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Cybermohalla is a thirty-two month old project comprising thirty media practitioners of varying ages (the youngest is fifteen years old), and with different social and educational backgrounds and interests. What binds them together is their experimentation and play with diverse media forms (photography, animation, sound recording, text, etc) to improvise and create cross-media works - texts, collages, posters, print publications, videos, installations. Works are created in media labs in different parts of the city - a resettlement colony in South Delhi, Dakshinpuri (started in June 2002), an illegal working class settlement in Central Delhi, LNJP (June 2001), and the Sarai Media Lab in North Delhi (2000). The practitioners engage with the everyday life of the sprawling metropolis of Delhi to create and build resources through which ideas, experiences and stories can find expression in different registers. Cybermohalla is a collaborative project of Sarai: a programme of CSDS, Delhi and Ankur: Society for Alternatives in Education.

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Hello,

My name is Shamsheer Ali. I work with Cybermohalla's Compughar (or the abode of computers) at LNJP. Today I want to share with you some reflections on what the Compughar is about.

A lot goes on at the Compughar, even when it looks like there is very little activity. Writing texts is one of the things we do here. We also talk. And we debate a lot. And when it's not these things, there is a lot else - conversations with the elderly, interviews about the place where we live, this social universe where there are many laws laid down for us, though we don't know by whom.

We also make animations on the computers, with the mouse as our play-mate. And sometimes we photograph our world. In this last, we find the opportunity to caress our memories and feel happy. And so our memories also find a world of their own. Relationships of a special nature get formed in this way.

Through the Compughar, we got an excuse to travel outside the colony. We stopped being hesitant, and felt a sense of openness through dissolving boundaries. And through this we realised there was a world outside, where there were people just like us. Just like us, they have questions, and though there are answers to these questions, these answers remain unacknowledged. Sometimes we imagine the Compughar in ways completely different from this one, through different terms. And thinking of the Compughar anew in this way, do something new in it. The constants that remain are texts, sounds, images.

Before writing a text, we peep inside our own selves. At least that's what I think. What I'm trying to say is that my family is mine, only mine. The railway line is mine. The sky, trees, plants, petrol pump are all mine. My friends are mine, their homes are mine.

Not only this, I also think they are mine rightfully. But I must bear a cost for all of this. This cost can be anything. One cost which is huge is what we call relationships. And this word 'relationships' is very valuable in our lives.

Travellers we meet on the way are strangers. Quite often, we haven't

met them before and we don't know anything about them. We can build a relationship with them and become co-travellers. And they really are co-travellers, not strangers. This happened with me once.

There was a marriage in the village. Only my elder brother and I were going for it. I told my father I would like to go alone. He was very happy to hear that and said, "Bravo! But you won't go alone". I felt a little unhappy. We had a reservation in the train. Sitting in the train I was wondering why Papa had refused. I think I knew. It's that one thing that circulates so much in society, and which I have already mentioned.

And what eventually happened was that I travelled back alone! And that too, without a reservation and in the general compartment. I found a seat which was occupied by only one man. I sat on it and after some time, the train started to move. A few hours later, a young man got on from a station and came and stood in front of me. I could take a good look at him - from the left to the right, from up to down. Even he had checked me out by then.

Then he said, "Bhai, can I get some space to sit?" I shifted and with my eyes, gestured to him to sit. A little later, we introduced ourselves to one another. We realised what was common between us was our destination, Delhi. While chatting, a bond of friendship developed between us, and that's how we travelled together. On reaching Delhi, we got off the train, looked at each other, shook hands and turned towards our respective homes.

Whenever we will think of this train journey, we will not think of each other as strangers.

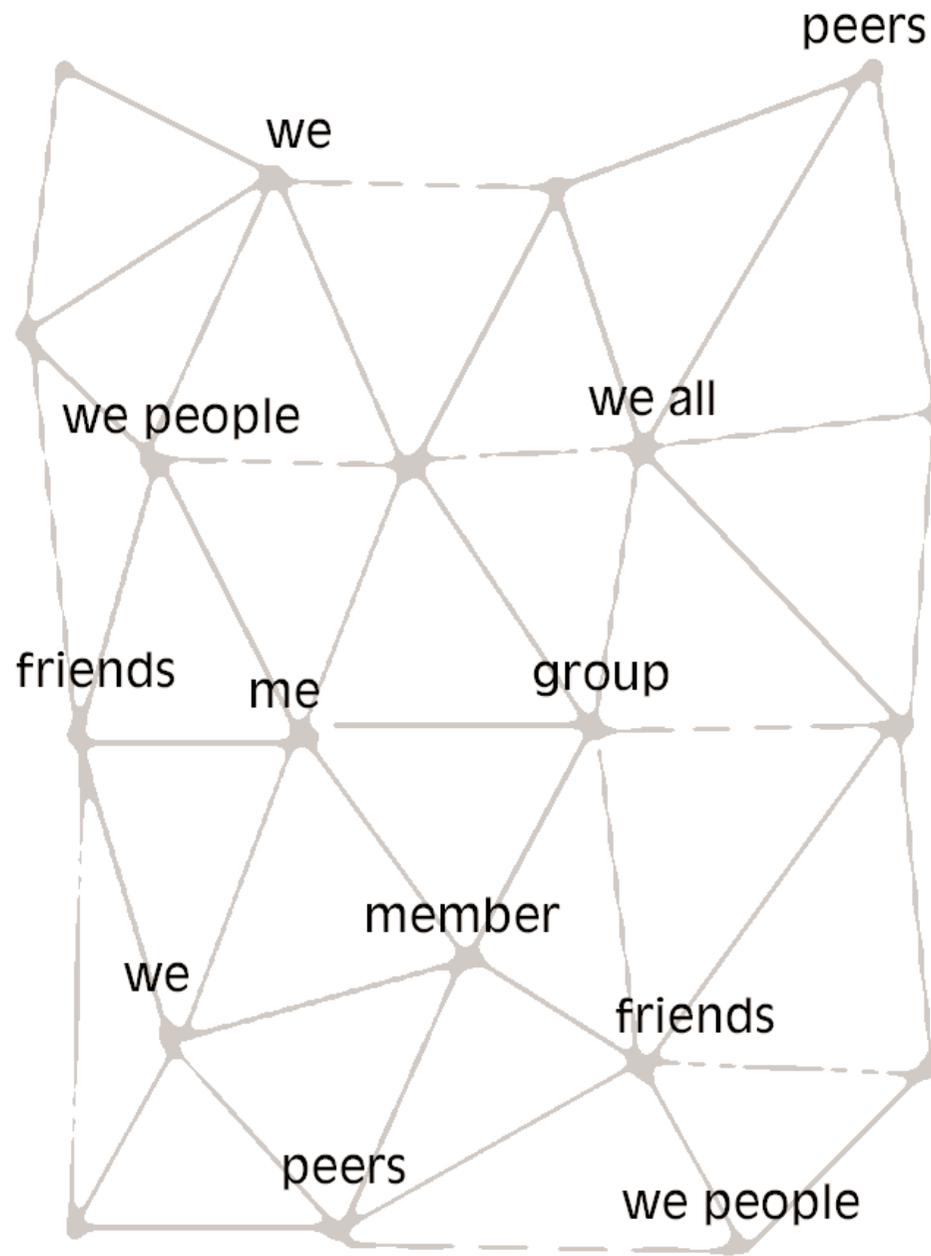
Many among you will be strangers to me. But now, after sharing this with you, I feel we are no more strangers. Maybe I have created a relationship with you in my heart.

Sham-
sher has
written about
us. Our names
are Azra, Neelofar,
Mehrunnisa, Suraj,
S h a m s h e r ,
Yashoda, Shahana,
Manoj, Babli,
Shahjehan, Ayesha,
Rabiya, Nasreen,
Masooma, Sultana,
Bobby, Naseem,
Tabassum, Dheeraj,
Kiran, Pinki, Lakhmi, Love,
Nisha, Polina, Raju, Rakesh,
Sangeeta, Sudeep, Dipika, Aas.
This ensemble also includes our
friends from Ankur and Sarai -
Prabhat, Dharam, Sohan, Joy,
Karim, Jeebesh, Shuddha,
Monica, Ashish, Ruchika,
Shveta, Mary - who have built
sustaining relationships with the
labs over the last thirty-two
months.

This book is in our voices, to
share our experiences and prac-
tice with all of you. It
is also a gesture of
friendship from us to
you, and an invita-
tion to you to
inscribe the surfaces
of these pages.
So scratch, and plug
in.

Cybermohalla/
Compughar is
our ensemble. It
is one of the
ensembles we
are part of.
We think it
is important to seek
out our own languages to
describe our practices. So, mark
these pages with your own imagi-
nation, your own understanding.
Describe your own
ensemble.





There is something I want to say.

Individuals, groups, collectives, etc. are often defined and caged in through lan-

guages of legitimacy, authorisation. And I also think

some people are considered to be authorised to speak about relationships, which means

others are not. I think the question of legitimacy or illegitimacy does not arise in relationships that we make or desire. Life is about relationships, and these don't have a boundary. Relationships are like force-fields. They produce feelings in us, which create distances, or which draw us close to others, to someone. I think it is important to understand friendships as a way to knowledge, and to speak about them.

relationships which do not fit into any of these definitions. Many relationships don't even have a name. What are these relationships, and how do we define them, what do we call them?

