

SCRIPT

Alone with Computers

a DCS Monologue

Part of the 'Dear Children, Sincerely ...' project



written by
RUWANTHIE DE CHICKERA

Based on interviews conducted through
the DCS theatre research project

stages
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Alone with Computers – a DCS Monologue

First public performance 2016

A Stages Theatre Group presentation

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Stages Theatre Group presentation
First performed in,
Colombo, Sri Lanka, January 2016,
The International Center for Ethnic Studies

An Introduction to the *DCS Project*

‘Dear Children, Sincerely...’ a conversation across generations

What is the *DCS Project*?

“**Dear Children, Sincerely... a conversation across generations**” (or the *DCS project*) is a research theatre project begun in Sri Lanka in 2015 by Stages Theatre Group. *DCS* collects the stories and experiences of the generation born in the 1930s and takes them to the present-day audiences in the form of storytelling and live performance.

Under the *DCS project*, short performance pieces are created from extensive conversations conducted with senior citizens, with each performance piece not more than 15 minutes long. These stories stand alone as individual performance pieces and can also be linked together to create longer theatrical productions.

Between 2015 and 2020, through the *DCS project*, over 70 senior citizens of Sri Lanka were interviewed and performance pieces created from these conversations.

The *DCS project* has also been implemented in Rwanda, Palestine, Pakistan, the UK, Serbia and DRC.

The DCS Monologues

The monologues under *DCS project* (the *DCS Monologues*) are personal stories of individuals who belonged to the generation born in the 1930s. Each *DCS monologue* tells us the story of one such individual. Together they give us some historical perspective on what people consider important, what people easily forget and what they find unforgettable.

A Tamil sportsman who left the country after securing a Gold Medal for it, an old lady displaced for the first time at the age of 90, a faithful butler who observed the infamous attempted Military Coup, a woman lawyer heading the country’s first Disappearance Commission, a doctor who trusted her family inheritance to a riotous drunk... These are but some of the *DCS Monologues*.

Alone with Computers is one such monologue.

An Introduction to *Alone with Computers*

This *DCS Monologue* is based on a conversation with Dr. Vimala Ganeshanathan.
Interview conducted by Ruwanthie de Chickera.

About the Monologue

This monologue was inspired by a conversation with Dr. Vimala Ganeshanandan. However, it was expanded using the experiences of many of the elders interviewed through the DCS project.

It is a monologue which focuses on the strange dilemma that many of the people of this generation find themselves in, which is a situation of isolation and enforced dependency on technology in order to stay connected to their families and loved ones.

In this piece, a successful lady doctor, and mother of five, spends her time navigating the latest technological gadgets gifted to her by her children, all of them whom now live overseas and who stay in touch with her using these devices.

Performance History

First directed by	: Tracy Holsinger	
English language performances	: Azira Eusufally Pia Hatch	(Colombo, 2016) (Colombo, 2017)
Sinhala language performances	: Nilmini Buwaneka	(Chilaw, Kuliapitiya, 2017)
Tamil language performance	: Shirani Mills	(Colombo, 2017)

For more detailed insights on this play, including the back story about how it was made, an analysis of all its design elements, its production video, soundtrack, publicity campaign, all press reviews and audience comments, and more, please visit its production page on the Stages Theatre Group website www.stages.lk

Alone with Computers

Character An elderly Tamil doctor whose 5 children are all overseas.

She lives, essentially alone, surrounded by devices gifted to her by her children, who use them to contact her.

She is, however, afraid and suspicious of all these devices.

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The stage is set with a number of devices piled up on a single table – a laptop, a desktop, an iPad, a smart phone, kindle - there are also routers and adaptors crowding the table and tangled wires hanging off it.

Behind it all sits an elderly old lady, peering into one of the computers.

Elderly Lady:

When something from the computer suddenly disappears, where has it gone? Ah? I have not put delete. So where has it gone?

Ah?

