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## Words about Music

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Kathmandu—in travel literature a rollicking town full of "magic confusion" (Chadwick 1987: 37), a "kaleidoscopic" (Pye-Smith 1988: 3-4; Iyer 1988: 79) profusion of people, cultures, and histories—always seems a little more orderly when reading ethnographic works. Looking specifically at ethnomusicological research, two theoretical frames impose order on the Kathmandu Valley. The first is that the changes wrought upon traditional lives in an increasingly modern world<sup>1</sup> have specific echoes both in music itself and in how people understand music. The second frame encompasses a corner of the first, and supposes that people have held onto traditional practices such as music as a way both to resist the ongoing disintegration of social space and to establish an identity amidst the cacophony of ethnic, religious, and political practices.

In recent work on Newar musical practices, these two linked frames appear clearly in the work of Ingemar Grandin and Gert-Matthias Wegner, respectively. Grandin summarizes his analysis of Newar musical practices in a neighborhood in Kirtipur in **Music and Media in Local Life** (1989) by noting that "in the last few decades, the neighbourhood, like Kirtipur as a whole, has experienced processes of profound change . . . These processes of change have affected sociocultural practice, including music practice" (224). Wegner, in his ongoing work on Newar drumming in Bhaktapur, is more interested in conservation; his books on drumming traditions are also useful for teaching, and he has taken an active role in teaching and promoting these traditions both in Nepal and in Europe. "Musical life in Bhaktapur is far from being intact" (1987: 471), and Wegner's response to a fading interest in traditional music has been to help the "Newar community [realize] the value of its own musical heritage" (472). While

Grandin worked to document how things have changed, Wegner has shown how some people (himself included) have used musical practices to preserve their identity despite the changes in the world around them.

A third frame encompasses both of these, and is implicit throughout the literature. Ethnomusicology has drawn a clear frame around its object: music. "Music" frames what is important in our research, and gives us permission to ignore what isn't. Assumptions of clearly defined realms of social activity organize many of our ethnographic endeavors, allowing us to sift every bit of research into separate boxes labeled "music," "religion," "society," "art," and so forth. Yet using "music" as a given, already established category is premature. It is a sign of our eagerness to suppress the days when we struggled with a new language, our willingness to ignore those moments when the presumed meanings of words about music become somewhat clouded by their use. Once we attain a limited degree of proficiency in a foreign language, we too often assume it to be a transparent window onto social reality. We don't see the window—just the objective view it frames. But language is more of a stained-glass window, coloring and shaping everything seen through it. It is premature to focus on music practice as the how, when, where, and why people play and sing without considering the words people use to put their ideas about expressive culture into practice.

Rather than jump to the daunting task of showing why music exists as it does in the Kathmandu valley, or how it is performed and used, I will in this article look at, rather than out, the window of language—here, language about music, sound, and emotion. My interest is in how Nepalis (and Newars in particular) describe some of the power that sound holds for them. In both interviews and conversations, it became clear to me that this power is at least as mysterious in the Kathmandu valley as it is in other places. Some physical, visceral process inside the body seems to generate the need for music, and many Nepalis associate song and sound with internal desires and pleasures. But what does this mean? This essay is about the terms of that association and the verbal construction of inner space. I start with some brief remarks about what "music" itself can mean, and then head into a discussion

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<sup>1</sup> "Tradition" and "modernity" are not the most appropriate terms to use in describing Kathmandu, but I do want to at least invoke Milton Singer's **When a Great Tradition Modernizes** (1972) because of its influence on several decades of ethnomusicology in South Asia. Kathmandu appears instead to have skipped modernity entirely, moving directly from pre-modern to post-modern ways of life; however, this argument needs more attention than I can give it here.

of the language people use to describe how sound affects them. The epigraphs to the following sections come from the liner notes of a recent cassette, *Echo's* (n.d.), a collection of rock songs by various bands. Although all of the songs are in the Nepali language, the liner notes include a quote in English about music from each band.

### "Music is the feelings of deep inside" (The Wind)

Deep inside what? Where do these feelings reside? Before getting to these questions, I need to start with the first word of the sentence above. What do people mean by the various terms they use to describe soundful activity? The most direct translation of what in the English language is called "music" is the Nepali term, *myujik*—which is usually transliterated back to English simply as "music." Yet is *myujik* the same thing as music?<sup>2</sup> I need to preface this answer with a brief note about linguistic practices in the Kathmandu valley.

The most pervasive language heard in the valley is Nepali. It functions as English does in many urban areas of the United States: it is the primary language for education, government, business, and media. Yet English, Hindi, and the Tibeto-Burman language of Newari are also common. Tourists use English throughout much of urban Asia, and thus have provided the impetus for many Nepalis active in the tourism trade to learn English; it is now also a required language in many schools. Hindi has been prevalent as well, partly because many Indians conduct business in Kathmandu and some live there more or less permanently, but also because many films and

television programs come from India. Newars often speak Newari among themselves. In much of the Kathmandu valley, this generally means that the younger children in a family, because they use Nepali for most of the day at school, often speak Nepali, while older family members (especially women) tend to use Newari more exclusively. Some people in Kathmandu also learn other foreign languages, such as French, German, Russian, Spanish, Italian, and Japanese, while other languages of Nepal, such as Gurung, Tamang, Sherpa, and Tibetan, are also common in some places.

