participants are keen to take on this shared experience, even though it is reported and vicarious, makes for a process of assimilation and accommodation greater than the whole of its parts. When the teller relates real import as to the significance behind the story's images, the listeners attend what is said more willingly and effectively than when the performance is obviously self-serv ing.

Some of the difficulty derives from literary and cultural theories, and contemporary storytelling participants relying upon these works, assuming that the brain is not available to researchers. Yet cognitive sciences 'continue to open windows into the working of the brain and to explore the relationship between the material brain and our immaterial concepts of mind' (Crane, 2001, 10). A recurring observation, brought up in the first chapter, is that due to the development of Romanticism and Nationalism as major movements, and Folklore as a discipline, storytelling studies arising from these have focused too much on texts as objects
rather than as process and event. Contemporary storytellers relying on these studies for rationalisation and creation of their practices have done the same, so that most critical language discussing story-texts focuses upon images and products.

An image, by definition a product, not a process, can be controlled, turned on and off, replayed, run backward. The same mechanical control is more difficult to exercise over authentic story, which exists by being transformed and by transforming itself. The retelling of narrative consists of making it anew: any telling, including a retelling, is unique, as is each rereading.  
(Kroeber, 1992, 177)

Not only must the story be transformed, as Kroeber suggests; for the storytelling experience, the contemporary storytelling participants must be transformed in some way also. Viewing storytelling and stories as process brings criticism and understanding closer to the cognitive perspective, since from ‘a cognitive perspective, the relationship between concept and language is significantly different from the paradigm suggested by Saussurean semiotics on which postmodern literary and cultural critics tend to rely’ (Crane, 2001, 11).

Early folklorists were mostly interested in stories as artifacts, recording, studying and publishing texts with a vast array of commentary regarding origins and meaning. These studies were divorced from the tales’ contexts with little, or no, mention of the performers, studies of audiences, nor observations on venues and circumstances of the events. Only recently have scholars looked at text differently.

A radical departure was effected in folklore studies by the recognition that “texts” are not simply strings of words with a meaning, even when recited according to certain rhythmic patterns, but are an integral part of a performance, which is by definition local, historically timed, and variable in its very repetition.  
(Sautman, 1998, 6)

This change of focus has affected folklore studies and the development of performance theory. It has not necessarily changed perspectives for a majority of practitioners of contemporary storytelling.

Writings of earlier folklorists remain readily available. Critics, writers and poets, psychologists and psychiatrists have referred to them right up to, and including, the
present day. Contemporary tellers still make use of this material, and the story collections and related theories early folklorists developed affect tellers’ identities and actions as performers and professionals. Much older material, discredited by current folkloristic practice, finds its way into new storytelling books: studies of myth, psychoanalytic theory, the art of storytelling, ‘New Age’ paganistic bestsellers and similar tracts. These writings, whether aimed at practitioners of alternative culture, educators, counsellors or tellers impact on perceptions of both performers and audiences. Romantic or mistaken concepts, developed by one theorist, carried on by another, reinforce notions that are banal, misguided or even bad. Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* or Graves’s *The White Goddess* are examples (Frazer, 1950; Graves, 1986), very much products of their time that continue to inform contemporary storytelling practices (Heywood, 2000).

Taking above-mentioned works as definitive interpretations of myth, which some performers and writers do, does not necessarily make for bad storytelling. Whatever their literary or scientific merits, or lack of them, artistry could lift such interpretations from being bad or banal into something inspired. What they would not be is authentic nor natural storytelling, and the possibility of genuine storytelling becomes unlikely. ‘This clinging to what is often a problematic idealization of the past haunts a literary tradition in crisis situations, such as political or cultural dislocation, and in periods when retrospection may seem to the bearers of the tradition the most advantageous perspective from which to legitimate their activities’ (Nagy, 1998, 212). Modern society is, by many accounts, in crisis and such views also are used to account for the ‘storytelling revival’ and give its many practitioners their motivation. Much contemporary storytelling is artificial, even bad, because ideas of what storytelling is, what a storyteller does, and what makes something traditional are based on outdated theories often highly colourful, nationalistic, and/or Romantic. This is mediated mediation, based too much on assumptions and not real-life encounters.

This is not a new phenomenon. Ancient and medieval writers and, we can assume, oral narrative performers of the time relied on beliefs that what they recorded and reported
was important and true. Just as many today assert, practitioners of the past insisted they were keeping alive that which was valued. Self-aggrandizement and the ego gratification derived from performance is nothing new, and clearly has long been a characteristic of humanity. McNamara points out the challenges for those holding such beliefs.

It is a commonplace in medieval narratives to claim that the author has heard widely circulating stories that are being written down “for the benefit (or memory) of posterity.” Simple though this commonplace may appear, it actually suggests a complex relation involving orality, literacy, and both personal and communal memory—along with questions of authority, both official and unofficial, to represent the memory embodied in a tradition. (McNamara, 1998, 21)

McNamara points out this complex relationship for both the medieval practitioner and contemporary medieval scholar. But the complexity remains true for the contemporary teller. Not all are aware of this relationship, nor, if they are, do they willingly acknowledge it. A large number of contemporary tellers do not consider questioning theory, aligning themselves to texts which best support their beliefs and practices without rational evidence.

There are tellers who proudly deny any connection to text, assuming oral and written texts to be polar opposites rather than variations of the same mental efforts. Kudos is claimed from learning a tale via oral sources, rather than books. Inexperienced tellers latch onto those identified as traditional tellers and claim they learn their repertoire, and style and techniques for telling, directly from these. Yet there is little consideration for or understanding of how these attitudes and beliefs affect all participants cognitively.