Now I can manage the basics. I am very good at closing down. I know exactly how to do that. I get so fed up. And I close off... Close up? Close down? ... Anyway I close it. And I put a small cloth over it.

But anything else...

There were these classes organized by the OGA, but I feel too shy to go men. I think our generation - most of us - are not exactly... you know... technically 'go-go'. We are frightened. It's... it's... you know... at 70 when you are suddenly thrown a computer...

Ringing tone.

Is that a call coming through? Oh dear...

All our children give us computers and phones and these 'I' things, you know ... I-tops... I-'things'... for our birthdays ... I-tabs! It's very frightening. Because they spend so much no? They spend so much on these. In dollars, you know. They spend in dollars. And they give it to you because they love you and they want to talk to you... and... and...

And then you have to learn it. You have to learn the wretched things no...

They say this phone can do everything. And I am sure it can but... I don't... I can't...

But then it costs so much... and all...

Skype call.

There see? Skype is calling. Now what do I do? I won't remember. Aiyo!

She closes the computer.

You feel so... so incompetent and... 'not clever' you know... our reflexes are somewhat slow now no? My children get so impatient with me. When I tell them '*What are you doing?*' they don't have the time to explain. '*We'll do it and show you!*' And then... you know... (*types fast on the computer*)... and their fingers move so fast.

I mean, how long they took to learn to walk! All five of them. How many years I spent teaching them to walk...

Skype call again.

Aiyo... I don't remember what to press. Once I pressed something that messed up the whole system. It caught a virus or something. I just don't understand how that happens, is it through over-exposure or dust or what? Anyway, I always keep the computer covered and also give it rest. You know. Because these viruses are serious things. And they spread so fast. The other day one of my friend's computer caught a virus and all sorts of terrible things happened to all her photographs. Thousands of photos – all saved in the computer – all affected by this virus and then it spread to all her friends also. Through the wires I think – or the internet, I don't know. Anyway. It was a disaster.

Opens computer again.

So my five children all want to Skype. All day. Two are in America. One is in Australia and one is in Africa. And the little one is in Italy.

Phone call.

Aiyo that must be my daughter calling to find out why I am not answering Skype.

She picks up the phone.

Hullooo??? What?? The green ball? Yes, I pressed it darling. So I pressed it no baby... Nothing happened. So I did that... I did exactly what you told me. So what am I to do Kunju? Don't shout at me! Why are you shouting at me? I have written it down... Now ... Listen...

Hangs up phone.

I don't know when they grew to be so rude and arrogant...

They make you feel so incompetent and foolish. And when you think about what you have gone through... in your own life. Even before they were born. What you have seen. What you protected them from seeing. The people you have helped... as a doctor, you know... I have helped people. So many people... The patients would look at me ... with this wonder... you know...

You know why it's called a practice? Because you need to practice. And you need time to practice.

I think a lot about these high flying young doctors. With their speed and their confidence and their gadgets... It's all very good, but... Sometimes I feel they treat reports, not people.

I went to see this young specialist the other day – they are all specialists now aren't they? The GPs are a dying race – such a tragedy. Now any patient has five specialists analyzing them rather than one GP who knows them...

So what was I saying? Yes, the other day I went to see a young specialist. I had this report with me. I was in that room for five minutes. I don't even know why I bothered to sit. He didn't look at me. He didn't once look at me. He read my report and wrote out a prescription...

How do you do that?

A pinging message tone. It repeats right throughout the next para.

Oh dear – that's that 'what's-up' group that my son has created. For the family. I don't know what happens there. They are posting videos... and they organize family trips... Every time I hear that blooming beep I get a headache... I feel like saying – 'ah now what's-up with you?'

The pinging stops.

You know, I have no one to test this theory on, but... I think that these machines sense fear. Like animals and babies, they somehow sense the fear of the person, and they play up. Because I only press what I have been told to press and still everything gets stuck. And it never gets stuck for my children. Even my grandchildren – tiny tots – they have no fear no? They just come and do this and do this and that... and the computer doesn't do anything bad.

