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Story of Our Lives letter from Alex Skitolsky

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Hi All,

Katie relayed to me some of the conversation that took place after last week's meeting about the possibility of audio-recording future meetings, and I think the idea should definitely be discussed further with the entire group. As I can't be there tomorrow night, I'd like to share a few thoughts and suggestions about that - though I completely support the preferences of the facilitators and writers involved.

My initial hesitation to incorporate video- or audio-recording in the process was not at all from an unfamiliarity or dislike of the technology (I'm mostly a digital filmmaker these days) and arises instead from the desire to remain immersed in the ingredients of the theatrical experience throughout the process - the live, active, and present space - while keeping everyone attuned to what is happening now. The very presence of an external recording device can sometimes interrupt this and change the dynamic (why audio- and video-recording, despite the practical benefits it might offer, remains widely unused in rehearsals for live performance).

The structure of the facilitator/writing partner is adapted from an approach developed by Jean-Claude van Itallie, the collaborative playwright from The Open Theater, and is one that I plan to use as the process becomes more image- and action-centered. The intention of this structure is to actually slow down the storytelling process and allow more room for reflection and detail - encouraged by the active listening of the facilitator and necessitated by the limited handwriting speed of the partner. The goal is to avoid glossing over the richness of the concerned experience, rushing through the story, and relying on the easy and immediate formulations of language.

When needed, requests from the writing partner to pause, slow down, or repeat so that she/he can keep up in recording the story - as well as requests by the facilitator for further detail and clarification - help maintain a pace that is better for the integrity of the story itself. If the story is told at a pace that is too fast for the writing partner to record and for the facilitator to consider and question, it is of detriment to the material itself, and the facilitator and writing partner should use these requests and work together to slow the pace. These requests should be viewed not as interruptions but as methods for supporting the story and establishing a healthy and manageable pace.

I think that the intention behind this structure is worth pursuing, but my experience in using these techniques (alone and with Jean-Claude) has been limited to native speakers of English. This particular project may present other challenges that necessitate another form of recording however, and I defer to the judgment of those involved.

Many thanks and wishes -

Alex