Even the form of memory is determined by its mode of transmission, the fluidity and potential evanescence of communal memory is presumed by medieval writers to be a function of its oral circulation, whereas the stabilizing of communal memory is authoritative for it is seen as a function of writing....

(McNamara, 1998, 21)

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9 Appendix I., 86.1—86.2., Journal Observation and Interview Transcripts: Mistaken assumptions on oral and ethnic origins of orally told stories as source material.
The form of memory must surely also be determined by modern electronic modes of transmission and this complicates appropriation processes in accommodation and assimilation of cognition in contemporary storytelling. Contemporary storytellers validating themselves by studying with traditional or even established contemporary tellers believe it provides them with legitimacy. The most legitimate practice would involve acknowledging, honestly responding to and accommodating somehow that wider, electronic commercial media-saturated world, reconciling it to the reality of older methods as well as the imagined ideal. Ignoring that wider world does not promote storytelling as an art form any more than selling out to it does.

**The New Reality and Cultural Appropriation**

Among the problems inherent in ignoring the new reality is respect for sources. Tellers learning orally do not always check sources to see where the traditional or original teller came upon a tale, and seldom relate stories and constituent elements to experienced reality. This means there is profound misunderstanding of cognitive forces at work within texts and within performances. In pre-literate societies where acquisition of knowledge was primarily through oral narrative performances, though in actuality such communities were more rare than supposed, there were natural 'checks' and 'balances' providing similar cognitive structures in the use of mediated and experiential knowledge in cognition today. A common knowledge gained and maintained through social exchange meant cognition was much more based on experiential, physically embedded encounters.

The shared experience of traditional communities, based upon the transmission of inherited stories, myths, legends, tales, lore, from generation to generation is being replaced, Benjamin argues, by the more anonymous and instantaneous transmission of information. This signals the end of cultural memory with its specific qualities of continuity, authenticity, accumulated depth and wisdom and the beginning of an electronically interconnected communications network—the so-called global village.

(Kearney, 1997, 184)

Common knowledge now for contemporary storytelling participants seems primarily mediated knowledge—information. Those achieving genuine storytelling do so either
through experience and experimentation, innate talent, and/or personal maturity. Heywood’s relevant observation of contemporary storytellers vying for authenticity at events by deferring to traditional sources and relating their personal contacts with such sources and/or mentors confirms the opinion that too many contemporary tellers view stories as objects for self-aggrandisement and/or commercial gain (Heywood, 2000). There is a difference between recognising, referencing, and respecting sources and using those same sources as a weapon to enhance one’s ego and/or defend one’s personal and professional ambitions.

With many accounts of traditional tellers who include material from written and modern media sources (theatre, cinema, radio and television) in their repertoire, naïve attitudes regarding appropriation of storytelling repertoires and practices can be problematical. Sautman, Conchado and DiScipio point out that

> a variety of other formats may combine written and oral modes, in matters of composition as well as transmission. For instance, a narrative may be originally formulated and transmitted orally, then couched in written form (in one or several manuscripts) but possibly also memorized from this new written version and then altered again in the course of oral performance and its passage through oral tradition. This pattern is further complicated when the “original” oral narrative is informed by written material read by the creator or creators of the narrative.

(Sautman, 1998, 3-4)

The problem is exacerbated when the oral transmission of text is between two or more contemporary tellers, as well as prevalent transmission via electronic media. There are numerous cases of stories being adapted after one contemporary teller performs a tale and other tellers take it up without talking to the original teller about it, nor crediting that teller as a source. There is very much a feeling that ‘tradition’ means taking things willy-nilly without permission or recognition of the material’s origins. As a result, many performers have told stories presumed to be ancient and traditional, by

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10 Appendix I., 87.0., *Journal Observation: Misappropriation leading to cultural appropriation from failure to research.*
anonymous authors, which have actually been original creations under copyright, by performers who first told them from literary sources.

This sort of exchange has always gone on. Today, however, when intellectual property and copyright is an issue there can be dangerous repercussions for the teller who does not know and acknowledge sources or understand copyright. Another, more serious danger arising from this is cultural appropriation. Some cultures and traditions find this no problem, while others find it offensive. A tradition stating strictly that a story is to be told only by designated performers at certain times seems clear. If the traditional performer tells the tale in a non-traditional setting, or if the story is in a published source failing to state properly the conditions of use, or which is poorly interpreted, then confusion arises and, possibly, offence results. One not of that tradition may be permitted to tell a story in restricted circumstances (for example, as a teacher or librarian telling for educational purposes). Even professional tellers may be permitted in those circumstances, but not in others, especially if there is commercial gain such as for broadcast media, audio recordings, or live performances at large, popular festivals.

The use of traditional narrative texts, of other individual’s personal narrative texts, and/or of literary texts can all bring accusations of exploitation. Tellers relating stories not from their culture, and purporting to represent that tale and culture authentically, have been accused of cultural appropriation and exploitation. Issues of cultural imperialism arise. These acts can derive from innocent mistakes or ignorance. They can also arise from commercial imperatives. If society wishes to hear stories of ‘the other’, either in order to empower a minority or to understand that culture’s traditions, tellers may feel pressure to develop and perform such material. Even tellers from ‘other’ traditions may practice a kind of self-exploitation when performing their traditions outside their communities.