But throughout our life, we form rela-

or jobs or child labourers!

out a childhood: employed

or out of school, with-

or orphans: studying,

either called families,

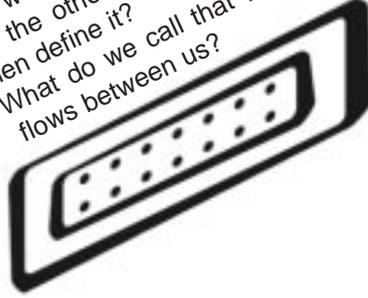
are born. We are

relationships even before we

names of relation-

We are straddled with

What words, metaphors, ideas can we use to define our practice if it is neither work nor games. If it is neither hobby, pastime, interest, nor line, job, career. These are questions that haunt us. What if what we do is neither one, nor the other? How do we then define it? What do we call that which flows between us?



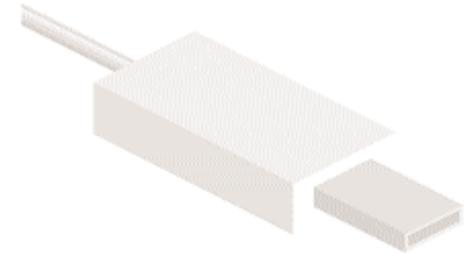
We think what witholds and prevents speech is the fear of listening to too many voices, a fear that a cacophony of sounds will result. But there is a richness in the the multiplicity of a band when it plays with myriad instruments, when there is improvisation, and more than one sound can be heard. The simultaneous existence of multiple, diverse voices means there is speech without fear, with freedom and dignity. And that, in turn, implies that there be responsible and fearless listening.

Let us tune in to how different people describe each of our ensembles. For instance, this is how our friends from Park Fiction describe our ensemble:

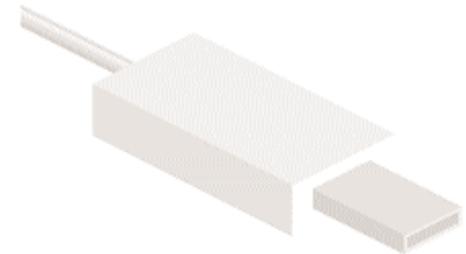
"Young people describe the cities within the city that remain uncharted territory on official maps. With their sensitive accounts of improvised settlements, the youths not only create a fragmentary urban literature of the megacities; their poetry, which is published in Hindi and English, reinforces the settlements on a second level. A medium completely remote from power turns into an element of a constituting power".

Others speak of it in other ways. Different definitions give us different perspectives on our own practice.

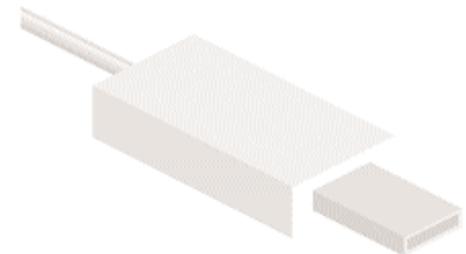
An ensemble you got to know and found interesting.



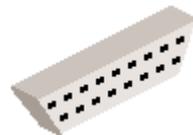
An ensemble you knew before and which you remember with fondness.



How the new friends you make would like to describe your ensemble.



I've noticed some-
thing. Everywhere,
we seem to be gov-
erned by rules. We
may not always
recognise them. And
we become so used
to questions about
these unseen but
ever present rules
not being answered,
that we either stop
asking questions, or
learn the trick of not
answering difficult
questions that may
be asked of us.
Are you surprised? If
yes, then just think
about how many
times in the last few
days you have been
asked, "But why do
you do this?" and you
have answered, "But
that's how it is where
I come from"...



FOUND: We were reading the newspaper. We chanced upon a joke in the paper. "The scientist and the spider. The scientist, experimenting on the spider, breaks one leg after the other. His observations after he breaks each: "The spider, when I commanded it to, walked. Till I broke the eighth one, and said, 'walk'. The spider didn't obey." The scientist noted, "The spider becomes deaf when it's eighth limb is cut off". It was a funny joke. But then someone said, "Something's missing. Was there a language in the joke that hid something?"

We had a very long conversation. We debated and argued. Do all words mean the same thing at all times? Are words all encompassing? Do they say it all? Azra said, No. There are words that produce gaps as well.

My name:

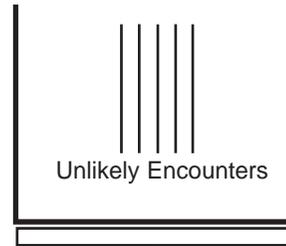
A map of the place I come from:

Unlikely Encounters are encounters, meetings and connections across cultural and class barriers. They make possible the creation of constellations that develop tools, attitudes, courage, practices, programmes in a relational knowledge field. These constellations search the emergent through the contingent and specific relations formed between ideas, experiences and practices.

And they are self-propelled. That is, unlikely encounters make further unlikely encounters, meetings and connections more likely.

Maps connect things. And each one of us connects things differently. We take different trajectories, we face different obstructions. Christoph, a friend from Hamburg, spent some weeks in Delhi. During this time we met him. Christoph speaks in German and English, Shveta speaks in English and Hindi, and we speak in Hindi. The relay of languages is always very interesting. But a lot of our interaction with Christoph was also through drawings and images. In one of our meetings, he suggested all of us draw a map of Delhi in three minutes. (He had spent some time walking around Delhi, and we were also curious what his map would look like.) When all of us finished, it was great fun to look at each others' maps, because even though they were of the same city, they were all very different from one another.

Sara from the Genderchanger Academy gifted us the hardware manual she and her friends have been working on. She said, "Won't it be interesting to see how the everyday examples we have used in our reader translate differently in different cultural and gender contexts!"



We discussed several court cases and judgments with Lawrence from Alternative Law Forum. This was very challenging. We realised our everyday interactions are marked by a complex play between norms, contestations, conflict resolutions, transgressions and redefinitions.

Meeting Geert and showing him our work shed a new

insight into our work with digital photography. Looking through our albums of film print photographs, he said, "Photographs you take are both digital as well as film prints. The two, however, do not displace one another. Rather they create a different dynamics around one another. The film prints create an immediate sociality around them through being arranged in photo albums and seen, individually, in groups or by being passed around. The digital photographs create around them a mediated sociality of being seen on the computer screen, or through a limited number of print outs that can then be circulated. They, however, make for quick downloading and manipulation on the computer and find their way into the animations you make".

Caroline shared her years of experiences with the Squatters Movement in Amsterdam with us. Looking

at our wall magazines, she told us about the different ways in which they worked to build links with their neighbours, their newly forming communities. Thinking further about such public forms, we came up with a great idea: Take photographs of a colony from outside (long shot). Upload the digital images onto the computer and manipulate them - paint the exterior walls with different, bright colours! Make an exhibition of prints of these in the colony. Arish from the Linux Users' Group in Iran spent a day with us, showing us his Persian desktop. Seeing our excitement with writing with Persian on his

desktop, he promised us a long friendship, and the patch that would make an Urdu desktop a possibility on our Compughar computers. Hansa told us many stories, and listened to many of ours. She picks up threads of conversations, observes relationships, and spins her yarn around them. But we realised it's not

so easy to fictionalise reality. Even if we change names, it's easy to make out who we are talking about!

