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Cover: Ryder is no more, no less than a name on a piece of paper. No artist biography to influence your impressions, no collection overview to police your critique, just the art laid bare. As Barthes stated, “It is language which speaks, not the author” and so we have given Ryder a voice, and allowed the art to do the talking. castlegalleries.com
The days of the Baal Shem Tov were a time of great spiritual awakening. Disciples gathered around him to learn the great power of praying with an open heart. Amongst them was Ze’ev Wolfe Kitzes, a rabbi who had originally opposed the Baal Shem Tov but was soon drawn into his inner circle. Amongst his many talents was to sound the shofar with great beauty and precision.

Now the shofar is a ram’s horn and it is notoriously difficult to sound. Sometimes all one hears is a nail-scrapping squeak; other times a good beginning will abruptly stop; still other soundings will begin as wobbly, limping wails that become steady and strong. But Ze’ev was among the best, and so he was the Baal Tokeah (the one who sounds the shofar) for the Baal Shem Tov’s school.

Ze’ev, a diligent student, took copious notes, which he collected into a sack that he carried with him at all times. No one understood how he kept them organized, but the depth of his study was clear to everyone. For all his wisdom he went to the Baal Shem Tov who embraced and encouraged Ze’ev’s study with daily lessons.

Ze’ev collapsed, the majestic sounds reverberating not just on the walls of the synagogue but in the hearts of all those present.

When he finally recovered, Ze’ev asked the Baal Shem Tov what had happened. “You were trying to use keys to open your heart,” was the reply. “Sometimes, one must use an axe.”

Not Keys, but an Axe
Traditional, retold by Maggid Jim Brulé

The Storytelling Revival, which began in the 1960s, was based in part on some people’s inclinations to connect with other people directly, with no electronic mediation. For these people, the Revival involved a reaction against the dominant role that television and other mass media had come to play in their lives. Fifty years later, we are living in a somewhat different media environment. Social media—media operated by individuals on their personal, increasingly portable, electronic communication devices—are major and growing factors in many peoples’ lives. It has become a very useful marketing tool for professional storytellers to place video recordings of their performances on YouTube and other video sites. Another set of options—the new media landscape presents is audio- and videoconferencing for training, discussion, and performance of storytelling?

Ways Storytellers are Using Audio- and Videoconferencing For Training, Discussion, And Performance

Eric Miller

Teleconference participants’ images are superimposed on each other in contrast to a more typical compartmentalized screen configuration.

Audio conferencing can be done for free through services such as FreeConferenceCall.com. A simple telephone call can also be called an audio teleconference, although the term, teleconference, is usually reserved for meetings of more than two people. A video teleconference—also known as a videoconference, video call, or video chat—is a type of “video-mediated” communication. Videoconferencing can be done for free through software programs such as Skype, FaceTime (for Apple devices), Zoom, and Google Hangouts.

In mediated ways, teleconferences can enable one to meet and interact with many people. They increase one’s reach through space and—through recordings of teleconferences—time. The Age of Teleconferencing is just beginning. Teaching, tutoring, training, coaching, counseling, selling, and consulting are just some of the activities that are now being done via teleconference. Through teleconferencing, one can provide specialized services to people around the world. To give just one example: languages—including rare and ancient ones—can be taught via teleconference using storytelling and other forms of verbal play.

Although I sometimes use them, personally I am not comfortable with terms such as, “storytelling through teleconferencing,” “audio-mediated storytelling,” and “video-mediated storytelling,” because in a sense an event is only truly a storytelling event if the participants are physically present to each other. Do we really want to bestow the word, storytelling, on teleconferences?

Freebone participants’ images are superimposed on each other in contrast to a more typical compartmentalized screen configuration.
A key aspect of storytelling is that participants can, as a story is being told, observe each other aurally and visually (simultaneously or asynchronously). Teleconferencing and videoconferencing give feedback to each other. This condition is met by teleconferencing, through the projection and perception of participants’ electronic representations. However, in teleconferencing certain aspects of physical presence are diminished or lost, including the information of sound, movement, smell, and temperature—although technology that would provide information in some of these areas is conceivable. If we do reserve the term “storytelling” for situations in which speakers and listeners are at the same venue—what about the use of amplified sound and magnified visuals, such as when a speaker’s face is projected onto a large screen so that people at the back of the space can see an enlarged moving image of the speaker? These electronic augmentations do not necessarily mean being “storytelling,” although they may water down the storytelling-ness of an event.

Looking at the larger picture: storytelling-type activities in teleconferencing have the potential to greatly alleviate one of the great difficulties of modern life: alienation. Two manifestations of alienation that teleconferencing could greatly reduce are loneliness and unemployability (and under-employment).

Regarding loneliness: What is needed is a design infrastructure by which a person could, 24 hours a day, feel like talking. This could be done through the use of keywords. These small teleconference groups would likely involve storytelling, as conversation largely consists of storytelling of the type: “This is what I have done,” and “This is what I am hoping to do.”