Sardar points out that ‘for the west authenticity is an individual goal, for the Others it is largely a cultural process—a process in which the stakes are not for personal identity but the identity and therefore the survival of the community and society as a whole.’
Tellers from ethnic backgrounds in the minority, performing exclusively for the majority, tread a delicate balance between expression of communal identity and survival and exploitation of their community. Western cults of individualism and materialism have tremendous affect on any teller’s work. Many African, Afro-American, Native American, First Nation and Asian writers and tellers ‘see the appropriation and pollution of the true essence of their culture by white writers and demand that their ownership of their stories be recognised’ (Sardar, 1998, 165).

Yet what is to be made of those writers and tellers if they solely or primarily address white audiences? Are they different from white tellers and writers performing stories from traditions outside their own culture to, primarily, white audiences? In terms of achieving genuine storytelling, and the storytelling experience, this research would conclude they are much the same and the lasting benefits of their work would be doubtful. Issues of class would come into play as well, since, if the stories do come from the disenfranchised, suppressed, or discriminated working and unemployed classes to be used as entertainment for the middle class majority, there is much concern as far as the ethics of this.

There are advantages to intracultural storytelling, but these are tempered with a caveat. As Birch and Heckler believe,

when someone from within a culture speaks to others of the same culture, intracultural dialogues flourish. When a storyteller tells stories from another culture, it can promote crosscultural dialogues. However, if a storyteller pretends to be part of a culture he or she is not related to, the misrepresentation stifles the possibility of real dialogue. To an audience unfamiliar with the story’s culture, the best that can be achieved is a performace tour de force. The spotlight stays on the storyteller, leaving both the complexity and truths of the culture—as well as the audience—literally in the dark. It is the essence of storytelling as disingenuous entertainment. Make no mistake, this is neither an indictment of storytelling as entertainment nor of a storyteller’s skillful achievements. It is an indictment of the mendacious qualities when boldness lacks intelligence and integrity.

(Birch, 1996, 88-9)
There are contemporary tellers who seek to avoid this, but still tell traditional stories outside their own culture. They look to texts from ‘dead’ civilizations, seemingly because one doesn’t have to ask permission or make excuses. These texts have particular exotic or romantic appeal and may truly cry out to the teller to be told; reviving them is seen as heroic, ‘saving’ narratives that may be ‘lost’. Psychological motivations are again at work, with tellers seeking material justifying their roles and the act of storytelling according to codes set outside the context of oral narrative performance (e.g., early folkloristics, Romanticism, etc.). Mendacious achievements use intelligence, altruism and research to mask the fact egos are fed, and qualms assuaged. So overwhelming can these attitudes be that tellers forget that even ‘dead’ civilizations have descendants, and ‘lost’ stories may still live in modern variants. Worse, they start with this reasoning and still exploit and appropriate.\(^{11}\)

Other moral issues exist regarding all texts. Mores of cultures evolve, and what is acceptable to one epoch can be reprehensible to later generations. Stories embody experience and values, and therefore contemporary storytellers are repelled by, or fear carrying on, attitudes people today consider sexist, racist, xenophobic, violent or otherwise offensive. Many offensive versions were imposed by recent interpretations. Oral forms can be offensive, but literary and mass media interpretations have had wider and greater impact. Nineteenth century folklorists and moralists, and twentieth century capitalists developing mass entertainment often bowdlerized traditional narratives to mirror their own tastes. Warner, Zipes and others have documented the evolution of traditional and literary fairy tales over the centuries, analyzing the imprint of mores current at the time (Warner, 1994, Warner, 1998, Zipes, 1993, Zipes, 2002). Traditional narratives remain powerful because they are malleable; as metaphorical language communicates both tellers’ and listeners’ moral views within performance and social contexts. If offensive, they are changed or dropped from the repertoire, but sometimes resurrected by later performers when the basic text is needed for new circumstances. This is another property of narrative texts (traditional, personal, and/or literary) that the contemporary storyteller must be aware of and use.

\(^{11}\) Appendix II., 21.0. Gathered material data.
Cultural appropriation, however, is more complex than the use and manipulation of texts—it is not only about text. Many in modern society, not just contemporary storytelling participants, appropriate entire ways of telling and listening, indeed, even ways of living. ‘Lifestyles’ are now highly commodified with powerful advertising providing impressions that they can be easily traded, transformed, and will improve the individual in countless ways. Such picking and choosing is easy among those functioning primarily through mediated cognition, and surely conflicts with those whose condition arises from experiential cognition. Rather than personal satisfaction and conflict resolution, the potential is for alienation and increased disparities.

The world is becoming with accelerated swiftness a single culture, and narrative has always been rooted in localisms—the personal, the family, the tribe, even the nation. In a unitary worldwide civilization perhaps narrative discourse has little or no significant function.

(Kroeber, 1992, 187)

Increasingly while ‘lifestyle’ is offered as a choice, the range of lifestyles from which to choose are limited, being homogeneous and manufactured. As Sennett pointed out, there is an overemphasis on ‘personality’ and an individual’s character is neglected, even ignored or destroyed. ‘Character is expressed by loyalty and mutual commitment, or through the pursuit of long-term goals, or by the practice of delayed gratification for the sake of a future event’ (Sennett, 1998, 10).

**Cognition’s Role in Entrenched Positions on Storytelling**

There is one more aspect to consider regarding the relationships between teller, participants and texts and cognitive processes involved making up the total context. Earlier, developmental experiences with oral and literary text affect each teller’s mental processes. Their definitions of story and performance, their strategies and techniques: all are informed by continuous interaction with spoken and written language. Some contemporary tellers affect pre-literacy to be a desired state, or claim to be post-literate, believing a purely oral relationship with stories is the ideal. Yet all contemporary storytellers come from a literate background. They may not have achieved success in
literacy, but certainly were exposed to modern education. This means the notion of a fixed text, an artifact to control and use, remains.

