



DIGITAL COMMUNICATION/DOCUMENTATION SPACES in ENSEMBLE: HOW (SRI LANKANS) TURNED A LUDDITE ON

THE LUDDITE REVEALED:

ARTFARM has a Facebook account. I don't use it. Don't know how. I leave that to my partner in crime— or to smart young interns. I have never had a personal FB account. I don't have Instagram, Snapchat, I still carry a paper calendar, and unlike our president— I don't Tweet. I email. I text. Go, Old School! Really— I just have had Zero Interest in this techno-madness. I'm a kinesthetic learner. I like being in real time, in real space, with real people
Mind you, for marketing our programs and performances, we use digital media, but it's not me that does it. We're in the game. I just don't really like to play.

EAST TEACHES WEST: I worked in Sri Lanka with the ensemble *Stages Theatre Group*. After our first meeting, I was added to the Stages Dropbox group and three of their Whatsapp groups; one for the larger Ensemble of performers, one for the Researchers/Interviewers and one for the Administrative Team (with overlap, in these.) The specific project we were working on is in its 3rd year and is interview-based. We worked regularly in the studio & in kitchens, but the Admin group communicated nearly daily via whatsapp, I immediately was involved in listening to interviews through Dropbox & was quickly acclimated to the project through the site.



SOME OF THE HOW: How one Organizes the On-Line Space can shape the creative process. *Stages* demarcated each interview with tabs: the Name of the Interviewed person, Who Conducted the Interview, If it had been Translated & Transcribed & Who Translated/ Transcribed it. Eventually, they came to demarcating by Theme— so that in putting the script together— the different selections covered a wide range of issues. This on-line space also held production calendars, budgets, scripts & guidelines for Interviewers. **For non-techies like myself, there is also a step by step guide to setting up a Google Drive site, created by our volunteer Student Intern / Project Transcriptionist available.*



IN the SERVICE of ENSEMBLE: Part of what impressed itself upon me was how the use of this on-line tool allowed for transparency and ensemble engagement. The Dropbox Site was able to be viewed by and added to by company members. This invited engagement. It also revealed varied levels of commitment to the work. Some members really just stuck to being performers and didn't interface much with the site. Others became closer to the decision making by being 'in the know' about details of the project. These were the folks, I found, that additionally took on administrative roles. Those roles ranged from creating material for pre/post-show community engagement, being the person who does Site maintenance— and communicates how the site works or what changes are made, or being the person who communicates about evolving scheduling. Folks basically were as much of a player in the company as they chose to invest. It seemed the site gave access, and the access invited ownership.

A couple of BRASS TACKS:

Through trial and error, evolution and sticking with what has proved most useful, Stages has made numerous discoveries that have led them to make certain systems choices (that may or may not be right for other ensembles, but are informed).

Google Drive vs Dropbox: Stages found that people who had MAC computers had a more difficult time utilizing Google Drive. All of the PC users in the group found Google a functional tool. For the MAC users, sometimes either the uploading– or downloading of material was unsuccessful. This led to added layers of communication and having other people in the Ensemble trying to fix or adjust or change the way things were up/down loaded, creating extra work and taking up precious extra time. When they switched to Dropbox –which was a big undertaking that one of the primarily Administrative Ensemble members took on– they found that PC and MAC users alike were able to access and use the system.

Whatsapp vs Group Text: Previously, I had only ever used Whatsapp for International communication. Stages utilizes Whatsapp for primary daily communication within the company. In the US, we are all used to big data plans, and in a developing country like Sri Lanka, big or ‘unlimited’ data plans are not the norm. This may be one of the reasons they chose the free Whatsapp ...err...app, but there are other reasons, as well. It was explained to me that group texts only worked for people with iphones. In their company, only 2 people have iphones. The US is flooded with iphones, so this may not fully apply, but since coming home, 2 of my kids got Androids– and guess what– they can’t group text! Okay– here is the biggest reason why folks might consider Whatsapp vs Group texting... You can send Videos and Files– Who Knew? Stages recently sent me a 6 minute video via Whatsapp– that opened right up!

WHY I AM NOW INTERESTED: A NEW ROLE in ENSEMBLE

The main reason I have been uninterested in techno-land, is it has seemed a distraction, a time-suck, a necessary evil to stay viable in a world on it’s head. WHY I am now game? - because these tools are enabling me to DO THE WORK. The work of creating new ensemble-based theater pieces.

Upon returning home from Sri Lanka, I immediately went into the late phases of an interview-based project, *Where Are We Now?: Race, Pride, Class & Inequity* (also looking at majority/minority dynamics). I integrated an on-line documentation/communication tool in this project. We used Google Drive, simply because that is what one of our members (our DeeJay) set up. This space was used to upload audio recorded interviews. Our intern/transcriptionist could listen to them, transcribe and save them here. My main collaborator is a song writer. She was able to upload lyrics and recordings– even rough recordings from the voice memo on her phone. One member is a poet, and she was able to upload poems in consideration for the piece. There was a section for people to dump historical quotes, and a place for relative data/research on race in America. As the piece would have numerous movement sections, as well as transitions, people were able to list songs, but also links to youtube to be considered.

Basically, when I holed up in a cheap hotel room for three days to cobble the script together– everything that anyone wanted in the running was available to me.

While I was doing this, my collaborator was traveling. We could get on the phone and look at an edit together. It was USEFUL in making the work. I aint’ got time for what aint.

Who’dathunk?