Therefore, I call on you, storytellers: Please help to save the world by joining the effort to design and implement small-group teleconference in which storytelling-type activities could occur. Teleconferencing is facilitating a renaissance of orality—“secondary oralities” being created. These kinds of activities could occur. Teleconferencing and videoconferencing, and virtual conferencing. Questions I ask included:

1) When did you start conducting storytelling-related activities via teleconference?
2) What have been some of your thoughts about these activities? Regarding training people in storytelling, and performing for people—what are some differences between doing so with people who are physically-present, in contrast to doing so with people who are present via teleconference?
3) In what ways has your use of the technology evolved?
4) What might be some of your plans for use of this kind of technology?

Eric Miller was born, raised, and trained in storytelling in NYC, he studied Folklore at the University of Pennsylvania and has settled in Chennai (on India’s southeast coast). He co-founded (in 2007) and directs the World Storytelling Institute (storytellinginstitute.org), and co-founded (in 2011) and co-facilitates the Indian Storytelling Network (indianstorytellernet.org). eric@storytellingandvideoconferencing.com
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Looking at the larger picture: storytelling-type activities in teleconferencing have the potential to greatly alleviate one of the great difficulties of modern life: alienation. Two manifestations of alienation that teleconferencing could greatly reduce are loneliness and unemployment (and under-employment).

Regarding loneliness: What is needed is a design infrastructure by which a person could, 24 hours a day, find a few other people who feel like talking. This could be done through the use of keywords. These small tele-conference groups would likely often involve storytelling, as conversation largely consists of storytelling of the type, “This is what I have done,” and “This is what I am hoping to do.” Therefore, I call on you, storytellers: Please help to save the world by joining the effort to design and implement small-group teleconferencing in which storytelling-type activities could occur. Teleconferencing is facilitating a renaissance of orality—"second orality," as Walter Ong referred to mediated speech in his book, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (Routledge, 1982). To make the most of teleconferencing, people need to develop their conversation, as well as their storytelling, abilities.

As teleconferencing is developing, “vertical” packages are being formed. This may involve a phone hardware and software maker, a telecommunication service provider, and a content provider, working together. These kinds of packages may present opportunities for offering training in the form of storytelling. Also, systems are being developed through which members of the public could tele-conference with authors for a fee. Libraries, publishers, and bookstores could facilitate these exchanges.

Written with the depletion of fossil fuels and the uncertainties of interest rate turmoil, audio- and videoconferencing are going to further emerge as green alternatives to physical travel. Mediated presence is not the same as unmediated presence—but the same could be said of wearing glasses, using a condom, or wearing a prosthetic limb. Yes, not the same, but one chooses the best one can with the resources and options one has.

Each medium of communication has its own advantages and disadvantages, and its own biases. For example: writing tends to be an internal, silent, and solitary activity. As such, its bias is often toward independent thought and the isolation of the individual, and this may influence what stories are conveyed, and how they are conveyed.

Speaking—including storytelling—with people who are physically present may influence speakers to emphasize the importance of the human being. Teleconferencing, especially videoconferencing, seems to me to have a bi-polar (mania/depressive) quality to it: if it works, one feels great, but if the connection is not achieved, one may feel very frustrated and/or embarrassed. Teleconferencing may also have an epic quality to it: momentous, great fun, and filling participants with senses of wonder and accomplishment.

**Guest Editor’s Overview**

This section has three segments: audio conferencing, videoconferencing, and virtual conferencing. Questions I asked included:

1. **When did you start conducting storytelling-related activities via teleconference?**
2. **What have been some of your thoughts about these activities?** Regarding training people in storytelling, and performing for people—what are some differences between doing so with people who are physically-present, in contrast to doing so with people who are present via teleconference?
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The Healing Story Alliance Teleconferences are Alive and Well

Elisa Pearmain

The Healing Story Alliance (HSA), a special interest group of the USA’s National Storytelling Network (NSN), was formed at the NSN’s 1999 National Storytelling Conference (NSC) in San Diego. Gail Rosen set the HSA in motion. Soon a board was formed. We hosted our first NSC pre-conference in 2000. Excitement and ideas-sharing exploded. Soon we had a bi-annual journal and quarterly newsletters.

Once a month, anywhere from 10 to 35 people call in from all over the USA, Canada, Australia, and even India. At 9:05 p.m. all except our speaker usually mute their phones to give the tellers an unbreakable silence. The teleconference begins. For the next 30-45 minutes our speaker tells stories and shares thoughts relating to the chosen topic. The rest of the hour is spent in discussion (which may include activities) with unmuted participants of the teleconference.

Eric Wolf’s first public storytelling performance was in 1978, at the age of eight. He received an ICORACLUE Circle of Excellence Award for service to the storytelling community for his work on the Art of Storytelling podcast from 2007 to 2011. He is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and narrative therapist in Black Mountain, NC. enwolf2@yahoo.com.
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The Healing Story Alliance Teleconferences are Alive and Well

In revisiting our mission to educate, support, and heal through story, we ultimately determined we needed to keep our teleconference open and free to all, whether HSA or NSN members or not. We were volunteering our time, and we wanted to expand our community.