Even the form of memory is determined by its mode of transmissions, the fluidity and potential evanescence of communal memory is presumed by medieval writers to be a function of its oral circulation, whereas the stabilizing of communal memory is authoritative for it is seen as a function of writing...

(McNamara, 1998, 21)

Contemporary tellers who idolize a notion of a pre-literate storytelling, attempting to learn all repertoire though oral means alone, may think they are replicating some mental state as practised in a fantasized past. They cannot escape their own experience, being products of a literate society, as are audiences they ostensibly serve. Their literate minds are going to impose themselves upon interpretations, performance, and the very texts they choose and develop if theory is correct and mode of transmission determines mental processes. Media-saturated minds that are commercially and materialistically acquisitive are also going to impose those outlooks on texts, events, and actions: the total process of storytelling. Sautman and other warn that ‘the presupposition of complete separation between written literary creation and oral creation/transmission does not hold up much better as a hypothesis in the distant Middle Ages than it has been shown to do in the more recent past’ (Sautman, 1998, 11). All forms of narrative and paraperformance text—written, oral, and/or electronically mediated—must be taken into account in any study of storytelling today.

One must consider whether it is mistaken to define a modern society saturated with electronically mediated experiences as significantly different from one where a majority of members have developed cognitively through direct experiences embedded in physical reality.

In a world capable of instant electronic transmissions and rapid and inexpensive reproduction of images...the patience required of a narrative audience, its willingness to let a story unfold at its own pace, may not be a valuable attribute. Most significant is the question of repetition. I have stressed that retelling and rereading of stories permit transformations that keep narrative alive because everchanging. But the exact replicability of a film, now accessible everywhere through the VCR, would seem to threaten that vitality.
Yet if the predominant experience is mediated, that must be the physical reality. And if part of the definition of embedded physicality contributing to cognition is replicability and repetivity, then such behaviours and potentials are certainly prevalent in this society. Given the phenomenon of film clubs, the popularity of cult films and television programmes, the willingness and desire for replicability (re-experiencing) remains prevalent. If so, the cognition involved in storytelling and story listening should be more or less the same as it is for members of societies whose mental and emotional processes arise primarily through direct physical experiences. Obviously the nature of experiences (real versus mediated) is not diametrically opposed but, again, part of a continuum. Therefore significant observable differences in telling and listening behaviours, suggesting radically different cognition, could be explained by contexts. As discussed in the chapter on listeners, data show that an inattentive, self-conscious and/or inexperienced audience, can be drawn into the same qualitative storytelling experience as another group more disposed to hypnogogic trance when the teller possesses the skills and judgment in terms of choosing and using texts.

However, certain changes in modern society happening at such a rapid pace have produced anecdotal evidence raising doubts that the range of differences from cognition derived from experiential and mediated realities are on a graduated continuum. There is worry—speculative for the most part—that some groups (younger generations, certain ethnic, class or national groups) have developed markedly different cognition, and even physiological aspects in the brain. Peter Hunt suggests this could be similar to the rapid development of the printing press on society in terms of social, religious and political impacts and slower influence on the evolution of literature, specifically the development of the novel (Hunt, 2000). As Lodge pointed, out, this led to the gradual ‘discovery’ of concepts such as consciousness and subconscious, and the modern literary practices of stream-of-consciousness and varied narrative points of view (Lodge, 2002). Hunt asserts this semi-oral, semi-electronic environment will gradually evolve new narrative in ‘post literary’ forms similar to previous oral narrative structures (Hunt, 2000). Such
developments would indicate mediated cognition is the "new" experiential cognition, and close on the continuum.

Jack Zipes, on the other hand, indicates darker worries as not all change is down to electronic technology (Zipes, 2001, 2002). Chemical and medical developments also influence cognitive development. As he points out, statistically an increasing number of school children in the Western World, and particularly in North America and Britain, are on medication for "behaviour disorders", such as attention deficit disorder. There is also significant data, and concern, about the rise in mental illness and applied chemical treatments in terms of medical care. Drugs used to control these conditions insulate individuals from reality, and so form another kind of mediated cognition.

The limitations of this thesis make it impossible to state how influential such concerns are when it comes to the storyteller's cognition, yet these are conditions, often hidden, forgotten or ignored, that contribute significantly to the context in which contemporary storytellers work. Although one would desire to pursue direct evidence between the relationships of electronic, chemical mediated and experiential cognition with contemporary storytelling, much of the material researched for the topic remains, at the present time, mostly speculative. Scientists in all related fields (cognitive, medical, psychiatric and psychological, and pedagogical experts) are just beginning to ask questions in this area. 12

What such questions tell us about the contemporary storyteller and contemporary storytelling practice is that so long as the art remains a performance art higher up on the performance continuum for a limited number in society, contemporary storytelling will remain a minimal part of modern society's vernacular and popular cultures. Even more, it suggests contemporary storytelling will remain reliant primarily on mediated rather than experiential cognition, in itself a cause for contemporary storytelling's relegation as artistic activity to the fringe of modern society.

12 Appendix II. 21.0., List of websites.
Part III. Challenges and Opportunities for Contemporary Storytellers, and Possible Research Arising from Contemporary Storytelling

Problems

Observations in this study focused on the certainty that contemporary storytellers face challenging influences in modern society upon their work and sense of self, along with the negative aspects of artificial storytelling. Contexts provided by modern society within which the contemporary teller lives and works are beset with possible conflicts. How we live and how narrative operates are increasingly at odds. Story originates in representations of people functionally individualized through their relationships with others.