Both Devanagari and Roman scripts are common in the Kathmandu valley. Walking down a street in Kathmandu, you would see signs for stores in both Nepali and English, each in their respective scripts. Newars sometimes use the Newari alphabet—*nepal lipi*, ("Nepal script")<sup>3</sup>—but primarily in a decorative way: on signs, on the covers and title pages of books, and on cassette covers, handwritten *nepal lipi* sometimes mixes with Devanagari and Roman typefaces.<sup>4</sup> Rarely do Nepalis transliterate Nepali or Newari-language texts into Roman script, although the covers of "rock," "pop," "sentimental," "reggae," and "heavy metal" albums are a notable exception. Unlike recordings of folk songs, *bhajans*, or *adhunik git*, most "pop rock" cassettes (the generic term for all of the styles above) often contain a mixture of Nepali (in Devanagari script), Romanized Nepali, and English, or just Romanized Nepali and English. Perhaps envisioning a day when Nepali artists might become more integrated into the international music scene, cassette producers manufacture a product that could move more easily into the world market.

Indeed, I can trace the use of the term, "music," back to a limited trade in foreign cassettes in the 1970s, although scattered knowledge of the word certainly existed much earlier. It is quite easy to imagine that singers and instrumentalists travelling to and from the courts of British India in the nineteenth century would

<sup>2</sup> When English terms are used in a Nepali context but written in the Roman script, as is common in Nepali-language books, they are usually written as they exist in the English language rather than transliterated back from the Devanagari. Yet, many people are unfamiliar with the English-language etymology of words that are common in the Nepali language, and the writing habits of those who can write reflect this. Such English-language words will simply be written as if they are Nepali words. Some people though, try to write words that they know to be English words in the Roman script, and often transliterate them directly back from their Devanagari spellings. For example, "music" becomes "*myujik*," and "research" becomes "*risarch*." A few common English terms literally have become Nepali words. One day my friend Suresh's eight-year-old nephew, who knew a little English, insisted that *ti bhi* ("TV") and *tebal* ("table") were Nepali words, and wanted to know how to say them in English. Essentially, while many English words are familiar to speakers of Nepali and Newari, *myujik* does not refer to an object in the same way that a word like *tebal* does, and the abstract dimensions of its object must be investigated.

<sup>3</sup> The Newari language is likewise known in Nepali as *nepāl bhāṣā*; this use derives from the fact that prior to the nineteenth century, "Nepal" seems to have meant only the kingdoms of the Kathmandu Valley. This meaning for the term is still current in some areas of the country.

<sup>4</sup> The use of *nepal lipi* works as a visual cue for traditional Newar *साम्स्कृति* (culture). While the alphabet itself maps directly onto the Devanagari alphabet (including forms for the retroflex dental sounds even though these sounds are not used in the spoken language), the letter shapes are quite distinct. Yet no typeface exists for the letters and most Newars write Newari-language texts in the Devanagari script. Thus, when it does appear, it is as an indexical reminder of old Newari-language religious and literary texts themselves, for these are the most common documents written in this script.

have picked up the word; however, my etymology goes no further than this fleeting vision. In the early 1980s, a private recording company, Myujik Nepal (or Music Nepal), began producing cassettes, and it is clear from their repertoire that *myujik* encompasses a variety of song and music genres. Although Music Nepal has not produced any pop rock cassettes, the everyday use of the word "music" clearly includes this amalgam of genres. But *myujik*, like "music," can also refer more explicitly to the music, rather than the lyrics, of a song. This is most obvious in the liner notes of cassettes—especially cassettes that are collections of the songs of various



Rita Shakya, Sitarist

bands—where separate names are cited for lyrics, music, and "vocal." Bhusan Maharjan, an eleven-year-old neighbor of mine in the summer of 1994, also used the term in a similar way. When he was interviewed for me by his sister Sarmila, in 1995, he first had trouble explaining musical affect. His basic theory of the importance of songs and music was echoed throughout my research: when you listen to them, they provide you with *ananda*—pleasure or comfort. Yet when his sister asked him how, he responded, "*tyasako myujikle gardda*—[the song]'s music is doing [it].

Myujik became an important word the first time that I sat down with Sarmila Maharjan to talk about doing interviews. I had written up some sample questions using the Nepali words "git" and "sangit." These words seemed to refer, respectively, to song and instrumental music. Yet I had some difficulty explaining that the interviews would ideally be about all kinds of listening habits and musical tastes until she realized I meant her to talk to people about myujik. Her use of the term helped me believe that what I understood by "music" was more or less the same as what many Nepalis meant by "music."