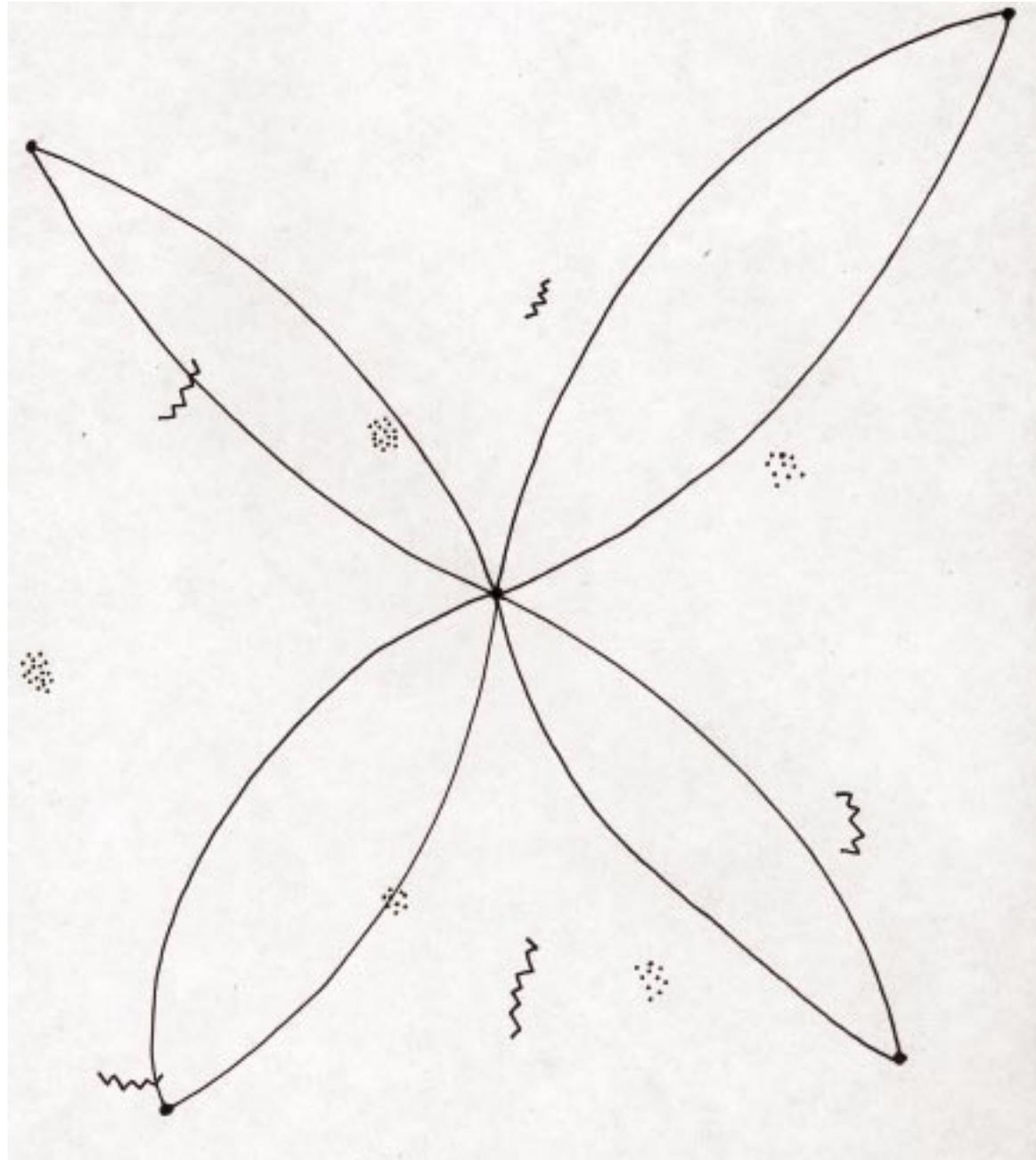
I like making maps, but I make mine on transparent sheets. This way, I can overlay one on the other.

For example, I make a map of what a place looks like. Then, over that I place a transparency sheet and make a map of sounds of the place (say of sounds in the evening) and over that, another sheet on which I draw a map of social relations between people who live there.

The map that you see on the next page is one that I made in this way. It is a map of interactions between people, through how they move around in the colony where I currently live. The long, dark lines show the movement of the pheri walas, or men who sell their wares by walking up and down the colony. The light clusters represent the movement of very old people, and young infants. And the jagged lines are fights between some people because of which they don't go to each others' houses any more.

Maybe it would be interesting to make maps of this kind in different kinds of places, and for different things.





LEGEND

A map of interactions between the familiar, the not-so-familiar, the unfamiliar, the first encounter, that which had been passed by unnoticed, that which moves but no one pays attention to or notices, that which moves and catches everyone's eyes...

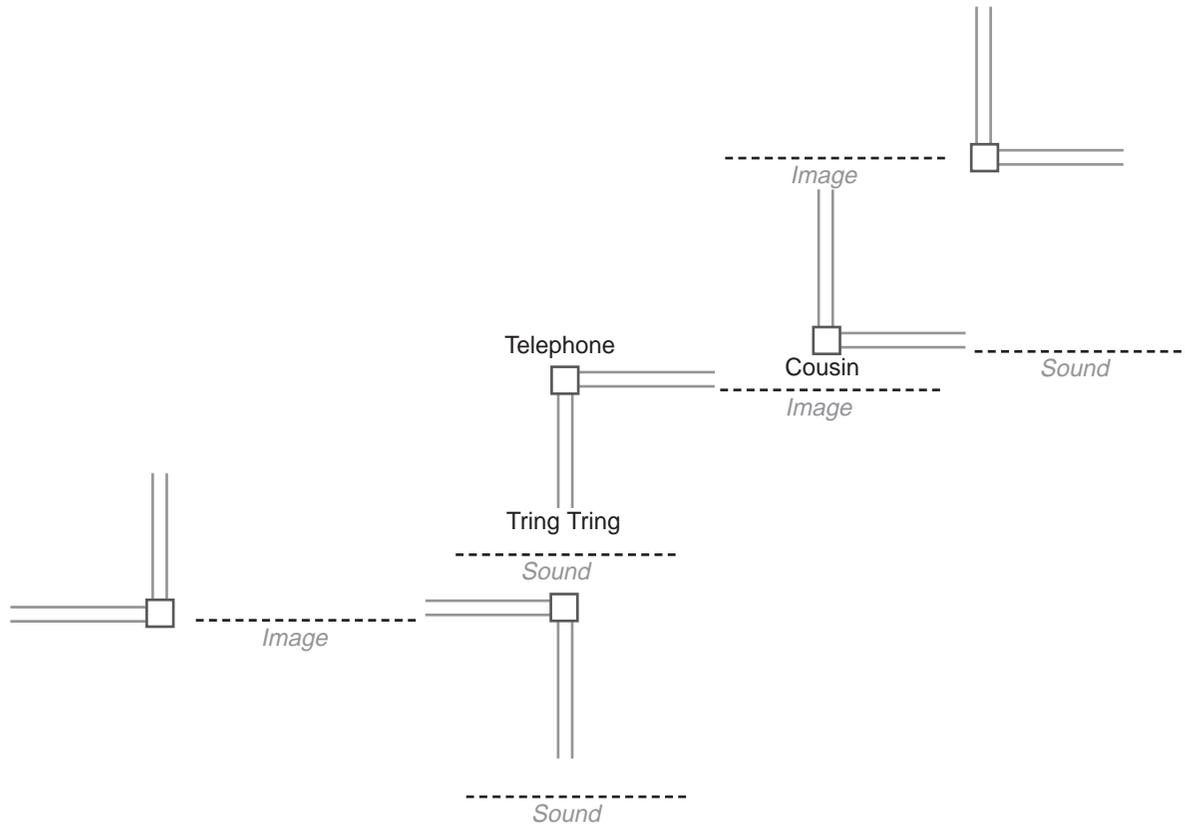
In January 2002, we took a trip to Bombay. It was our first visit to the city. Every morning, before heading out on the city roads, we would eat at the same restaurant which was near where we were staying.

It occurred to us that a repetitive action of eating in a place makes the place familiar but somehow keeps the strangeness intact. In its midst, there flows the everyday which the place is part of, and mingles with traces of our own everyday which we carry with us even on a trip.

How do the familiar and the unfamiliar interact?

A Map of Words...

Before Coming Here, Had You ~~Thought~~ Heard of a Place Like This?



I think one of the things that makes the Compughar special is that we have formed friendships with each other through conversations around ideas. If we write something, we sit together and read it to one another. Everyone asks questions, which we incorporate into our texts. Or everyone tells stories or writes their own texts which are related with this text in some way. If we read something, we bring that to the lab as well. If we take a photograph, or find one, we bring it along to the lab to discover what others think about it.

Being able to write, and to share texts, or ask questions from it, or tell our own stories through it was difficult in the beginning. But through doing this, we realised how little we knew about each other even though some of us were close friends.

Through sharing our own ways of seeing, our questions, our perplexities and our stories with our peers, we discovered more questions, connections, excitements. In a sense, these daily conversations are about hugging one another for a smear of another's thoughts. They bring laughter and joy to our lives... and produce the most vibrant, pulsating and provocative ideas! Sharing ideas about the everyday with everyone has made me more curious about what goes on around me.



In
India, in
the month of
March, there is a
festival Holi to celebrate
the arrival of spring. It's a festival of colours. Bright yellows and reds, greens and pinks. Colours, dry like dust, are smeared on each others' bodies. They are also mixed in water, sprayed on relatives, friends, acquaintances and passers by. Everyone hugs to pass their colours on to each other.

It's an occasion when the logic of colours we wear is so completely inverted! Usually people like colours to be fast. They shouldn't wear off one cloth on to another. But on Holi, it's all about colours rubbing off from one to another!

We
write about where we live, what we
see around us, what surprises us, what puzzles us. We also write
about what angers us.

In our colony, it sometimes becomes difficult for girls to walk around because some
boys really misbehave. All of us have written many texts about this. It's something
that makes us all mad!