(Kroeber, 1992, 192)

We live in a highly marketed, branded and commodified world. The alienation and exploitation so remarked on by Sennett, Klein and others unfortunately can, as they point out, see relationships selfishly objectify individuals to serve self-esteem and financial gain (Sennett, 1998; Klein, 2000; Sardar 1998). These same tendencies lead to commodification and bourgeoisification of stories, suggesting storytellers and acts of telling are being forcibly changed to serve only to middle classes and/or individual livelihood and self-esteem, meaning storytelling develops into something tawdry and self-serving.

This is not my intent as a storyteller or my opinion of my own work and the work of many others: I do not consider this to be the overwhelming state of things for contemporary storytellers and in contemporary storytelling. However, I do fear there is potential for such a state to become dominant. Many professional storytellers with long, successful experiences in the field express concern for a lowering of standards, caused by a profession crowded with opportunistic newcomers lacking training, experience or talent who will divert much of the general public to the causes of their revival storytelling (Heywood, 2000). Such fears suggest to me that a cult of personality has become the prime focus of contemporary storytelling, with many individuals practising the art for more selfish reasons. It is not the newcomers threatening aesthetic standards, professional practice and the status of storytellers and storytelling. Professional,
experienced tellers, particularly those associated with ‘founding’ the ‘revival storytelling’ movement can do this by becoming entrenched, protective and too precious about what they do. A graver danger arises from the possibility that more public, commercial successes in contemporary storytelling, such as festivals and clubs, become the primary form both contemporary storytelling participants and the general public think of when hearing the words ‘storyteller’ and/or ‘storytelling.’

There is certainly a place for such events, and they are much in need of serious study and real criticism, for their own benefit and the benefit of the art form generally. Overwhelming forces, however, still see storytelling marginalised. The actions of contemporary storytelling participants do not necessarily counter this process and, if anything, reinforce the position.

Despite these attempts at revalorizing the nature and functions of storytelling, given the increased rationalizing and technologizing of social life, accompanied by appalling growth of population, “return” to critical appreciation of narrative must remain doubtful. And storytelling is perhaps more precariously situated today than it was with our grandparents at the beginning of the century.

(Kroeber, 1992, 191)

If storytelling festivals and concert clubs become the ‘cliché’ for what storytelling is, they will prove as detrimental to the future of storytellers and storytelling as many contemporary tellers consider the cliché of the librarian-storyteller to be.

There are tellers who resent coming upon an image still present amongst the general public, that storytelling is for children and that it consists solely of a librarian reading aloud a story from a book to a small group of youngsters in a corner. Both views are by their nature simplistic—as clichés are. I believe the librarian-storyteller in her corner is as vital and important a form of storytelling as is the festival with highly-paid theatrical performers entertaining audiences in their thousands. The performance continuum validates all kinds and forms of storytelling. Rather than evaluate good standards of practice by placing these forms relative to each other, the quality of storytelling must be determined in relation to context and intent within the praxis of text-teller-listener-environment. As this study has shown, narrative, and particularly oral narrative, is far
more varied and complex than either model. As a ubiquitous aspect of human nature in all conditions, I believe narrative very much one of the universal domains of cognition. As such it has great power and will always find different forms of expression and use.

The fear arises that 'revival' storytellers, those performing primarily for and at festivals and clubs, become the standard image, and this image will fossilise and keep contemporary storytelling a minority interest for a few specialists and cranks. This has, to an extent, already happened with folk music festivals and clubs, and the audiences and performers involved in such events. Storytellers delight in their individuality, eccentricity and aspects of anarchy inherent in the craft, but if storytelling is or becomes a minority interest the power to confront, change or generally serve modern society will be missed. Almost all involved in contemporary storytelling express sincere, liberal and worthy views of the world and a desire to change it for the better. The Romantic strain exists for the good as well as the detrimental. But investing all one's energy and sense of self as a storyteller in 'revival' activities, festivals and clubs, immersing oneself in an artificial community (the 'storytelling scene') means such expressions become shallow and ineffective. The storytelling scene of festivals and clubs provides a placebo effect, with temporary communities but ultimately no effect on the wider more powerful causes of alienation and loneliness in modern society.

**Perceptions**

Roemer points out that

Storytellers...are apt to be prisoners of their perceptions—which in turn, are almost entirely conditioned by society. But there have long been narratives that undermine rather than confirm our assumptions. Some storytellers seem to resemble the alienated, placeless individuals, or "heroes" who carry out tasks the community cannot accomplish or risk. They stand outside the coordinate system, less blinkered by its limitations, and may, indeed, have an interest in invalidating the very structures that excluded them. As outsiders, their experiences are often unprocessed, anomalous, and inexplicable—encounters with the unknown or unconscious.

(Roemer, 1995, 32)

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13 Appendix I. 88.0 Journal Observation, Whitby Folk Festival Discussions and Conference of Festival Organisers.
This again evokes Benjamin’s two storyteller types: one the artisan embedded in a community where everyone knows each other (that is, of the rural past); the other the visiting stranger (such as a sailor or merchant) bringing vital experience from the outside world to share with that enclosed one (Benjamin, 1992). Benjamin suggested such storytelling was endangered by modern technology emphasising exchange of information rather than of experience. Much of contemporary storytelling activity has been an attempt to refute this, and to ‘revive’, or perpetuate and support, the storytelling he celebrated. Others in modern society concur with his concerns.