The first speakers on our calls included some of the early HSA board members, such as Laura Simms, Gail Rosen, and Dorothy Barnes. Liz Mangual and JoAnn Stockbridge, soon realized that our members had many gifts of experience and perspective to offer, and we invited them to submit proposals to speak. Now we also reach out to non-members who are engaged in interesting healing work story.

Examples of our teleconference topics include:

- Expanding understanding of ways stories can be therapeutic.
- Ways to tell a healing personal story.
- What to do after a healing personal story is told.

Another set of topics concerns working with various groups. For example:

- People experiencing grief.
- People experiencing suicide.
- Battered women.
- People experiencing Alzheimer’s.
- People experiencing cancer.
- People thinking about suicide.

We have had programs on conflict resolution, forgiveness, uses of healing story to teach peace, environmental awareness, community building, and using folktales and myths for healing. We have had several teleconferences on the use of the Hero’s Journey model to help people cope with challenges such as coming of age, and cancer.

More recently we have been working to bring healing story to the challenge of building bridges between diverse communities, and we have been featuring more diversity in terms of cultural and gender identity. For example, Arbythea Morton shared the story of her journey to Ghana for the Panafeast experience. And Tom DeWolff (whose ancestors were slave holders) and Sharon Morgan (whose ancestors were slave owners) shared their story of searching together for meaningful healing.

We have experimented with teleconferences that were more interactive. Liz Mungal and Bob Kangegis led us to look at and share “Legacy Stories: Using Story to Create and Sustain Community.” We felt as if we were sitting around a fire together, sharing stories and making meaning. We also had a workshop teleconference on looking at silence in the stories and how to keep using from telling some of our most important stories: although with such personal material, only a few people felt comfortable enough to share their stories in this format.

In January 2017, we held our first teleconference story swap. The theme was, Stories of Resistance and Solidarity. Norah Dooley began the hour telling inspiriting folktales, biographical stories, and personal-experience narratives. We then heard from Ben Farmer, a Healing Story Alliance teleconference regular.

This worked well and met a need for community members to think about how stories can help in a time of upheaval and uncertainty. We are planning to offer more teleconference swaps in the future.

There are a few challenges to audio teleconference programs. The calls tend to work better with landlines than with mobile phones or computers. Connections get dropped occasionally, but people are usually able to call back in. Sometimes there is background noise from another room, or static, which can cause distraction. We have a function that can “mute” all which helps with this problem, although this can cause confusion for those who join a session late.

Another issue is that in audio teleconferences, the speaker/teller cannot see any of the participants, and while the lines are muted they get no feedback even in the form of “ahh’s,” “laughter, breathing sounds, and occasionally the eye contact that many speakers expect.” Thus, some speakers have chosen to have the lines unmuted and have stopped every few minutes to ask for questions and other feedback. Some audience members have found it difficult to insert themselves into the open discussion time without seeing who else is waiting.

The teleconferences have benefitted us as an organization, as well as our listeners, in multiple ways. We are sharing a wealth of experiential information and resources. We are learning from one another and deepening and the field is growing. More people can access these ideas, which leads to more of the work being out in the world.

Since 2010 we have had the ability to record our teleconferences. This allows people to go to our website, and listen on their own time to any of our archived recordings.

In the last year the HSA’s Executive Committee has worked on building out our social media presence. The Healing Story Alliance Teleconference Social Justice Initiative. Soon our website will reflect this new program. Our teleconference themes have already begun to focus on this area. Our February 2017 speaker, Donna Sife from Australia, was a 2012 recipient of the UN Ambassador for Peace Award for her work helping communities in conflict. Our March speaker was Sarah Armstrong from California, who shared her uses of dilemma stories in the classroom to teach social justice issues. In April, 2017 Storytelling Magazine
If you are interested in being a featured healing story teleconference speaker please contact me. To sample the HSA’s library of recorded conference calls, please visit healingstory.org, and select “events,” then “teleconference recordings.” If the HSA’s mission of spreading the healing method of storytelling resonates with you, you are invited to join us by becoming a member!

Notes on Videoconferencing

Eric Miller

While doing course work for my Folklore PhD at the University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia, from 1999-2000, I worked part-time in one of Penn’s telecommunication labs. I had already been videoconferencing for a number of years. However, at Penn I discovered that universities were not only practicing high-quality videoconferencing over the Internet, but that it had become a common practice to simultaneously relay a videoconference’s combined audio and video as a webcast, so that others could observe the videoconference, live or recorded. The webcasted videoconference is a splendid method of communication.

Years later, I was amazed to discover that Google was providing a lower-quality version of this same service, at no charge, calling it “Google Hangouts on Air,” Skype, and Zoom are other popular free videoconferencing sites, but they do not seem to match Google’s webcasting and online recording abilities.