Then, one day, we were playing with the dictionary. Each of us picked five words from
it. These were my words:

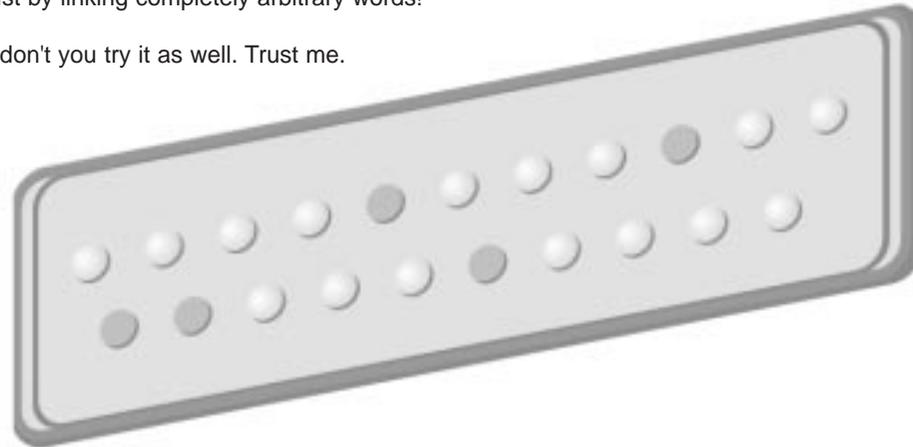
Rascal - Rob - Woo - Fantastic - Follow

I wrote a text linking all these words. What I wrote made me feel great. I wrote:

My brother is a rascal. He doesn't let me get out of the house, but who knows how many
women he follows around himself. Who knows how many girls he woos. What is fantas-
tic is that boys keep their sisters reined in, and tease other girls. Then they don't think
those girls must also be someone's sisters! But I am certain every girl doesn't get
entranced by my brother. Some must surely rob him and leave, teaching him a lesson!

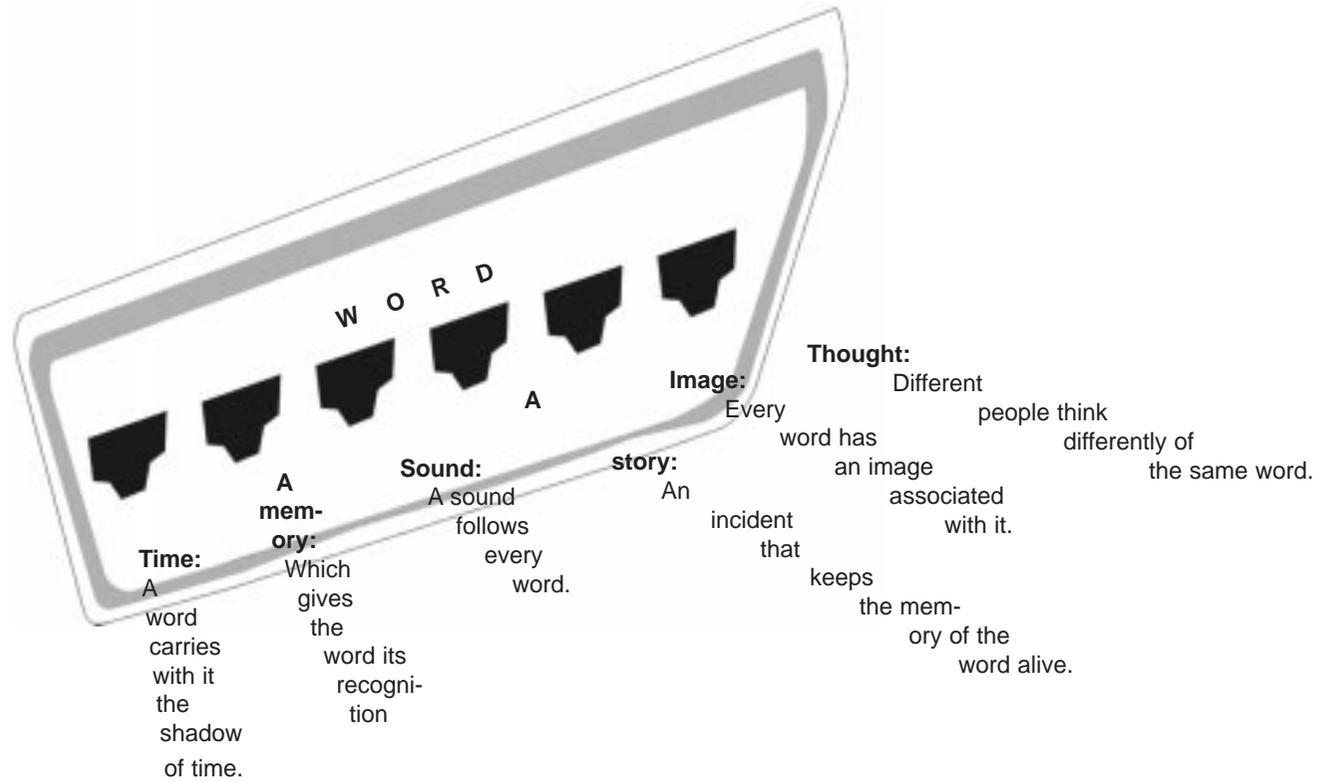
You know, it was the first time that I had written text with a voice that was not only angry or
upset, but also cheeky! And of course, there was a huge pleasure in chancing upon this
thought just by linking completely arbitrary words!

Why don't you try it as well. Trust me.



Here is a question I have been thinking about with my friends at the Compughar:

WHAT DOES EVERY WORD CARRY WITH IT?



We would like to introduce you to Ayesha. Ayesha was a quiet, withdrawn and shy girl. She was a very close friend, and our peer. She fell ill and died in the summer of 2001. A y e s h a liked to think about time. Once she wrote about time standing still.

Time stands still when water runs out and the tap is dry.
Time stands still when electricity goes.
Time stands still when one sleeps in the afternoon.
Time stands still when we sit in class in school.
Time also stands still when we can't go out and have to stay at home.

When does time stand still for you?

SAVE. This is of two types. 'Save' and 'Save As'. When we want to create and save something for the first time, we click on 'Save As'. It is only the first time that we 'Save As'. Thereafter, we only 'Save'.

My favourite pastime is listening to songs on a cassette player and watching films on video. Sometimes I wish that just like we rewind cassettes, we could rewind time. We would just click the rewind button, and redo or undo some things we did!

All of us work with some stereotypes or the other. I, for instance, lived with at least one that a friend helped me recognise. I had said to him, casually, that women in my colony gossip a lot; that in fact they do little else.

He turned around to me and said, "Are you sure? Why don't you spend a

day with a woman, watching and recording what she does from morning to night?" I did that - I spent time with a woman named

Dhanno.
Dhanno wakes up in the morning at 7:00 AM. At 7:30 AM she makes

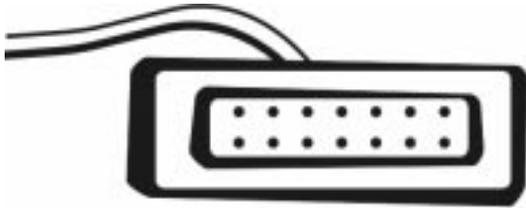
tea for her son, and wakes up her other children for school. At 8:00 AM she readies them for school. At 8:15 AM she collects her utensils and washes them. At 8:45 AM... Her day continued like this till she goes to sleep at night. My friend said, "So this is how much she gossips".

Just the act of spending a day with Dhanno made me examine and reconsider what I thought.

Thinking, afterall, is about recognising and mulling over all the un-thoughts in our minds. And friendships that are combative really help.

But you know what I think? I think time flows not in a straight line, but through the mangled mess of cables, or the knots of a coiled-up rope. And I think our lives can be seen and understood only by time travelling through these tangled loops.

I find devices very interesting. I think there are many stories hidden in them. One night, I was sitting with my back against the wall. I was looking around the house for an object that has continued to be kept in the same place for many years, and of which there is no chance that it will ever be moved from there. That's when my eyes fell on the transformer...



It was a hot, lazy morning. We were hanging around the lab, trying to think of something to do. The same question seemed to be going through everyone's mind: "Why am I finding it difficult to write?"

We lounged around, as if waiting for some flash of an idea. The music system was on. We were listening to a cassette of film songs. Someone was playing with covers of the cassettes. He put one empty cover over the other.

Suddenly, Sangeeta got up, picked up her notebook and began to write. Then she read out the text to us.

Looking at the cassette covers, one lying on the top of the other, she had written about a house. The house was made of glass, and had many windows. A spiral stair case connected the floors. There was a small garden with trimmed bushes outside the house of Sangeeta's imagination.

She looked at us. Her eyes were smiling, as if saying, there are so many fascinating things around us. All we have to do is look, imagine and be curious!

When it rains, things look different...

One thing we constantly do is to pose questions to ourselves. After all, what is the easiest thing? Letting flowing thoughts flow! What else do we need? There is so much we can do with thought, thinking. With these, we can go anywhere we want. The whole world opens itself before us. But to go into the depths of thinking, we need a pass, and the name of that is QUESTION...

Lets take an example. Like our peer Naseem says, objects have stories in them. Look around you. There are so many objects. Once we were sitting around when Manoj left in a hurry, leaving a notebook lying on the floor. One by one, we spun a web of questions around it. It was no more only a notebook, but a whole social universe inviting us to discover it! Here, the questions:

- > Who made it? Did many people participate in making the notebook?
- > There is usually a net-like binding on every notebook. Does one person bind them all? Does the cloth come ready for binding? How is the cover designed? Who designed it? Was it designed keeping in mind who might buy it?
- > Are the cover/inside pages printed? Where? How?
- > Who sold it?
- > Was it in a shop?
- > Where was the shop?
- > Did the shopkeeper have notebooks of different sizes? Or was s/he out of stock of other sizes, and so whoever bought it, bought this one?
- >Who bought it?
- > What is the price of the notebook?
- > Does more than one person use the notebook?
- > Who writes in it? What do they write?
- > With what do they write? With what all colours would it have been written in?
- > Are the pages of the botebook very white, or are they a little yellow?
- > Why is it not covered?
- > Why is it looking unkept? Is it old? Or not taken care of?
- > Seen from a distance, could it be thought of as something other than a notebook? A greeting card?