Ong, for instance, stated, ‘Writing and print and the computer are all ways of technologizing the word. Once the word is technologized, there is no effective way to criticize what technology has done with it without the aid of the highest technology available’ (Ong, 1982, 79). Many contexts in modern society and contextual effects upon cognition in contemporary storytelling arise from this technologising explored by Ong. Hunt, Zipes and others express fears, and hopes, for how this technology and accompanying shifts in mores will affect human cognition and physiology as well as narrative forms (Hunt, 2000; Zipes, 2001, 2002). Even so, contemporary storytelling participants and scholars, folklorists, linguists and cognitists all recognise that throughout modern society the ‘tendency of both reciter and the audience to become completely immersed in a story is well documented’ (MacNeil, 1987, xxiv). Data from this study reveals that no matter how affected a group of children are by commercial, electronic entertainment they can enter the storytelling experience and create it themselves as tellers. Those completely outside contemporary storytelling practice, such as psychologists and linguists, recognise this. ‘Few would deny that we all have stories in us which are a compelling part of our psychological and ideological makeup’ (Coles, 1989, 24). The survival, continued use for and study of storytelling will be a long one.

One condition continuously raised as both a requirement and reason for storytelling is that of community. The disintegration of communities in modern society is of concern
to many, and contemporary storytellers make claims for their art addressing this problem. Yet they are challenged either to find or create that community, a process more often accidental, or incidental, than conscious because emphasis has been on texts and performers.

Storytelling requires a community in order to exist, though it may be the sudden and unexpected one created, by pity on the one hand and misfortune on the other, between the shipwrecked man and the person who rescues him on the beach; the novelist, on the other hand, is apt to intone a lament for a lost community.

(Savater, 1982, 9)

Similar laments prompted contemporary tellers to create a ‘storytelling community’, but this community quickly becomes static. It is natural for communities to become fixed; as folklorists have observed, within traditional storytelling the community—consisting of tellers and listeners—serves as a conservative influence upon the art form. While the number of storytelling events has grown at a terrific rate in affluent western societies during the past two decades, there have been few or no studies measuring these and fewer still analysing audience size and make-up. Apparently motivations for such audiences to attend contemporary storytelling events such as festivals consist of the following:

- For entertainment
- A desire to be storytellers themselves (using festivals as a means of training—for learning how to tell and for sources of stories)
- For socialising—to achieve a sense of belonging to a community (a real one or one created)
- A combination of any and/or all these

Since storytelling festivals and concert clubs take other commercial entertainments as their models, the context for the contemporary storyteller is to be an entertainer.

In a context where entertainment is expected, or appropriate, the storyteller’s main task is first to convince the audience to view her as a performer and then to persuade this audience that she is the ideal performer for this situation.

(Peiffer, 1994, 93)
There are other persuasions, however, necessitated by audience motivations at festivals. All audiences have a responsibility to judge the teller, text, and act of telling, as Bauman, Georges and others well established (Bauman, 1984, Georges, 1971). Those desiring to attain the status of professional storyteller, or any type of storyteller, will be even more critical, even envious of the tellers highlighted at festivals. This can create a tension between tellers and listeners inimical to the storytelling experience. Motivations for socialising and the creation of communal feelings are paid lip-service, either by using texts expressing universality of human nature or through faux informality (Heywood, 2000). True community involvement is scarce for many storytelling festivals, with few locals taking part, out of lack of interest or inability to pay high ticket prices, and few community storytelling projects linked with the main action of festivals. When community events are incorporated they tend to be tokenistic (such as sending tellers out to perform to local school children and the elderly, more in hope of publicising the festival rather than generating real local involvement).

Such criticism was noted by Wilson's review of one extremely successful and popular storytelling festival in Britain.

*Beyond the Border* has evolved, at least in part, to act as a flagship to promote storytelling in Wales. In this it has certainly achieved a good degree of success, in that there are now more storytellers in Wales than there were before. But the job is not yet complete. There are clearly three main types of audience at this year's festival. There were the young New-Age festival-goers, who naively, but harmlessly, perceive storytelling as an essential constituent of a Utopia of pre-industrial (and even pre-Christian) simplicity. Secondly, there were members of the 'storytelling community', committed enthusiasts who, like their folk music cousins, support storytelling festivals and clubs with an energy which can only be admired. Finally—and probably the largest grouping—were the left-leaning, *Guardian*-reading, middle-classes ... but the festival now needs to reach out to its new audiences as well, embracing the democratic nature of storytelling, and attracting those who would not normally participate in the arts.

(Wilson, 2002, 99)

Such comment would be typical of almost all storytelling festivals throughout Europe, America and Australia. Exceptions to this do exist, particularly with regard to festivals in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Saint Louis and Illinois, for example. Other storytellers
believe, also, that festivals which commission long-term community projects and the development of new storytelling performances will widen audiences and incorporate more members of society at large.