In a videoconference, the screen can be configured in a number of ways. I prefer a static side-by-side configuration, so viewers can see both the speaker and the listener. Currently, Google Hangouts limits users to seeing the speaker’s image larger at the top of the screen, above the other participants’ images. This occurs automatically, based on who is speaking. The initiator of the call can override this and can select whose image is largest.

Videoconferencing has still not come of age. It is whipcord thin. It is tremendously exciting and a state of the art development. Members of the public often use it for communicating with far-away family and friends. But its use is not yet ubiquitous. Reasons for this might include: if using a mobile phone, it is difficult to hold the camera steady for an extended period of time; it may cost more per minute, and may use up battery power faster than audio calls; and sometimes people may not want to show others how they look or where they are.

It can be challenging to videoconference with people at more than one site at the same time: the quality of audio and video coming from each site may vary widely. Some people are enthusiastic and throw themselves into the activity, while others can be emotionally distant. Also, if the audio is lagging far behind the video, one may decide to use telephones for audio, while continuing to use the Internet for video. If there were more than two participants, they would need to do a telephone conference call.
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Elisa Pearnain wrote this article with the help of current and former members of the HSA Executive Committee. She has been telling stories professionally for 35 years, and is an award-winning author of two collections of tales and a CD. She is a licensed psychotherapist practicing in Concord, MA. elisa@wisdomtale.com, wisdomtale.com.

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torytelling has become a word used to refer to or describe different kinds of narratives or art-works that are more personal. The story-telling that I practice is more akin to traditional myth telling where language is alive with meaning in direct response to a live audience. My personal study has emphasized developing a sensitivity to the dynamic qualities of spoken story and engagement as an embodied and relational event. Meaning for me is not confined to words but more fully from the energized space and visualization existing between the audience and the teller. Many levels are felt at once; conceptual, imaginative, intangible.

In 2010, I created a mentor program that could occur in long-distance. This program facilitated in-depth preparation of a story for performance. I encouraged a tremendous amount of research, conversations, and personal journaling as part of a step-by-step process of entering the heart of a text and building a relationship with it. Through various methods of communication, including one-on-one and group audio- and video calls, I helped each participant to develop a relationship with their story.

Recently, working with a woman in my kitchen, I realized that she used her hands while speaking closed off the space between herself and the listener. It was not a matter of where she placed her hands, but of how she accessed and embodied the energy of language and feeling of that energy moving between herself and others. She got it when I had her speak from different parts of her body and finally extend her hands outward letting aliveness off the space between herself and the listener. It was not obvious in movement.

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For years it has been a dream of mine to conduct workshops with mixed groups—some participants being physically present, some being tele-present. In this workshop, all participants would be able to see and hear each other. However, the cameras and microphones built into personal communication devices are designed to give optimum audio and video quality only of a person directly in front of the screen. A workshop situation might call for at least two cameras in the room: one camera directed at the workshop leader and the other at the other participants in the room. It would be ideal if the second camera would have zoom, pan, and tilt functionality. A technician might be needed to operate this camera and mix the two local images. One or more external microphones might also be needed. In addition, monitors would be needed so that everyone in the room could see the images of the distant participants. I could also have used a “ethnographic video-conference.” Ethnographic video-conferencing—the use of videoconferencing to generate, share, and record ethnographic data—is a development in the evolution that began with ethnographic photography, and ethnographic film and video. Links to writings of mine relating to this and other videoconference topics are at storytellinginstitute.org/224.html. Links to recordings of 16 videoconferences I have participated in are at storytellinginstitute.org/as.html.

When I addressed the large group at the World Storytelling Institute’s Chennai Storytelling Festival via videoconference in February 2013, I noticed several differences compared to being physically present. First, if I had been there I could have turned my head at any time to take in the full size and position of the audience. I would have had a clearer sense of its mood and responsiveness, and that would have acted as a whole of the space. When facing a physically-present audience my attention can be grabbed by individuals, which can affect my delivery and lead to personal interactions. This kind of thing usually does not occur in videoconferences, in part because I cannot see or hear individual audience members very well, nor locate where sounds are coming from. Part of the electricity of a live performance, for the audience, is the visceral sense that the performer is real and is just a few feet away. When the performer interacts with an individual audience member, the rest of the audience feels that could easily be them, and this creates a unique kind of intimacy. I couldn’t have demonstrated connecting with an audience by Emitting through videoconference. Physically-present storytell- is subtle and fluid in the way the teller can shift roles. Storytellers can move from narrating, to interacting with the audience responses, to commenting on the story, to embodying a character’s posture, and so on. This fluidity occurs partly through body language, but this may not be clear in the limited frame of a screen (especially as screens usually don’t show the whole body of the teller). Airspace cannot be sensed and controlled very well via videoconference. When people are in a room together, everyone senses, usually subconsciously, the mood of the group. As a teller I assess and can change this atmosphere, but over videoconference I may not notice things in the audience’s space that may be affecting their atmosphere. I can generate my own atmosphere and attempt to project it, but much of this subtle communication is lost.