I walked from the hot sun, straight into a hail storm...

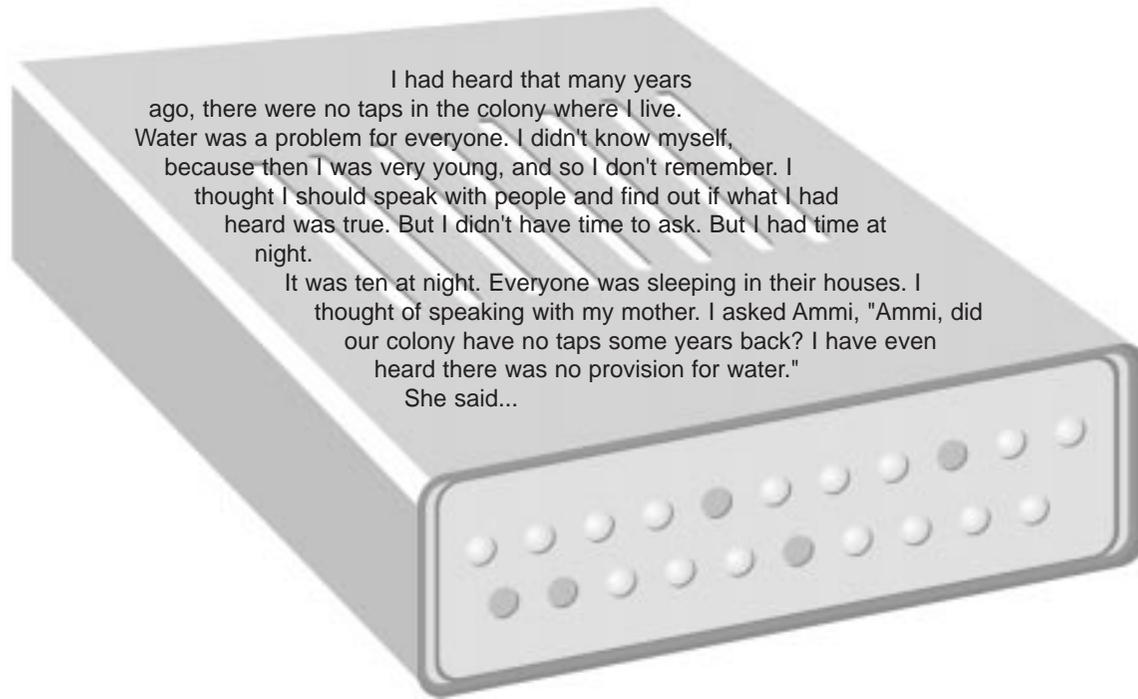


QUESTIONS TO A WINDOW

What is the colour of the curtain? What type of curtain is it? Whose house is it? How many people live in this house? How old is this window? Who has put these long iron rods here? Why? What metal is the antenna made of? Why is this empty box lying here? What are these brownish stains on the window? Is it ever cleaned? About three to four months back, I could see some people in the house. Where are they now? Is the curtain black in colour or is it covered by a layer of muck? Why can the crowing of the rooster always be heard here? Who is the owner of this place? Is this a white box, right in front, or soap foam? What is the route to this house? Why is it usually dark in here? What is the meaning of the small wall here? When no one lives here, why is there a curtain? Do people have no relation to this place, is that why no one can be seen here? Why is the light on in the closed room? Why are the stairs orange in colour? Whose shirt is this? Are these boxes filled with water or kerosene? Why is a pair of red and yellow pants on the door? Why is the curtain on the door torn? Who is spilling this water that can be seen flowing? What is this smoke because of? Is it seeds the bird is pecking at? Why is the gaze with which the house being looked at changing? Who has put the stairs outside the house? Why is this curtain dirty and torn? Why is it so dark inside the house? Is the electricity out? What colour are the walls inside the room? What is the boy going up to the roof in this cold for? Why is there so much noise inside the window at this time? Why is the rooster crowing at the window? Is the window always hidden like this? Is there a history hidden inside this window? Why is so much dust settled on the window? The space in front of the window looks like a house, but why does no one live there? Why is this window right in front of our window? Is this window older than, or was it built after, the compughar window? What could be the reason for the window to be made to open here? Is there an end to the questions around this window? Why do the limits of each of our questions about the window seem to be closing in on one another? Does the window have a persona of its own? Why are we asking so many questions of this window? Are our thoughts and gaze limited to the window? If not, then why? Where has this curtain been bought from? I mean, from a shop, or from a hawker? Have these people got the window made to compete with us? Or co-incidentally? Who got the square stone made above our window? Why? Is it to appropriate some space? Why is there no door-leaf in the window? Neither a net. Did they run out of money while building the house? Or did they just forget? Do the people who live opposite us use the window? I mean, for the sun in winters and the breeze in summers? Do they ever get the wall outside white-washed? Are these windows friends? Why did the people who live opposite us get the window made? If, instead of boys, there were a family, or girls living in this house, then would a relationship of friendship have developed between us through these windows? Why do the boys start fixing their curtains as soon as they see us? What all gets put into you when you are readied? Why are you put in houses and offices? How do you benefit us? When you are purchased from the market, what is it that people like/look for in you, that they get you for their house? Why is glass fixed into you? What all do you like and dislike seeing outside? Why are you always accompanied by a curtain? Do you like the curtain? What would it be like if you were not there? Do people passing by the street ever look at this window? Is this window made of iron? Why not of wood?

Whose house are the wires and ropes from this window going to? Do these people need the window? What are the things inside the bag hanging in front? Why is there so much garbage near the stairs? That boy locked the window, but why did he not draw the curtains? Why isn't

there any noise coming through the window today?



I had heard that many years ago, there were no taps in the colony where I live. Water was a problem for everyone. I didn't know myself, because then I was very young, and so I don't remember. I thought I should speak with people and find out if what I had heard was true. But I didn't have time to ask. But I had time at night.

It was ten at night. Everyone was sleeping in their houses. I thought of speaking with my mother. I asked Ammi, "Ammi, did our colony have no taps some years back? I have even heard there was no provision for water."

She said...

Sometimes, things just pass by us. But at other times, if we try, we can see details, textures... stories.

For instance, if you stand along the crowded street that you usually walk on to get somewhere, and just look, the street looks very different.

The scene becomes quite intriguing. It feels like we had never seen it this way before. We see something that is familiar, differently.

Things look different today...

We can choose a public place, like a bus stop, the gates of a cinema hall, a park, or a street corner. we chose a bus stop and spent about three and a half hours there. This is the time it takes a film with thirty six exposures to be shot. In this time, we chose a frame and clicked a photo every five minutes, along with writing about what happens in the duration of every five minutes. Doing this, we realised we were looking at the place completely anew.

The first snap is clicked at 3:30 PM. The sound of a motorcycle, drrr... drrr... drrr... A rickshaw wala is standing in front of me. He is wearing a lion cloth. There is also an RTV (Rural Transport Vehicle/Mini Bus). People sitting in it are probably wondering who these people with a camera and notebooks and pens are. Just then a water tank of the Delhi Water Board passes by. There is a cycle repair shop in front of us. Its sole customer is pumping air into his bicycle. There is loud noise of vehicles around us, pi... pio... po...



3:35 PM

The sound of a Boxer motor cycle, durr... durr... durr... ti... The traffic has increased. There is a three wheeler driver looking for passengers. An RTV arrives. A man is transporting some things on a bicycle. Vehicles are coming from every direction. A girl wearing a green coloured salwar kameez walks by, scratching her head.



3:40 PM

Some school kids walk past. Just then, the waiting RTV leaves. A vendor is selling guavas on his cart. School hours have just ended. A scrap man is taking scrap on his rickshaw. A roaming vendor is



selling cosmetics. The voice of a boy, "Hey! What are you doing?" The driver of an RTV is looking at us, and laughing. A cow is roaming around as if the road were a cow shed. Scooter: ti... ti... ti... ti... ti... ti...

3:45 PM

A scooter: trr... tr... A red van stops, then drives away. The conductor of an RTV calling out, "Moolchand!

Moolchand!" Two women are walking past. The woman in front is holding a child in her



arms. The child's face looks kind of sad. Two girls are walking past, laughing, exposing their teeth!

Two children walk by, drinking mango Frooty.

A boy runs...



Photographs surround us. We see them in newspapers, in magazines, on billboards, in photo albums.

I read a text written by one of us. He had written about a random photo, which had been downloaded from the net. He called it 'Reading a Photograph'. This text opened up many new ways for me to look at my own photographs.

Reading a Photograph.