Criticism also exists within the arts, but is little developed. Again, this is due to the lack of critical language first discussed in this dissertation. A recent example is found in an essay by the poet Gillian Clarke in the Welsh Academi’s publication, A470, along with responses from a literature festival organiser, a storyteller, and a schools librarian. Clarke raised the question regarding scarce funding, and whether it is appropriate for writers to be paid for performing but not writing by arts councils and similar bodies, or for storytellers to be paid out of an arts council’s literature budget for performing when they are not writers. There clearly is misunderstanding between the nature of orality and literacy and attendant aesthetic interests within the field of literature. Clarke attended the same festival as Wilson, and noted:

In between my sessions I listened in walled gardens to snatches of stories being told. Some were compelling. Some were poor. Some of the language was powerful, some was clichéd. I was struck by the fact that, apart from two storytellers from Wales, I knew nobody, and the occasion was hardly Welsh at all. It wasn’t common ground with Hay-on-Wye, the Eisteddfod, Academi’s Festival of Literature. With exceptions, storytelling and literature seem to have quite different audiences, and one does not appear to be leading to the other. Even those attending my reading and workshop looked strikingly different from most of those attending the storytelling events.

(Clarke, 2002)

The response to this article was vastly in defence of storytelling, and of contemporary storytelling being included as a form of literature. It clearly raised strong emotions, touching issues regarding art aesthetic, nationalism, politics, and class. These issues, however, were not pursued and definitions and the relationships between forms not clarified by the debate.

**Potentials**

Successful contemporary tellers develop as artists and improve their practice through knowledge of audiences gained by experience or innate understanding of human
dynamics. Some festivals have now existed a decade or much more, and although they may be larger in terms of the number of events and participants, they still maintain very much the same format, and increasingly the same artists and audience members, as when they began. With emphasis on individual tellers who were popular at previous festivals and, rightly, acknowledged for their pioneering work, the result is still the objectification of the performers, who are used as marketing tools to assure the commercial as much as the aesthetic success of the event. But this is the conservative element that turns contemporary storytelling into ineffective cliché in terms of its place in modern society.

The teller must have freedom to experiment. The art must be able to grow and reflect the society from which it emerges. The new tellers find ways to interact with their urban environments through stories... The storyteller is a player, he plays with images, audience, and patterns of narrative. Through play transformation is possible. The teller can elicit pleasurable feelings from his listeners, one of the universal qualities of storytelling.

(Wischner, 1991, 46-7)

Developing new stories and/or new genre for performance is not experimentation or novelty. Revival storytelling activities have no doubt a counter-cultural aspect as Heywood ascribes to them (Heywood, 2000). They are, however, susceptible of becoming set in their ways and the pleasure tellers solicit from listeners becomes self-serving. It is not wrong, but it is delusional when festivals and concerts become ends in themselves while at the same time claiming that they achieve more than entertainment through storytelling. Successful storytellers on all levels and situations understand the important role listeners have in creating the storytelling experience, as described earlier. They appreciate the vital role of the local over the universal. When they do not and either ignore or try to control audiences artificial storytelling develops.

Once a storytelling community is established and storytellers cater primarily to it, listeners become a much more fixed entity that performers can play to and manipulate, rather than engage with as equals. This creates a storytelling that is more similar to the writer-reader relationship, where the writer imagines the reader in too abstract a fashion.

As the storyteller functions are subsumed with author functions, narrative is perceived less as transmission and more as creation, and its primal
function of making sense of contingencies changes, and focuses increasingly on singularities of subjective, psychological experience.

(Kroeber, 1992, 37)

Should contemporary storytellers take on too much of this novelist role there will be the problem that his or her mega-identity and performances will be artificial, cocooned from the real world in an artificial community of other tellers. Contemporary storytellers do appropriate these author functions, seeing themselves and behaving as creative artists, justifying what they do through subjective and psychological impressions. It is this that leads too much focus on the individual to prima donna behaviours, the ‘Hollywood star system’ that Zipes criticises (Zipes, 2001, 128). Ironically it militates gaining any respect from critics of literature and literary writers, imbued with fashionable postmodern views of narrative. ‘For...the postmodernists, narrative becomes a form of false consciousness and consensus’ (Kearney, 1997, 186).

When contemporary storytelling is artificial, those not enamoured of its philosophy or nature criticise it with these words, and other literary artists and literature officers determining arts council funding decry storytelling as pastiche, parody, or bad practice.

A greater challenge, and risk, is to find and develop storytellers within those broken communities that need them most.

The presence of a storyteller, besides validating a narrative as belonging to a larger social or cultural context (that a story can be told implies some shared community between teller and audience), provides the most direct means by which changes in audience perspective can be effected.

(Kroeber, 1992, 108-9)

If there is a question of priorities when it comes either to funding or the choice of work involving contemporary tellers, it is the embedded community work tellers do rather than the current emphasis on festivals and clubs which is more important. Community projects are far more challenging, fraught with disappointments, slow progress, and little public recognition, but their impact will be, and is, more lasting. Contemporary storytelling institutions generally prioritise services and fundraising for professional, commercial storytellers through the creation of directories, websites, festivals and other
events, and mass-marketing and branding strategies. Storytelling activity on the middle
and lower parts of the performance continuum is more in need of support. These
activities will develop oral narrative as a process rather than an event, focusing on the
act rather than the individual, and create a real culture of storytelling in modern society.

Much good work of this kind takes place, particularly in Northern Ireland, Scotland,
Wales and parts of the United States, England and France. It is, however, not given the
financial and administrative structures to sustain it. One unique initiative is praised,
pioneers good practice and ends with a positive report, only to be left unrepeated due to
lack of funding. This is partly due to funding agendas which finance only original work,
and partly to constant changes in institutional and community practice in modern
society. 14

Contemporary storytelling must begin to rely upon a greater application of cultural
criticism based on cognitive science. This should provide better understanding so as to
improve and shape tellers’ work in a meaningful, purposeful way. It will also raise the
status of storytelling in the eyes of funders, academics, politicians, educators and the
general public without recourse to mimicking solely the practices of electronic mass-
media commercial entertainment. It should be possible to integrate the best of a variety
of current practices and encourage diversity of content, application and events. This will
lead to a healthier range of storytelling and ultimately a culture of storytelling.

