

Writing, you know, Deepthi, sitting down, hunched over, with the paper, word after word, arranged into lines, rows, with clauses, sentences, paragraphs: 'like soldiers marching' Thoreau said. He knew. We are making the war || What war? || The war between Red and White. Left and Right. Butter-side down and butter-side up. The war. The war that never ends. But what can I do? || Stop? If it's causing you so much anxiety || Stop writing? Become a garlic farmer? || Why a garlic farmer? || I always thought it would be nice to be a garlic farmer || When you tried to stop writing? || Yes, I told you, I spent a year not writing. Did that help? A year. It was very quiet. I found quietude. I lived in the forest. I cut wood with a hand-saw || Really? || Really, it was like 1811. Of course, to us, that's the Stone Age, but really it was 1811 only. I had windows, and a wood-stove, and a bicycle, and a steel hand saw. || Are you sure they had bicycles in 1811? I don't think there were rubber tires yet || I don't know, but they didn't have any of that in the Stone Age. I was in 1811. And I didn't write. And I didn't use petroleum.

What do writing and petroleum have to do with each other? || Nothing. I didn't use petroleum, and I didn't write. The two were unrelated, as far as I could tell. The only relationship was location || What location? || The cabin, by the way, the cabin where Aletto lives || With the stream and the seductress? || Yes, she walked over the bridge and we drank beer in the cabin and we talked a lot and we never made love || You're so full of shit || Yes, but its true || That you are full of shit? || That I never wrote and I never used petroleum and I never made love || And that you are full of shit || I am full of shit. It's true. I eat food and as soon as it passes my stomach it turns to shit. And yes, I had a downfall because being in that cabin was a high, a summit: Burning brightly with living heat is a high. And I couldn't sustain that high and so I had a downfall. But no one brought it about. It just happened, like a note coming to an end, trailing off, because the player has no more breath in his lungs. Quietude couldn't go on forever. Just like we need to inhale, we need to exhale. I needed to breath, to breath people, to breath language. The words were pushing, and they were also spoiling. I had to come out of the forest in order to be in touch with living speech. And, I had to write because if I didn't I would become sick from the words pushing against my skull. Otherwise I would have died, like my father, whose hands were closed.

You said your father died in a big fall? || Yes. But why did he fall? Why did he split his head open when he fell? Spill his brains? Because he had to let the words out. It's that simple. I can see no other reason for it || Why do you need to find a reason for it?

Sometimes I fear that madness is hereditary especially when I find myself getting very excited and alarmed reading about military researchers stimulating the planet's ionosphere for strategic purposed. I think of all the things my father would make of it, and how it relates to our ongoing debate regarding magnetism versus gravity. || What was his name? || Maninder. Did you ever see the Elephant Man? || No || The Elephant Man sometimes thought that his head was so big because of all the dreams that were stuck in there and couldn't get out. He said that one day the weight of his dreams would crush him. [In the play, that is exactly what happens, then the pin-head girls from the freak show come out and sing || I think I saw the movie, but I don't remember that scene || Maybe the play and the movie don't correspond? || It was a David Lynch film. He has his own logic || Well, it is fitting that my father's skull broke open and let all his thoughts finally free like a gas contained at high-pressure. I often wish that he had discovered tape-recorders. Writing was obviously too slow for his needs. || What needs? || He suffered from asthma. My taya said that the asthma was there to protect his mind from excessive oxygen. He said that it was ok that I smoked cigarettes because if I was like my father, I had to be careful about excess oxygen, too. Cigarettes slow me down, enough to write. Otherwise all I can do is talk about it. My father, too. He could talk. But he didn't make recordings. He had the telephones.