In a videoconference, one doesn’t know what the other person is seeing or distracted by, whereas when telling to an audience in the same room, one does. In a vid- eoconference it’s awkward that the image of the person you are looking at is usually not quite looking into your eyes, as this obstructs the language of eyes, its subtle messages and rapport. This doesn’t prevent reason- ably engaged conversation, but it can reduce the feeling of intimacy and connection.

A core quality and function of storytelling is bringing people closer together. This closeness can be profound and deeply satisfying, and physical closeness aids emotional closeness. But storytelling is powerful, and quickly helps people transcend their conscious awareness of their environment as they are transported into the communal imagination. Storytelling happens best through physical presence, but the art is potent enough to create magic even without it.

Videoconferencing by the Bangalore Storytelling Society

Aparna Athreya, BSS President (aparnathreya@gmail.com; kiddiywiki.com)

The Bangalore Storytelling Society (BSS) was founded in 2013, and has facilitated videoconferences (which were also webcasts) on World Storytelling Day (WSD, March 20) in 2015, 2016, and 2017, each time using Google Hangouts on Air. The hosts of the March 20, 2017 videoconference were me (Aparna Athreya in Bangalore), and Deeptha Vivekanand, and Deeptha Vivekanand in Chandigarh. The storytellers were: Wangari Grace and John Namai Titi in Nairobi, Kenya; Sowmya Srinivasan and Eric Miller in Chennai; Sheila Wee in Singapore; and Jan Blake who is based in the UK but was in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A link to a recording of this videoconference is at http://tinyurl.com/jwurtkz.

Bangalore is India’s leading city for information technology, so it should come as no surprise that the BSS is into videoconferencing. I have worked in the software industry for over 15 years, and a lot of my work involves interacting with individuals through long-distance, video-based communication. I am delighted to apply this experience to storytelling performance and training. The challenge is to utilize the technology without compromis- ing the “ethos” of storytelling. The BSS is planning to host a series of videoconfer- ences that will feature a combination of storytelling work- shops that will include performances. Storytellers from around the world will teach and tell. There will be people physically-present with the trainer/performer, people par- ticipating in the videoconference from various sites, and others observing the live webcast (and afterwards the web archive). Distant observers may support the storytelling by providing visuals and music. Translation will be provided when needed, and teaching-and-learning languages could also be involved.

Top: Jan Blake who was traveling in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, participating in BSS 2017 World Storytelling Day. Bottom: Sheila Wee participates from Singapore.

Deeptha Vivekanand, BSS Vice-president and past President (deeptha.vivekanand@gmail.com; ever-after.co.in)

Storytelling through videoconferencing has a lot of potential. Of course, there are technical snags and band- width issues, but I feel storytellers must explore this medium to reach audiences far and wide and create a loyal follow- ing for storytelling. Telling stories to a camera is not something most storytellers are comfortable with. Storytellers like to see and talk with their listeners, employ call-and-response tech- niques, and draw from listeners’ energies. However, with practice it is possible to develop altered techniques to suit the videoconference medium.

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It helped me very much that Kamini Ramachandran personally welcomed me into the room, giving me close-up contact with a person, with the audience mem- bers behind her. She mediated, enabling me to project my presence. She also very helpfully showed me around by swiveling the camera to the sides, which gave me a sense of the whole space.

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Aparna Athreya, BSS President (aparnathreya@gmail.com; kiddiywiki.com)
For years it has been a dream of mine to conduct workshops with mixed groups—some participants being physically present, some being tele-present. In this workshop, all participants would be able to see and hear each other. However, the cameras and microphones built into personal communication devices are designed to give optimum audio and video quality only of a person directly in front of the camera. A workshop situation might call for at least two cameras in the room: one camera directed at the workshop leader and the other at the other participants in the room. It would be ideal if the second camera would have zoom, pan, and tilt functionality. A technician might be needed to operate this camera and mix the two local images. One or more external microphones might also be needed. In addition, monitors would be needed so that everyone in the room could see the images of the distant participants. One or more external microphones might also be needed. In addition, monitors would be needed so that everyone in the room could see the images of the distant participants.

A core quality and function of storytelling is bringing people closer together. This closeness can be profound and deeply satisfying, and physical closeness aids emotional closeness. But storytelling is powerful, and quickly people transcend their conscious awareness of their environment as they are transported into the communal imagination. Storytelling happens best through physical presence, but the art is potent enough to create magic even without it.

When facing a physically-present audience my attention can be grabbed by individuals, which can affect my delivery and lead to personal interactions. This kind of thing usually does not occur in videoconferences, in part because I cannot see or hear individual audience members very well, nor locate where sounds are coming from. Part of the electricity of a live performance, for the audience, is the visceral sense that the performer is real and is just a few feet away. When the performer interacts with an individual audience member, the rest of the audience feels that could easily be them, and this creates a unique kind of intimacy. I couldn’t have demonstrated it better than during the “ethnographic video-conference.” Ethnographic videoconferencing—the use of videoconferencing to generate, share, and record ethnographic data—is a development in the evolution that began with ethnographic photography, and ethnographic film and video. Links to writings of mine relating to this and other videoconference topics are at storytellingsociety.org/224.html. Links to recordings of 16 videoconferences I have participated in are at storytellingarchive.org/as.html.

