

To what extent can
storytelling as a ritual
be used



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Since the beginning of time, humans have been telling stories to each other. From the cave man days without language, through to the Greek and Roman empires, through to today, and even as I type, there is probably a story being told to someone. Stories, however first came to being dramatised (or so it is thought) back in the days when we were cave men. At the end of each day groups of people would sit round a fire and relate, to each, their days, by acting them out.

In ancient Greece storytellers would tell epic stories about the heroes of the past, and of their Gods and Goddesses. In a way their stories were like a ritual because they were always about gods, or sons of gods, or goddesses and in a way it became ritual to add them in to a story. It also became a ritual in the way that the stories were told, and passed down from generation to generation. Even today epic stories such as Homers Odyssey are still being told in theatres and in film, for example the new film called 'Troy'.

Today stories are still being told to celebrate life's experiences. At the end of most days we normally end up telling people what we have been up to in that day, and writers are still telling stories which tell people what they have been experiencing and what they have been up to. In modern theatre ritual story telling has seen an increase. In ritual theatre we have been learning about stories being told as a ritual and we have learned some examples. The most obvious example of story telling as a ritual has to be Augusto Boal's Playback Theatre.

This is a type of theatre that uses ritual to celebrate or help people come to terms with an experience that they have had. It involves a member of the

audience to volunteer a past experience, or a story that has happened to them, and to tell it to a group of actors with the help of a director, or a conductor. The actors then perform elements of the story to an audience and to the person who's story it is. This type of theatre has been called 'Theatre of the cave'¹ as it does bare resemblance to the first days of theatre when the days events were acted out in the cave mans cave.

Jo Salas, who was an original member of Boal's Playback Theatre, has said that it relates to an 'ancient impulse to communicate and dramatise ones' experience'² . I can agree with this quote as it has been proved correct as we are still telling stories today. Another experience of storytelling as ritual was in our performance for our ssession. The group I was in did a ritual performance about money, which was very important and help full to me. As I analysed our performance I began to think of my own life and how the performance we produced was very much like a story of what had happened to me.

Based around the work of David Bueys, and his work of healing and cleansing of an experience, I found that our ritual piece in which we are forced to sign our lives away to banks, and to debts was like an experience of mine that I recently had in which I found myself three thousand pounds in debt to a bank and ith no means of being able to pay it off. Luckily my parents came to the rescue (good old parents!!) but I found that by telling the story as a ritual it helped me come to terms with what had happened to me. Tim Etchells, of Forced Entertainment once said that 'writing (a story) is a kind of acting. '³.

When I first heard this, I was a bit bemused by what he meant by it. (I was in arguments for theatre at the time) But after doing the ritual course, I've come to take a meaning away from it. In my understanding, he means that in writing you have to give up a lot of your feelings, which is a bit like a cost. In doing so, you are therefore investing a part of your life and feelings to a play, which is a bit of a risk to yourself as you are giving your inner, deepest thoughts away. This is a lot like ritual as by performing, or acting in ritual, there is a certain element of cost, risk and investment involved.

Tim Etchells work with Forced Entertainment shows this especially with the 2000 performance of 'Scar Stories' in which a group of researchers asked people about how they had gotten their scars, and then a group of 2 people performed a ritual in a theatre which, was supposed of be like an operating theatre in its design, and told stories about the scars, and develop a series of accidents, operations and fights. 4 One of the best form of story telling that I have read about is by a group called the Metamorphic Ritual Theatre group, who performed a pieces on Norse, Germanic myths.

One performance they did was in Vienna, where they performed ritual acts and seemed to be punishments upon themselves in order to tell a story. One story they did with 'Terra Tenumbra' involved them depicting Norse legend by doing such things as piercing their spines eighteen times with feathers (to represent Odin's pain with hanging from a tree) as well as being pierced on the wrists and ankles and joined together (person to person) by rubber threads so that they have no choice but to move together (this was supposed to represent the ravens of thought and memory).

As well as having less obvious rituals in place, they was also a lot of chanting of the Norse holy book as well as a man hanging upside down from his ankle to represent Odin. This was a performance called the 'Eight Gates'. 5 Today story telling as a ritual is still going on. There are numerous theatres depicted to just this, and in its stories it is either, celebrating, or, commiserating, life's xperiences. There are groups such as Forced Entertainment or the Metamorphic Ritual Theatre group who are celebrating experiences through ritual.

There are also theatres devoted to ritual storytelling such as Lalish ritual-theatrelab in Vienna. There are also festivals such as the Brighton Occulture Festival, which are all for ritual story telling. All theses examples, and the once that I have experienced are here to show how story telling as a ritual can be used as a dramatic force to celebrate the experience of an individual, or of a myth that has grow out of an individuals experience.