In this photograph, I can see a child, someone's right leg, the tyre of a truck and shadows. Light is coming from above, possibly from where my face is. It is falling wherever things are lying. But I can't be too sure, because what lies within these black shadows, we don't know. There could be lots, or nothing at all in these shadows. But that's not for us to think. If we think, then this: What can there be in it? I say we can think of anything, because this photograph is with us. We can do anything we want with it. If we want, we can create a dark world within it. If we want, a colour television, washing machine, buildings, India Gate, or a gutter, a drain, a water-filled puddle, there can be...



"This is not a pipe"
What do you think about this photograph?

What do faces in photographs of newspaper and magazines say to us? Do they give us information? Or do they tell us stories?

We cut out several photographs of faces from newspapers and magazines and with some of them, created a web of faces. Here it is for you to try... Everyone makes such different connections! For this, you will first need many photos. Then you can proceed in different permutations and with different

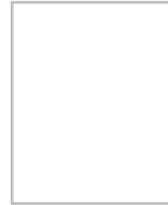
r e l a t i o n s
between people.
Here are some
beginning sug-
gestions.

A



Lets give him a name. Write five things he likes. Also write five things he has in his wallet.

F



Give her a name. Everyone knows her, but she doesn't know any of them. How?

E



Give him a name. He knows all the four (A, B, C, D). In what context does he know them?

B



Give her a name. What does she think about before going to sleep at night?

C



She knows _____ (A), but doesn't know ____ (B). In what context does she know him? What does she have in her hand bag?

D



Give her a name. She knows _____ (C). In what context does she know her? What does she do when she gets up in the morning?

G



Give him a name. He knows
all six by name and address,
though not by face. How?

A photograph is always silent. There is no sound in it. But if we plug into it, we'll be able to hear the photograph, and sounds that lie outside its frame.

When, in silence, I lie down, laying my own self beside me on the bed, voices from all around melt into my ears like pebbles in water. It seems as if water fills me from my ears to my brain. And one by one the pebbles (that is the voices) pass through my ears and file into by brain. When I put my mind to this whirlpool of sounds, sometimes I find myself standing far away, and sometimes confined to immediate surroundings.

When the sound of a fast moving car's horn reaches me, all my attention shifts, racing to the road. But then the sound of my mother's snores draws me towards them, because my mother sleeps with me. When the sound of songs come from the neighbouring house, my heart sways with abandon. But the sounds of fighting from the lane behind dampen this joyful feeling. From among these, the softest sounds of someone speaking compel me to pay attention, thinking perhaps what they are talking about is important. But when the cat jumps heavily, making a crashing sound on our impermanent roof, thought withdraws from all else and comes to stop inside the house. Sometimes these sounds are exciting. But sometimes, listening to these sounds, I feel like I am standing at the threshold of madness.

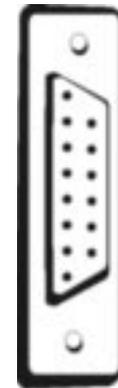


The city pages of newspapers

bring us many stories of the

city. Here is one.

If you find some interesting stories, please, we'd love it if you would send them to us!



FOUND:

"Storytelling is the art of repeating stories.

Experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth, in the speech of the many nameless storytellers, is the

source from which all storytellers have drawn. Stories - fairy tales, legends, novellas - emerge from the oral and flow into it. Drawing

from experience - his own, or that reported by others - a storyteller makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale. When the rhythm of

work seizes the listener, he listens to the tales in such a way that the gift of retelling them comes to him all by itself. The storyteller is never

alone..."

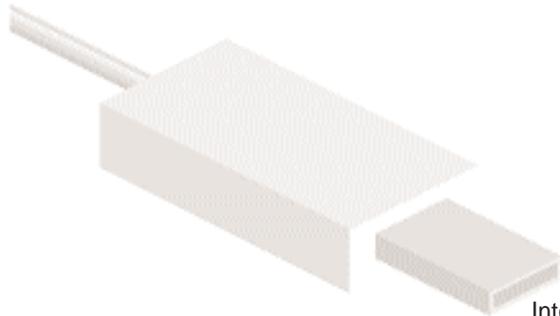
Thus wrote Mr. Walter Benjamin in 'The Storyteller', a text

we enjoy very much, and have many discussions about and quarrels with.

EXPRESS NEWSLINE
The Indian Express,
January 20, 2004,
Tuesday.

At 10:30 AM on Saturday night, Noida resident R.K. Trehan had a strange caller. A DTC bus driver was on the line, asking him if he had proof his son Gautam was friends with Nagpur-based Nirmal Singh. Stumped, Trehan had no clue what he was getting into.

Trehan and his son turned up at Patparganj's Shiv Temple a few hours later, with a photo album of the two boys in class together to meet the driver and conductor. The 40-year old woman, from whose pastry shop the call had been made was also waiting for them there. It turned out that the bus driver Raj Kishor Tyagi and conductor Vijay Pal Singh only wanted to...



Interviewing people around us, we realised, helped us know who live and work around us, recording the conversations. Such encounters have revealed to us so much about histories of the place, about different ways in which people think. And sometimes, these encounters leave us

where we live. We walk around with recorders, and spend hours talking to people who live and work around us, with questions we have never thought about before. But always, they present us with experiences which are so different from ours... through interviews, we meet newer life worlds.

A conversation with Hamid

"But I won't give this interview," he said, laughing. "Why?" I asked, raising my eyebrows, immediately upset. "Oh no, you're thoroughly prepared to ensnare me!" I connected the walkman, headphone and microphone and said, "No, no, there is nothing like that. This is just for us".

"No, I don't want my voice to be recorded. Elections are due very soon. I don't want there to be any problem for my men".

"Oh no," Farzana baji, who was there with me, chipped in. "No harm will come to anyone because of this, least of all to you". Farzana baji is a little plump, short, has eyes medium sized eyes, thin lips, a full, rounded face, wears glasses. She tried her best to convince Hamid, but he wouldn't relent. Insisted that he'd give us an interview, but minus the recording. "I'll tell you every thing just like this. You write it down". I didn't have much choice...

You know something... Conversations can be of two kinds. Conversations in questions and answers, and conversations without questions and answers. When you talk through questions and answers, you define a boundary within which the conversation will flow; you choose a target through which you figure out what you want to say. In conversations without questions and answers, the conversation proceeds through suggestions upon suggestions, where the Self has to open out to the Other.

I have taken some headlines from a newspaper. Some of what is here is from conversations with people around the headlines, and some is my own banter...

(1) Comfort for a short while, or trouble for life?

I spoke with many people about this line, most of whom were men. At the mention of this line, the first image before their eyes was that of their wives. The biggest problem to them, they say, are their wives. They say, "Bhaiya, marriage is a moonlit night only for four days. Then it's darkness. This is that poisonous sweet which, if you eat, you repent, if you don't eat, you greed after". Well, that's what they think. But what do you want to say about this?...

In my news you will find truth hidden in the dust storms accompanying explosions!



Scratch Book / Cybermohalla

There was a girl I used to see everyday, but never spoke with her. The girl used to come to the door of my house every evening to watch television. Initially, we didn't speak at all. Even now, when she comes, we don't talk much with one another. Only Ammi and I sometimes ask her to come in and then talk a little with her. If the TV is switched off, she comes and looks at it, then casts a glance at us. There are questions in those eyes that she leaves us with.



We have many stories around faces. We write them often. Or sometimes, we ask an elder person in our neighbourhood about a face that lingers in their memory. Or a face we just pass by, without noticing, without speaking, without thinking about it. Or a face whose eyes linger in their minds... eyes that leave questions behind.



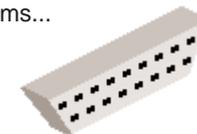
Today we learnt how to "cut", "copy" and "paste". How we can lock any thing in "paste" and take it to another place and stick it there. We can also change a text from the middle of the story.

SOMETIMES THINGS FLOW IN RELATIONSHIPS, AND SOMETIMES THEY BECOME STILL.

The Internet, which is primarily the interconnection of many sub networks, is constituted of a community of online users spread across physical spaces. It works with multiple protocols. These protocols do not implicitly rely on hardware-specific addressing for transportation of information. The Internet, then, is a mechanism that enables communication between heterogeneous networks. Every machine on the network gets a unique address, called the IP address.

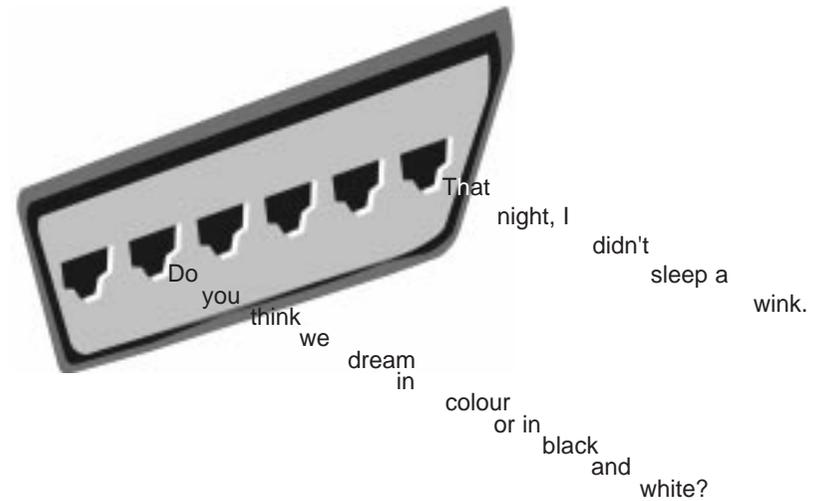
There is, in our colony, a web of lanes. These lanes are such that if strangers, or someone's relatives venture in, they won't be able to locate the address they are looking for. They either return, or finally do reach their destination after an extremely long-winding search...

