

There will be a day that we know all, but understand none.

This is not a dystopia or potential critical reflection, but rather a realistic speculation on the contemporary dominant admiration for objective forms of information and data-analysis. This is because this form of content {information} is not only an abstraction and reduction of forms of value, but also limits us in the value that we may apply to the form of content. The loss of the traditional story will consequently bring about a loss of understanding.

In the essay 'The Storyteller' (1936) Walter Benjamin elaborates on the notion and value of the storyteller. And he does so by primarily acknowledging a decline of value and interest in the story. According to Benjamin experience has fallen in value. This is the result of the media –

of which Benjamin solely addresses the newspaper, but if written in the twenty-first century would for sure include television and the internet – that has massively changed our perception of the world. Many articles have been written on the power and reproduction of the image and the opportunity of broadcasting allowed for world wide communication. Our senses adjusted to the amount of information and communication that surrounds us, and so a story that fails to meet these expectations consequently fails to create an experience that equals the value of a well told story.

The origin of the storyteller can be found in essentially two archetypes, namely the sailor and the local craftsman. It is the sailor that crossed borders in both physical sense and cultural, that as a traveler brought stories from far away. The foreign and

unfamiliar are holding – still today – in their unfamiliarity a certain form of interest. "The intelligence that came from afar (...) possessed an authority which gave it validity." [1] The craftsman on the contrary, has his expertise and value for a deep and thorough understanding of the local environment, nature, history and inhabitants. Compare him, if you will with a shaman who holds his authority by inner expertise and wisdom of the local.

Storytelling is an artisan form of communication. By its authority, expertise and skill it does not aim to convey an abstracted form of 'essence' – like the seemingly antagonist 'information' or a report – but rather the full essence through an experience. "Council woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom" [BENJAMIN. 364] Storytelling addresses the full essence, not by addressing minor factual truths,

but rather through the experience of the essence of such truth. Accordingly so, the storyteller always is concerned with the essence and with truth. Stories and narratives are equally so inherently connected with relations to the experience of the meaningful.

“Seen in this way, the storyteller joins the ranks of the teachers and sages. He has counsel – not for a few situations, as the proverb does, but for many, like the sage. For it is granted to him to reach back to a whole lifetime (a life, incidentally, that comprises not only his own experience but no little of his experience of others; what the storyteller knows from hearsay is added to his own). His gift is the ability to relate his life; his distinction, to be able to tell his entire life. The storyteller: he is the man who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of history. [...] The storyteller is the figure

in which the righteous man encounters himself.” [BENJAMIN. 378] It is no surprise that in the essay ‘Between Criticism and Critique’ (2015) Thijs Lijster and Pascal Gielen reach out for the notion of the storyteller. The storyteller holds a supreme position by his authority (through prestige and admiration) and his skill (his expressive form of communication).

Despite that the strong position of the storyteller seems to be secured, by means of his authority and expertise, it are the same factors that allow for its position to be questioned.

Contemporary technological influences allow for fast communications and so it allows as well for traveling. Power and wealth resulted in the opportunity to travel and move, and so, both place and time became irrelevant. “.. when any place can be reached in a fraction of a second, the notion of place as such

becomes meaningless.” [Gielen p.28]
When places and the physical foreign
looses its meaning, it demolishes the
interest in the foreign and
consequently the authority of the first
notion of the storyteller, the sailor.

The same technological interventions
demolish the claim of the craftsman.
For what previously only could be
accessed or understood due training,
studying or practicing – a process of
years of experiences – can now be
artificially and superficially accessed in
a matter of seconds. Summaries of
books are to be found on the internet
alongside youtube tutorials revealing
the tricks of a previously extraordinary
complex craft. Magicians are revealed
and clouds of mysteries are cleared.

Nevertheless, I would like to argue that
both the sailor and the craftsman still
potentially hold credibility. But for the
credibility of the sailor to be valid, we

need to redefine the act of traveling and not only consider spatial physical traveling, but especially culturally and temporal forms of traveling. First is to say that traveling is not only a physical act – crossing a border –, but primarily includes the notion of being temporarily surrounded by another culture. And it is in the process of stepping out of the cultural framework, that allows to both see and experience other cultures, and reflecting on ones own culture. The second non-physical form of traveling, is through our concept of time. By this I want to refer to the Greek conceptions of time, namely both kairos and chronos. This is essential for our traditional conception of time primarily focusses on chronos, the order of things and chronologic order of time. But for the storyteller it is especially the kairos – the rightness and meaning of time – that is relevant for the contextualisation of the

contemporary.

The craftsman too is threatened with a form of communication that Benjamin describes as information. It seems indeed that information drastically influenced our perception of reality, and potentially decreases the interest in the story. "Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation." The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time. A story is different. Expertise and understanding are different. It is one thing to know that it is, it is something else to understand why it is so. And it is this aspect that claims the legitimacy of the craftsman. Instead of an artificial

and superficial form of understanding, the craftsman distinguishes himself to a profound and superior understanding. The contemporary average person drowns in endless floods of information. This allows for a revival of the traditional notion of the storyteller as craftsman. To quote Walter Benjamin "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience" and so, equipped with curating and analytical skills, the storyteller has the capacity of structuring data and to create an accessible narrative.