In my manuscript *Irreverence*, (which is buried in Plainfield, Vermont) I created a character, The Phone Artist || Your father? || He was trying to flip the magnetic poles through conference calls and mantras || Where did this idea come from? || As a young man, the Phone Artist had been a revolutionary partisan, and had developed a belief that a genuine overturning of the order of things would occur simultaneously with an inversion of the magnetic poles. This belief was formed after smoking a joint on a beach in Cypress with a very sexy Russian physicist named Illyana (or Yanochka as he was calling her by that point.) Illyana planted a seed that would grow into a tree whose spreading branches would shade and wither all belief in class struggle and dialectical materialism. The Phone Artist devoted himself with single-minded purpose to affecting the polar reversal. He consulted with researchers both academic and outsider on geo-magnetism iron core dynamics elegant catastrophic theory and above all ley lines determined significant points in upholding the relationship between north and south. And he began to connect those points, weird them together, through conference calls.

That's a very good question, but one that could lead to a great deal of sorrow, and since I'm happy with the explanation that I have, I shall avoid your question. We have to return to the question of sequence

Chronology but no no thematically would be a better approach. Cut-and-paste by topic. You'll get to India and you can record all these conversations, then come find me in Haridwar. You'll love the house! It has a view of the Ganges! And we'll listen to the conversations and put them together into a story. Sounds good? || Great || Then I have two questions. Or three. Maybe more. Are you ready? || Yes

First, if the novel of utterances can jump around in time and place and is not organized chronologically, how do you mark the transitions? How do you solve the problem of narration?

Well, you could insert segues, padding for the changes, a voice-over. It could be us, later, saying 'hey, remember when...' or it could be like a radio-announcer sort of voice || Chorus || Singers? || No, the narrator of a Greek drama. Think of the Stage Manager in Our Town. But then that's a whole other character || No, it could be us, but not you and I. If the novel of utterances really works, Lex and Deepthi remain, but no more you and I, or anyone else. Just words. What are your other questions. Let's hear them all then answer them.

Second, how does your novel of utterances differ from drama? || That's a good one. Third?

Third, if the novel is utterances is comprised of recordings, why does it need to be translated into visual text at all? Couldn't it exist simply as recordings? || Do you have more questions?

Yes, how would you tell a story? || Does a novel need to tell a story? || [...]

I don't think there's any need for a single story. It could visit stories. There're stories that people tell || Plus, EVERYONE in Delhi is writing a book, and they all will tell us the stories of the books they are writing || Or have written. But this could be a philosophical novel || But even philosophy has a subject || Scripts could be our subject || Are scripts like Tom Cruise's Reactive Mind? || Burrough's thought so, sort of. The Reactive Mind is like the Other Half. The subvocal speech that never stops. Sometimes that subvocal speech comes out into the world, and we are speaking without thought. Writers, their practice is to shape words, so they are very privileged human beings since they shape this Other Half. And by writing, they move it outside themselves. Also, writers create scripts. So they can change the scripts || Or maintain the scripts. Reproduce them || Of course. The most powerful and privileged writers are the ones who come up with newscasts, advertisements, speeches. The writers who maintain the current constellation of power.

So, besides that piece of filth that you read me in Newark, you told me about two other books, one with a terrorist and one with a beggar boy. I assume there are no women in any of your books? || Probably not. I never can tell what women are thinking, so have a hard time generating women characters || That's because only women can generate. Men only observe || That's why I'm interested in a literature of the tape-recorder || So these poker, eavesdropper novels of yours... || No, these were not realized with tape-recorders. I was just writing. Very expressionist || What were they about? || The first was about dopplegangers, though I was too immature to realize it at the time. Alyosha, the uncorrupted murderer, and Imam Jozeph, the pure terrorist. Alyosha is this nice, sweet, bundle of loving-kindness, but on the first page of the novel he accidentally administers an OD to a friend at a party || So he's a manslaughterer || Yes, like Sailor Ripley in Wild at Heart || I was just thinking that! Where he tells Lulu's mama that he's not a murderer, just a manslaughterer. And who is Imam Jozeph? || He is this confused anti-Semitic Georgian-as-in-Gruzkhya homeboy who has a posse of black muslim homeboys who worship him because he's the first and only real muslim they've ever met, and also because he's a homicidal maniac. Alyosha is sort of his nemesis || A Russian nemesis for a Georgian Muslim? A bit imperialist, innit?

How big is this novel? || As big as it needs to be || And how far along are you?

Fragment of "I'd Rather Talk About It"
Alexis Bhagat