Every lane has its own quirks and habits, its own uniqueness and speciality, its own share of problems...

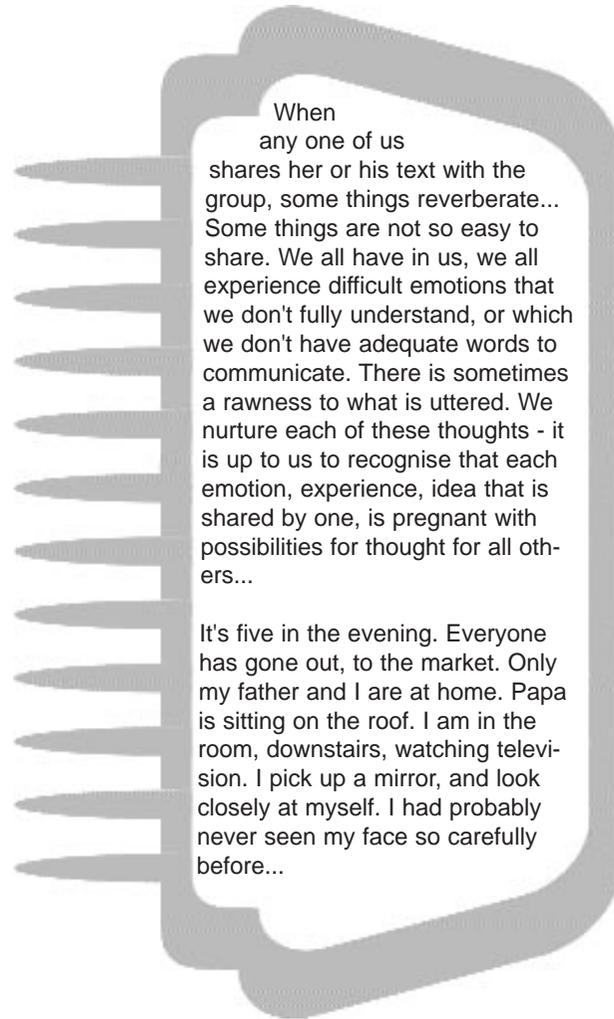


We talk with each other for hours. Some things which are said stay with us for a long time - a comment, an insight, a question, a curiosity. For instance, one afternoon we were talking about how houses in the colony look. One of us suddenly said, "A window has four eyes. Two on the inside, and two on the outside. What does the window see..."

Two houses stand close to one another. They are faces. What does one face say to the other? What are they talking about? What are they gesturing to one another? A woman comes and stands between them. What happens? What do the three talk about?



*BECAUSE IN THE COURTHOUSE OF
GLANCES, THERE ARE NO EYEWITNESSES.*



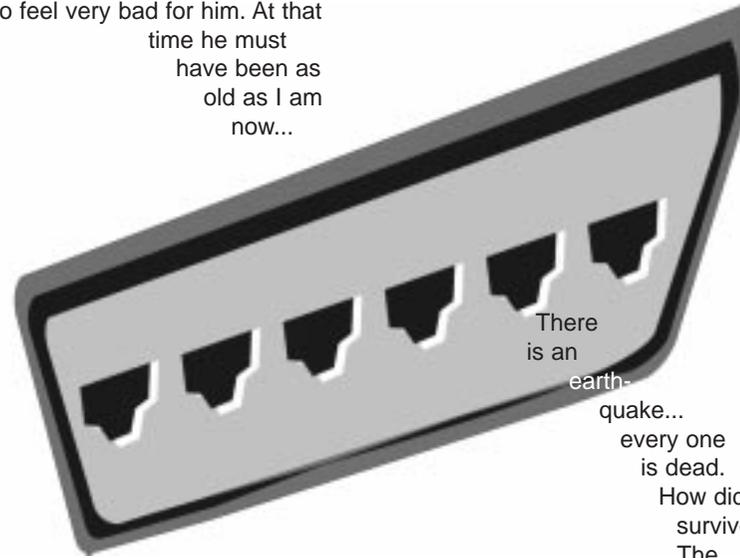
Eyes are the most important thing humans have. Sometimes they do the work of the tongue. What we are unable to say with our mouths, our eyes tell. Eyes also come in handy in scaring people...

What is the person sitting next to you thinking?



On the internet, content (be it a movie, a book, music or software) travels in a digital language of 1s and 0s. This allows for the copying, replication, reproduction of resources.

When
Makadi first came here, he would
wake up at night, crying for his mother. I
used to feel very bad for him. At that
time he must
have been as
old as I am
now...



There
is an
earth-
quake...
every one
is dead.
How did I
survive?
The
question
will
haunt
me.
It is pos-
sible
that I
would
die of
shock of
losing
my family
members.
If I man-
age to sur-
vive, I will
happy to be
a free bird...

Once Yashoda brought her passport sized photograph to the lab. We asked questions to the photograph. And then, Yashoda wrote a text from these questions.

-When was the photograph taken?
-Who is in this photograph?

-What are her likes and dislikes, her beliefs?
-Can one gauge from the colour of the dress?
-Or the black thread around the neck?
-What is the history of the dress, the jewellery she is wearing?
-Are they gifts?
-Where did she buy them from?
-Who accompanied her to buy them?
-What is her name? How can we engage with her?

-Why was it taken? What for?
-Why passport size?
-How did she feel about being photographed?
-Did she want to be photographed?
-What happened at home before she came to be photographed?
-How was she feeling just before being photographed?
-What was she thinking about while being photographed?
-Did she go alone to be photographed or did

someone accompany her?
-Who was taking her photograph? What was the relation between the photographer and her?
-Did she have any say in how the photo should look (background, light)?
-Where was the photograph taken? Was it in a familiar place (location)?
-What was the lighting set-up for the photograph?
-Who were copies of the photo sent to?

-How did the studio look?
When she read the text, Yashoda herself asked, "Did you shape your thoughts like a potter moulds his clay pots? Or did you pick and arrange them, like fruits in a basket? Did you pick as many as you wanted? Or as many as you needed? Or did you pick as many as you could?"

I thought to myself that just like the transistor catches radio and FM waves, maybe the television will catch some cable channels. Twist by twist, I reached one such channel which was showing a film. I thought why not try and move the wire around a little to see if the image clears a little more. But the image didn't change. I thought something must be done so I can watch cable. The cable-guy's satellite was just five steps away. The wires were tied to an electricity pole in front of the house. All that separated me from them were the electricity wires tied to the pole, the breadth of the lane. I cast a glance at the rooftops in the market. People had tied a speaker, the rim of a cycle and a magnet to the antennae on their roofs. I realised that could be easily done.

There
is
always
one
difficul-
ty - do
we
know what it is that we think?



Objects tell stories... and sometimes we make ourselves into objects and write autobiographies!

"Actually it is the lock from Aligarh that is famous. I am also a lock from Aligarh. I was brought from Aligarh to Delhi. I was kept in a shop..."

And we walk. We walk
around the place where we
live, we walk in different
parts of the city. We walk in
markets, along roads,
through other colonies...

When we walk, we observe
shoes, or bags, or the dif-
ferent kinds of hats or other
headgear people wear. We
observe different hands
and what the hands are
doing...

Then we write about the
walk. Many interesting con-
nections and discontinuities
appear. Many plots unfold,
and many stories reveal
themselves.



This, here, is a man whose writings we find
engaging. His name is William Burroughs.
He writes, "The important fact about urban
living: the continual stream of second
attention awareness. Every license plate,
street sign, passing strangers, are saying
something to you".

Burroughs suggests walking on colours.
Pick a colour, edit out the rest and see
what associations come up. A yellow
jeep on 40th and Central Park West
transports his mind from New York to
Mexico, then to a gun-toting episode in
the life of a friend, then to old gangland
wars in Chinatown, and thence onto a
piece of writing by a gifted student.
"When you take these walks you are lit-
erally travelling in time association
lines". You are reorganising space.

An interesting thing to think about while writing the walk is:
Can you think of space like this elsewhere? If not why? If yes, where?

One obvious fallout of information being freely shared through broad band networks is the possibility of constant regeneration and reworking of ideas and works. And for these to be organic concepts, not discrete, static and complete units. Ideas travel, multiply, connect...

Dilli Gate, which is a well known landmark in Delhi. Where there is always too much traffic. A pigeon cote which separates two roads stands here. It has become well known because of people who, despite leading busy lives, try to do some good work and earn some goodwill. Today when I passed by here, I witnessed a strange relationship between these people who are related with the place, and which I had not noticed before.