Videoconferencing by the Bangalore Storytelling Society

Aparna Athreya, BSS President
(aparnaathreya@gmail.com; kiddywiki.com)

The Bangalore Storytelling Society (BSS) was founded in 2013, and has facilitated videoconferences (which were also webcasts) on World Storytelling Day (WSD, March 20) in 2015, 2016, and 2017, each time using Google Hangouts on Air. The hosts of the March 20, 2017 videoconference were me (Aparna Athreya in Bangalore), and Deeptha Vivekanand in Chandigarh. The storytellers were: Wangari Grace and John Namai Titi in Nairobi, Kenya; Sowmya Srinivasan and Eric Miller in Chennai; Sheila Woe in Singapore; and Jan Blake who is based in the UK but was in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A link to a recording of this videoconference is at http://tinyurl.com/jwurtkz.

Bangalore is India’s leading city for information technology, so it should come as no surprise that the BSS is into videoconferencing. I have worked in the software industry for over 15 years, and a lot of my work involves interacting with individual teams through long-distance, video-based communication. I am delighted to apply this experience to storytelling performance and training. The challenge is to utilize the technology without compromising the “ethos” of storytelling.

The BSS is planning to host a series of videoconferences that will feature a combination of storytelling workshops that will include performances. Storytellers from around the world will teach and tell. There will be people physically-present with the trainer/performer, people participating in the videoconference from various sites, and others observing the live webcast (and afterwards the web archive). Distant observers may support the storytelling by providing visuals and music. Translation will be provided when needed, and teaching-and-learning languages could also be involved.

Storytelling through videoconferencing has a lot of potential. Of course, there are technical snags and bandwidth issues, but I feel storytellers must explore this medium to reach audiences far and wide and create a loyal following for storytelling.

Telling stories to a camera is not something most storytellers are comfortable with. Storytellers like to see and talk with their listeners, employ call-and-response techniques, and draw from listeners’ energies. However, with practice it is possible to develop altered techniques to suit the videoconference medium.

Top: Jan Blake who was traveling in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, participating in BSS 2017 World Storytelling Day. Bottom: Sheila Woe participates from Singapore.
A true storyteller invites the audience into the world of the story, engaging them as if they are characters in the performance. Physical presence during storytelling allows for effective use of space, body movement, gestures, facial expressions, question-and-answer, call-and-response, music, and dance. Audio- and videoconferencing can limit all of this—although if one is inventive one can find ingenious solutions to some of these challenges. It is an art that requires some level of intimacy. Unlike theatre or movies where the audience is an outsider peeping into the world of the actors on stage, a storyteller is restricted by the position of the computer camera, giving eye contact to the viewers of the recording. Despite the glitches, this is a good way to overcome the distance barrier.

Information about BSS is at facebook.com/bangalorestorytellingassociation

I am based in Bangalore, and work with a number of schools in the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. We began the Cloud Storytelling Project in Feb 2014. The medium is Skype videoconference. A storyteller from a distant location comes online at a designated time and narrates stories to a group of children on the other side of the conference, and discusses the stories with the children.

This activity gives children opportunities to improve their listening and comprehension skills. The storyteller is a stranger to them, so they learn to express their thoughts to strangers. This helps the children reduce their stage fear and inhibition. There has been a dramatic improvement in the courage and power of expression in the children who attend these sessions. It also teaches them discipline and the courage and power of expression in the children who attend these sessions.

I have been telling stories to school-children over Skype for the Cloud Storytelling Project over the past five years. I tell stories from my home in Bangalore. When Mr. Manoj asked me if I would participate in this project, I was a little hesitant. But with help from my neighbor and family members, I learned to Skype.

Storytelling via videoconference has its limitations. The movement of the storyteller is restricted by the position of the computer camera, unlike physically present sessions in which the storyteller can move around the entire space. Positives include: the comfort of telling stories from home, children get to hear stories from storytellers from different locations, and there is a huge variety of stories.

When it comes to the influence on children, I don’t see much difference between physically-present and videoconference storytelling because ultimately the joy of hearing stories and the moral lessons of the stories prevail on the minds of the listeners.

Videoconferencing for Arts Education in the Classroom

Mary Blue, Virtual Learning Specialist (bluem@gtc.edu)

Poster announcing the BSS 2017 World Storytelling Day videoconference.

Sheila Wee, Storyteller (sheila@storywise.com.sg; storywise.com.sg)

It was helpful to see peoples’ images to tell my story to, but it might have been better if those little squares with faces in them would have been at the top of the screen, near the camera. As it was, when I played it back I noticed I was looking down and thus had not been giving eye contact to the people whose images I had been looking at in the little squares—and also was not engaging them as if they are characters in the performance.