The sound of an email arriving.

Ah an email... from my granddaughter... She must be 14 now... aiyo she has sent attachments. That's another mess...

I have been thinking about this, a lot. In between the calls, I have some time to sit and think now...

Emotions you can't see on a computer no? You get an email. You don't know the state of mind of the person. If somebody talks to you and they are telling you something, you can see from their face – if they are lying. But on a computer page it all looks as if it's fine.

That human touch and... no... actually just that, that touch, is so essential when we talk, to touch the person. It's so important.

People don't realize it but if the patient is depressed or lonely, they don't tell you. They talk about a lot of other things and you have to see through all that to see the truth. You have to see through it.

The way we are going, soon doctors will be diagnosing on the computer.

Imagine? Where that will end?

My mother at 65 said she wanted to die. They married young, that generation. By 65 they felt they had come to the end. Enough of living – you know? Isn't that a nice feeling? To be able to say... enough of living?

Another message tone.

Ah now see? See?? My second daughter has now sent something. Now that Google is going to come and ask me all sorts of questions. As soon as I go there, it comes and says 'do you want this?', 'do you want that...?' It comes off and on like that. And I get mad you know? I just cancel. I press the close down.

And I cover the computer.

She shuts the computer.

Enough. Enough.

END

Production Credits

Alone with Computers was first performed at the **International Centre for Ethnic Studies** in **Colombo, Sri Lanka** in January 2016, with the following cast and crew.

CAST

Azira Esufally (English) - 2016

Pia Hatch (English) - 2016

Nilmini Buwaneka (Sinhala) - 2017

Shiranee Mills (Tamil) - 2017

DESIGN TEAM

Director Tracy Holsinger
Ruwanthie de Chickera

Designer Tracy Holsinger
Jayampathi Guruge

Composer/ Sound Design Ranil Goonawardene

PRODUCTION TEAM

Stage Manager Akalanka Prabhashwara

Backstage Prabhath Chinthaka
Praveen Tilakaratne

Lights Jayampathi Guruge
Saman Malalasekera (2016)

Sounds Pemanthi Fernando

Make-up Nilmini Buwaneka (2016)
Sanjeeva Upendra (2016)
Jayampathi Guruge (2017)

Front of House Sanda Wijeratne

Production Team Nilmini Buwaneka (2017)

Malshani Delgahapitiya – 2016

Anila Sadasivan Krishnamma – 2016

Admin Team

Miranga Ariyaratne

Pemanthi Fernando

Sanda Wijeratne

Sponsors

Gehan Gunatilleke

Radhika Hettiarachchi

Rebecca Owen

Sanda Wijeratne

Publicity/Media Team

Gihan de Chickera

Deandra Bulner

Pemanthi Fernando

Pia Hatch

Graphic Design

Venura Navod Balasooriya (2016)

Ruvini de Silva (2016)

Deshan Tennekoon (2020)

Souvenir Team

Ruwanthie de Chickera

Dharini Priscilla

Pemanthi Fernando

Piumi Wijesundara

Praveen Tilakaratne

Venura Navod Balasooriya

Photography

Prauda Buwaneka

Pramila Samarakoon

Video

Prauda Buwaneka

Video Editor

Jithendra Vidyapathi

Producer

Radhika Hettiarachchi (2016)

Pemanthi Fernando (2017)

Dharini Priscilla (2017)

The following artists contributed to the making of this script:

Writer	Ruwanthie de Chickera
DCS Interviewee	Dr. Vimala Ganeshanathan
DCS Researcher	Ruwanthie de Chickera
Translators	Geetha de Chickera (Sinhala translation) Shiranee Mills (Tamil translation)

For more detailed insights on this play, including the back story about how it was made, an analysis of all its design elements, its production video, soundtrack, publicity campaign, all press reviews and audience comments, and more, please visit its production page on the Stages Theatre Group website www.stages.lk

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