Cultural critics would do well to consider aspects of oral narrative performance on all
levels and forms, rather than those lower on the continuum embedded anecdotally in
conversation. Storytelling does much to counter postmodern thought while, it seems to
me, remaining an expression growing out of it.

The linkage of words through sound itself is a feature of the human
cognitive system that cannot be easily assimilated to rationalist explanation.
In this sense it may disrupt Foucauldian theories of discourse, which do not
seem to allow for logical or nonsignifying elements of language. And yet,
cognitive theory recognizes that such links are neither accidental nor special

14 Appendix I., 89.1-89.6., Journal observations. Examples of successful ‘functional’ (community)
storytelling projects that have not been repeated.
devices of literary language but a crucial feature of the storage and retrieval of words in the brain. Studies of phenomena such as malapropisms and other word-retrieval errors as well as tests of word recall and memory have shown that sound plays an important role in our ability to understand the speech of others and to recall and produce words while speaking and writing.

(Crane, 2001, 180)

One matter disrupting structuralist theory the most is Kershaw's observation that there is an ideology of individualism which assumes that a society can function through discourses that do not produce common meanings. In my view the contradictory nature of this proposal renders it nonsensical...as both quintessentially assume the possibility of a collective response based on the achievement of shared readings.

(Kershaw, 1992, 35)

Through cross-disciplinary study and empirical observations of contemporary storytelling in the field we can achieve greater understanding of narrative arts when we see in practice interactions of text, teller, listener and space in creating storytelling experience, and alter mental states.

For cognitists, linguists, neuro-scientists, evolutionary biologists, psychologists there remains the need to acknowledge the fact that contemporary storytelling has not been studied in depth. There remain many subjects for comparison and review, particularly in the study of more formal storytelling higher on the performance continuum. For one thing, while Benjamin (and others since then) decry the sequential-logical, mechanistic, electronic, information-driven nature of our society, scientists are coming to the conclusion that models derived from these conditions are inadequate to understanding cognition—and humanity. There are problems with the excessively mechanistic computer-driven model for thinking and the penchant for scientifically oriented test problems foreshadow long-term problems with this approach. For one thing, like most previous approaches to intelligence, the information-processing tack is studiously non-(if not anti-) biological, making little contact with what is known about the operation of the nervous system. For another, there is as yet relatively little interest in the open-ended creativity that is crucial at the highest levels of human intellectual achievement. The problems posed characteristically feature a single solution or small set of solutions, and there is scant
attention to problems with an indefinite range of solutions, let alone the generation of new problems.

(Gardner, 1993, 22)

Opting for a biological, as opposed to anti-biological (mechanistic/electronic) link to understanding intelligence supports the practice and study of oral storytelling, which itself must look to the embedded physicality of biological contexts. It is now easier than ever before to study the physiology of the brain and related bodily functions when telling and/or experiencing orally, written or read narratives.

Summary

Study of contemporary storytelling can provide structural and psycholinguistic theories and the development of transformational grammars for oral narrative performances higher up the continuum.

A focus on the mastery of domains entails certain assumptions. One belief is that, within each domain, there exists a series of steps or stages, ranging from the level of rank novice, through apprentice or journeyman's status, to the status of expert or master. Irrespective of domains, there should...be a stagelike sequence through which any individual must pass. However, individuals differ greatly from one another in the speed with which they pass through these domains; and contra Piaget, success at negotiating one domains entails no necessary correlation with speed or success in negotiating other domains. Domains may be cordoned off from one another in this sense. Moreover, progress in a domain does not depend entirely on the solitary individual's actions within his world. Rather, much of the information about the domain is better thought of as contained within the culture itself, for it is the culture that defines the stages and fixes the limits of individual achievement. One must conceive of the individual and his culture as embodying a certain stage sequence, with much of the information essential for development inherent in the culture itself.

(Gardner, 1993, 26-7)

Since cognitive scientists have already traced a number of means by which word meanings are based on complex domains of cultural knowledge, extending meanings beyond the original references to create linguistic structures and devices that link meanings (Crane, 2001), contemporary storytelling provides the opportunity to pursue ever more complex links. These in turn will support associated studies of storytelling in child development and learning.
For modern society, if we recognise that many problems result from alienation and isolation, the encouraged development of a culture of storytelling could do much to alleviate those concerns. Again, experimentation and study of how contemporary storytellers can do this is needed. There is a danger contemporary storytelling will become complacent, resting on its laurels. It will fossilize into a series of festivals and concert clubs with the same narrow range of performers, organisers and audiences. It will become a fad, a passing fashion eventually supported by the eccentric die-hard few. This will certainly be true so long as contemporary storytellers and contemporary storytelling practitioners insistently evoke long past lost traditions and exotic subjugated cultures without adequately referencing their work in modern society as truly contemporary, forward-thinking artists.

The most effective solution, or counteraction to this, is the development of ‘functional’ storytelling. That is, the financial and administrative support of community arts projects incorporating all kinds of storytelling, as well as advocacy for such storytelling work on the part of storytellers, storytelling enthusiasts, and storytelling organisations. Academic institutions, particularly those that teach and study performing arts, literature, contemporary art forms and community arts, need to work with contemporary storytellers and storytelling events organisers. Useful measurements and, especially, an evolving and supportive critical language will guide all those enthusiastic for storytelling in the future.
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