Despite the glitches, this is a good way to overcome the distance barrier.

Videoconferencing for the Cloud Storytelling Project

Manoj Kabre, Educator (manoj.kj@indo-mim.com; can-trust.org)

I have been telling stories to school-children over Skype for the Cloud Storytelling Project over the past five years. I tell stories from my home in Bangalore. When Mr. Manoj asked me if I would participate in this project, I was a little hesitant. But with help from my neighbor and family members, I learned to Skype.

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Information about BSS is at facebook.com/bangalorestorytellingassociation

Mary Blue, Virtual Learning Specialist (bluem@gtc.edu)

One interesting project was “The Virtual Storytelling Experience,” which was a collaboration between 1) the Milwaukee Public Museum (Distance Learning Program), 2) the Milwaukee Public Schools, 3) Milwaukee Succeeds, and 4) the First Stage Theatre Company. Storytellers told stories to children (via videoconference and webinar) and engaged in follow-up educational activities in schools throughout much of Wisconsin.

Related materials are available at storytellingjustsane.org/223.html.
I have found Internet videoconferencing to be wonderful for one-on-one training, and panel discussions. I also use videoconferencing to tell stories to children in a school a few hundred kilometers away from my home. The connectivity is unpredictable and we sometimes struggle with audio-video disconnect (one’s audio tends to reach one’s videoconference partners before one’s video does). In addition, responses come a second or two after they would in a physically-present exchange. Telling stories to groups of children through this medium is challenging due to the lack of connection on various levels, although I am sure the quality of interaction will improve as the technology improves. As this occurs, I believe elders who love to share stories will also increasingly use this technology.

**Wangari Grace, Storyteller**
(wangari.storytelling@gmail.com; wangaristhstoryteller.co.ke)

The BSS 2017 World Storytelling Day videoconference was my first time participating in such an event. In the past, I have done one-on-one conversations on Skype with fellow storytellers, most of whom I have met before. Videoconferencing is a great way to bridge the distances. It is important for storytellers to interact with people of other cultures, to exchange views about current trends in storytelling, and to observe others’ stories and ways of telling them. Meeting online can open up new ideas, spaces, and opportunities, and can expand one’s networks. Through videoconferencing I have been able to brainstorm possible collaborations with tellers from around the world. Getting funding for cultural projects is not easy. Travelling from one country to another is expensive and time-consuming. Thus, there is a real need for high-quality videoconference technology. Therefore, there is a need for high-quality videoconference technology.

Storytelling is an art that requires some level of intimacy. Unlike theatre or movies where the audience is an outsider peeping into the world of the actors on stage, a storyteller invites the audience into the world of the story, engaging them as if they are characters in the performance. Physical presence during storytelling allows for effective use of space, body movement, gestures, facial expressions, question-and-answer, call-and-response, music, and dance. Audio- and videoconferencing can limit all of this—although if one is inventive one can find ingenious solutions to some of these challenges. It is well utilized, e-conferencing can open new doors and enable worthwhile “halfway meetings”—meetings that are halfway to seeing each other in person.

**Hanan Shelby, Storyteller**

It was helpful to see peoples’ images to tell my story to, but it might have been better if those little squares with faces in them would have been at the top of the screen, near the camera. As it was, when I played it back I noticed I was looking down and thus had not been giving eye contact to the people whose images I had been looking at in the little squares—and also was not giving eye contact to the viewers of the recording. Despite the glitches, this is a good way to overcome the distance barrier.

Information about BSS is at facebook.com/bangalorestorytellingassociation

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**Videoconferencing via the Cloud Storytelling Project**

**Manoj Kabre, Educator**
(manoj.k@indo-mim.com; can-trust.org)

I am based in Bangalore, and work with a number of schools in the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. We began the Cloud Storytelling Project in Feb 2014. The medium is Skype videoconference. A storyteller from a distant location comes online at a designated time and narrates stories to a group of children on the other side of the conference, and discusses the stories with the children.

This activity gives children opportunities to improve their listening and comprehension skills. The storyteller is a stranger to them, so they learn to express their thoughts to strangers. This helps the children reduce their stage fear and inhibition. There has been a dramatic improvement in the courage and power of expression in the children who attend these sessions. It also teaches them discipline and an organized way of working, considering the fact that the time schedule needs to be strictly followed. The effort that somebody is making to conduct a videoconference session all the way from UK or USA makes a big impression on the children. Different time zones can be a challenge; one person conducted a session at midnight, her time.

**Shanthi Krishnan, Storyteller**
(shankri86@yahoo.co.in)

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When it comes to the influence on children, I don’t see much difference between physically-present and videoconference storytelling because ultimately the joy of hearing stories and the moral lessons of the stories prevail on the minds of the listeners.
Eric Miller, Guest Editor

In 2013, Mary Blue and I co-facilitated a videconference between high school students in Chennai and Wisconsin. Information about and a link to a recording of this videconference is at storytellinginstitute.org/36.html.