IF YOU
WERE
TO
STAND
IN
FRONT
OF A
CROWD,
WHAT
WOULD
THE
EYES
OF THE
CROWD
SAY TO
YOU?

On a dark winter evening in early January in 2002, during our trip to Bombay, we reached the Dadar metro station bustling with the hurrying commuters moving into and pouring out of the local trains. Falling into step with a stream of commuters heading for the exit, we reached the foot-over bridge to the vegetable market. Swinging batons of policemen attempted to control and bring to order the hotch-potch of the bodies - some halting for breath, others finding their own rhythms and directions. Underneath, the market was bright with halogen lamps lit in different stalls. Crowds thronged the stalls, the market was flooded, bodies packed together- a sea of heads that could allow no one admittance. Still, the crowd seemed to be swelling by the minute.

Crowds
carry
silences
with
them.
The
singular, dis-
tanced
figure
devoid of
its biog-
raphy,
multi-
plies to
become
a mass,
indistin-
guishable
in its fea-
tures, so
remote....



I looked down from a height of about 25 feet. It was very crowded. People were coming and going.



We decided to walk through the crowd in pairs. Reaching the other side, we were surprised at the ease with which we had moved through the crowd. Someone from the group said, "There were gaps in the crowd which we could not see from above. Once we entered the crowd, we could walk through these intervening spaces".

TO THINK I AM ALONE WOULD BE GROSS INJUSTICE.

<http://genderchangers.org/>

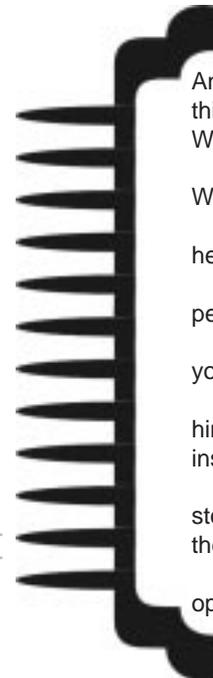
A
gen-
d e r
changer is
a small
device, an
a d a p t e r
that changes the 'sex' of
a computer cable, device
or port. It has two sides
with holes, or two sides
with pins. The holes are
female and the pins are
male. Having a gender
changer makes it irrele-
vant what gender the
connection
is; gender
makes no
difference.

When we travel, we make friends. When people come to visit us, we form friendships. When friends travel, they make friends and they tell us stories about what they have seen. These could be snippets of conversations, or moments that linger in our minds. These are gifts they leave with us.

We have a friend, whose name is Oli. He lives in Hamburg. There is something he said, which we want to share with you...

"What I love most about these streets is how many languages one can hear - German, Turkish, Arabic, Russian... I want to roam the world, but don't have the money yet. Listening to all these languages while travelling on these roads, I travel to their lands..."

"Why this?" are words which we often use in our lives. Sometimes they make us conscious of our wrongdoing, and sometimes they stop us from committing wrong. At times, they point to the follies of our thinking, and at others they compel us to think about our thoughts. So come, let me tell you about one mistake I committed. When I remember this mistake, I sometimes laugh, and sometimes feel angry at myself.



And then there are some things that make us say, "What's this?!" Here is one of them. It's from a game we played. We'd love to know what you think of it!

When I look at someone, I don't for a moment think of
thief
her or him as a **patient**. If we go to a hospital and see
thieves
people, we might think they are **patients**. Actually,
thief's
you can tell a **patient's** condition by looking at her or
Thieves thieves
him. **Patients** look tired. But some **patients** look healthy. For
instance, someone who is going to get a
thief
stone removed doesn't necessarily look like a **patient** before
the operation. Only when we get to know of the
thief
operation do we believe she or he is a **patient**.

"I am Ashoki. On Thursday, in response to a complaint that had been filed with us, we went to clean sewers in Dakshinpuri. We had gone to clean the main line. As soon as I entered the lane where we had to clean the sewers, I stood to one side quietly. I had to go inside the sewer. So I had come wearing dirty clothes, and was a little drunk. People who live in the lane had come out of their houses and

were telling us that the third sewer was blocked. They said this was probably because a new house had been constructed near it and when cement was being mixed for it, it was flowing onto the drain. Maybe it flowed inside.

My colleagues were opening the lids of the sewers and checking them. I was just standing, quietly..."

Lakhmi wrote this text when he met Ashoki. The two met when Lakhmi went to file a complaint about a blocked sewer. Ashoki was the one who registered the complaint. Something about Ashoki drew Lakhmi to him. Lakhmi wanted to draw Ashoki close to him. So, he became Ashoki and wrote this text as Ashoki. It's a text we love very much.

Are there figures around you who you want to draw near?



We don't know how to draw. But we can all visualise things we read, through our imagination. These are some frames from a graphic strip Raju made after he heard Lakhmi's text on Ashoki. They made us think, "Everyone is a graphic artist"!

This relay
of experi-
e n c e s
constantly
f l o w s
between
u s .

Through
these we
excavate

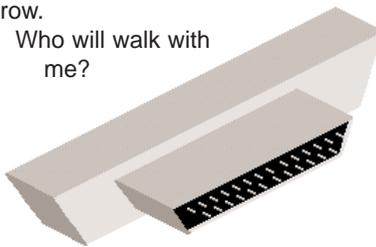
perspectives and meanings among our-
selves. A universe of hyperlinked experi-

e n c e s
emerges,
which is
u n p r e -
dictable in
its growth,
inclusive
in its
s p r e a d

and open in its propensity to encounters.

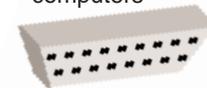
This
accretive
relay of expe-
riences creates
an interperme-
ability of ideas
- ideas collide
and mingle,
open out and
jostle.

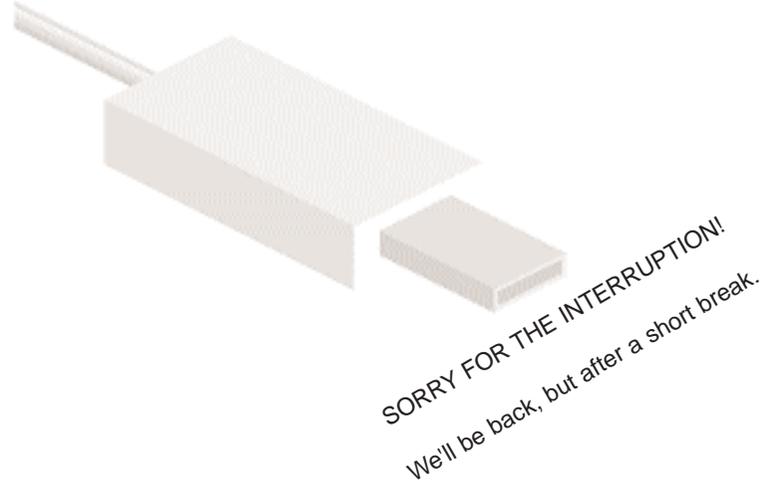
I need to walk. No
compromise on
that. Being in the
street, I sense a
freedom. A freedom
to see things and
faces and to feel
part of a flow, a
freedom to think
about others, even
though there is
always a lingering
fear. Being alone
makes this fear
grow.



Who will walk with
me?

A hub is a
central
connection
point, a
device that
connects
computers





The Edges of Thought

Day before yesterday at around ten at night, I was sitting in my room with my friends' texts in my hands. I pulled out one text. It was Shamsheer's, 'The Edges of Thought'. I like this text. I had already read it twice or thrice before, but this time I wanted to write my thoughts on it, so I read it three times. On reading it thrice I felt as if Shamsheer was sitting in front of me, telling me about the edges of thought.

Reading it this time, a question rose in my mind: "Does thought have edges?" I thought hard, but couldn't quite reach the limit of my own thoughts. But another thought came to my mind, that boundaries of thought are created by thought itself. And it is only when we step on these boundaries that our feet start to get entangled in the quicksand of thinking. It is difficult to tell how much we think in a day. There are so many things we see everyday, and so many that we encounter for the first time. There are some things which we see, but don't consciously acknowledge. But there are some things, seeing which we create in ourselves an ocean of thoughts. We dive in this ocean, and let ourselves sink. And once this begins, we can only go deeper and deeper into this ocean. Where one thought ends, another begins. And with every thought is a feeling, and to give a sense of that feeling is sometimes difficult. How can we explain a thought?

Everyone has thoughts. Some people think good things, others bad. We think good things for people we respect. But if they do something we don't like, our thought for them becomes bad. Why does this happen? Maybe because we are unable to reach the limits of our thought. Before we reach the limits, another thought engulfs and hides these limits.

We always carry something with us. What is that? It is thought. Because even if we rid ourselves of one thought, another comes and surrounds us.

I started wondering, when my friend wrote 'The Edges of Thought', were his thoughts confined to the text itself, or were they also travelling outside! I'm also writing my thoughts. And while writing I thought I wouldn't let my thoughts step out of what I was doing. But how much ever I tried, they wandered outside what I was writing. Sometimes we think we have reached the limits of our thought, and so create a boundary around it.

Lets think about thought. What must a thought be like? I think it must be round like a ball, in which we can't find edges. And we keep playing with the ball. This is a game that has a beginning, but doesn't end.

Raju
8th October, 2003