Two educational videconference projects were the Megaconferences (which involved college and university participants and began in 1998), and the Megaconference Jr. (which involved K-12 school participants and began in 2004). Both were discontinued after 2013. These events were produced by Internet2 (www.internet2.edu) a USA computer-networking consortium of organizations from the realms of research and education, industry, and government. Megaconferences were annual marathon videconference events composed of segments by teams of videocentrers on subjects in the Humanities and Sciences. They typically lasted 12 hours, and were composed of 24 separate half-hour segments. The videocentre segments were webcast live, and recordings of the segments were available online for years afterwards. Internet2 continues to be used for high-quality videocferencing. Over 250 USA colleges and universities are members of Internet2, which has Special Interest Groups dedicated to Education and Performance.

On the practical side: Organizations through which one can apply to be hired to give performances and teach classes via videocference with students include:

- Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration: clic.org
- Skype an Author Network: skypeanauthor.wilifoundry.com
- Skype in the Classroom: education.microsoft.com/skype-in-the-classroom/overview

**VIRTUAL CONFERENCING**

**A Virtual Reality Storytelling Series: Chew on This Storytelling**

Cici Woo

(Chewonthistorytelling@gmail.com; ChewOnThisStorytelling.com)

Since January 2016, I have been curating and presenting storytellers in virtual reality, enabling storytellers in the San Francisco Bay Area to interact with audiences worldwide. As far as I know, this is the first storytelling series in virtual reality. People participate via audio and avatars (two-dimensional visual representations of themselves, which they can manipulate using various kinds of input devices). Our avatars sometimes gather around an image of a campfire. Many participants find the process supercedes any other electronic technology in terms of how immersive it is, and of how strong a feeling of togetherness it generates. One of our future guests specializes in piano performance improvisation based on what is being spoken.

**NEW VOICES**

**The Most Powerful Weapon: Learning from Augusto Boal**

Jasmin Cardenas

Being a traditional theater graduate, I was poorly equipped to work as a teaching artist in inner city schools in high-risk neighborhoods. I became aware of my privilege. I grew up in Chicago and went to Catholic school; working in Chicago’s public schools was an altogether different experience. The lives of these young people were full of the conflict of theater, but finding the right plays to read together was tricky because most of the published work didn’t speak to their experiences or use their language. They struggled academically to read the text. Whether my students were in 4th grade or high school, I found that what was most interesting to them was discussing the obstacles in their lives. I needed inspiration and technique, which led me to take a workshop with Augusto Boal at the Brecht Forum in the West End of Manhattan.

Augusto entered, sat in the chair, and much like the masterful storyteller that he was, his arms gestured a warm welcome as he said, “Come closer.” We all scooched in to form a more intimate spatial relationship: with him, with each other, and with the work. Our group was diverse in age, ethnicity, occupation, geography, and socioeconomic status. Regardless of our background, over the course of that week Augusto created community and trust.

Games that I considered icebreakers were carefully curated to build a sense of self and group. They allowed us to practice critical thinking together and to develop an awareness of what was before us (literally and figuratively) so we could consider the construct of relationships and power. Scaffolding on what happened the moment before or the day before, our group grew from eager beginners that first day into a group of questioners who felt powerless in our lives. Augusto listened, asked questions, and then a week later we recreated story moments when the outcome could have gone in a different direction. It was strangely revealing and healing.

Suddenly we were no longer spectators listening to a story or watching it play out. We were in the story, attempting to be change agents by simply trying out different approaches towards the oppositional force, the Antagonist. It wasn’t made of pixie dust or happily ever afters: it was controlling husbands and sexually harassing bosses, over-bearing mothers and blackmailing coworkers. The biggest obstacle was myself and facing my fears. Augusto said, “Theater can also be a weapon for liberation.” I didn’t entirely understand him then, but now I do. This work is called Theater of the Oppressed, but that is an umbrella term for an arsenal of techniques that branch out of love in search of truth and equity of power. When we share our stories we are building bridges towards each other. We are growing empathy, which he called “the most powerful weapon.”

Jasmin Cardenas is a bilingual storyteller from Chicago and was an Exchange Place Teller at the 2016 National Storytelling Festival. Using storytelling and theater Jasmin has worked in schools and communities to create dialogue, address conflict, and build bridges. She is presenting a YES! Pre-conference workshop on June 28 introducing a technique called Theater of the Oppressed. (jasmin.cardenas01@gmail.com)
Not appearing in the Magazine -- An additional note:

Here are three examples of ways people can draw, and can process images, in videoconferences -- for fun, self-expression, art, or any other reason:

A recording of the videoconference these images are from is at http://tinyurl.com/y6uaoj9.

This link -- and links to 15 other recordings of videoconferences I have been involved with -- are at http://storytellinginstitute.org/av.html.

Best regards,

Eric Miller