However, in her transcriptions of the interviews she did in Nepali and Newari, she titled each notebook, "Research of music and song." Here, music and song seem to be the translations of *sangit* and *git* respectively. So *myujik* now means at least three things. It delineates an expressive form in which the most distinctive feature is the cultural (but not necessarily Nepali) patterning of sound. It highlights the sonic and non-verbalized characteristics of a song, and it translates the Nepali word *sangit*. If my assumption above holds, any genre that lacks a vocal line would be considered *sangit*, while anything with a vocal line would be simply a *git*, or song. But it doesn't, mainly because instrumental versions of songs are still considered simply songs. Typically, *sangit* is used in the designation, *rastriyasangit*, which translates quite easily into the English "classical music," and refers to the practice of using stylized *rags* (melodic frameworks) and *tals* (metric cycles).<sup>5</sup> Kishor Gurung in his writing also refers to *lok sangit* and *adhunik sangit*—folk music and modern music (1992)—but I have not heard these terms used in everyday conversation. In academic discourse, *sangit* is the Nepali translation of the English word, "music," and separates musical practices from other artistic practices like dance, art,

<sup>5</sup> Most performances of *rastriya sangit* in the Kathmandu Valley are of voice, sitar, or sarod (doing the melodic work) accompanied by *tabla* (giving voice to the metric structure).

and literature. Its use outside of these situations is uncommon in part because almost all of the standard repertoire, for both listeners and musicians, is song.

The Newari word for *git*, or song, is *mye*. *Git gaunu*, sing a song, is the usual context in which the Nepali verb, *gaunu*, is used. The Newari term used to translate *gaunu* is *hale*. While *mye hale* obviously means "sing a song," other kinds of animate noises *hale* also. Aside from *mye*, onomatopoeic noises usually are prefixed to *hale*: animals especially don't *hale* without *halegu* some kind of sound. "*Chwiñ chwiñ hala*"—something, probably a bird or a mouse, squeaked. People can simply *hale*, though, when they're trying to get someone's attention; the noise that they make is implicit in their speech. While it might be more accurate to say, then, that Newars shout their songs, my intention here is simply to describe the range of meanings that a word itself can have rather than gloss it once and for all with an English word.

Musical instruments are called, in both Nepali and Newari, *baja*<sup>6</sup> The word itself comes from a Sanskrit word for "speak," and is etymologically related to the verb, *bajnu*, which means "to sound." *Kati bajyo?*—what time is it?—literally asks, "how many [bells] sounded?" From *bajnu* comes a causative verb form, *bajaunu*: the way to play an instrument is to make it sound, *baja bajaunu*. Aside from musical instruments, radios can be *bajaeko*, as can people. The latter implies beating someone, even to death, and both *bajnu* and *bajaunu* also suggest striking (so as to make a sound). The Newari word is, on the other hand, *thaye*, which means more like "to make an impression," or even "to become stuck [to something]." This word is used with instruments that are played only by touch—drums, keyboards, and string instruments. Wind instruments like the *pwana* or the *mahali* are blown, and the verb for this is *puye*.

*Awaj*, an encompassing term for "sound" or "voice" common in both Nepali and Newari, concludes this brief glossary of connotations. From an Urdu word for voice, *awaj* is distinct from two other Nepali words: *swar* is a human voice, while *sur* refers to the tone of an instrument. Rarely does *awaj* have any use in discussions of music though. One day I took my former Newar landlord to be fitted for a hearing aid, and the doctor tested it by standing at various spots around the room, holding his hand over his mouth, and asking, "*Awaj du?*"—is there a sound? This is more the sort of context in which I heard the word, but a theory of the relations between sound and emotion in Nepali and

Newari discourse also must consider the distinction between music and noise.

### "Music is the cosmetic to cover up the ugliness of this world" (The Plus)

My days in Kathmandu seemed loud. While nights were often quiet—except for the barking of dogs—days were filled with the noises of traffic, chickens, political demonstrations, radios, commerce, souvenir hawkers, gossip, stereos, and worship. For some people, music really is something of a cosmetic, drowning out the extraneous noises of the city.<sup>7</sup> Bus drivers crank up cassettes as they drive, tea stall owners turn up the radio as diesel trucks rumble past, restaurants keep background music rolling as cars honk through the tangled streets outside. But for many more people music fills the silent gaps within the day, calming the *man*—the heart or the mind—and relaxing the body. Both mind and body must come into question in talk about emotion in music, but for the moment, I want to imagine a day in the life of a Nepali. What is noise, and how does silence sound to a Nepali ear?

Noise is, in this context, unwanted sound. While some authors consider noise to be the category which subsumes all sounds—organized or jumbled—I am using it to represent specifically noisy sounds. When Jacques Attali wrote that "in noise can be read the codes of life, the relations among men" (1985: 6), he was prefacing an interpretation of the organizational strategies used to shape noise. I am adding his sentence here merely to suggest that in the distinction between the audibles of desire and disgust lies one code of life, an aesthetic groove that forces the retuning of the ear from place to place.

*Awaj*, the word I used above for "sound," already implies organized, and not necessarily unwanted, sound. I can hear the *awaj* of a radio station, a cricket, or a truck in the distance, but when the speakers of the radio start to distort, when there are ten crickets chirping under my bed, or when the truck rumbles past the window, *awaj* becomes *halla*—a noise, commotion, or racket. Nepalis don't talk about *halla* as much as they use inflections of voice and onomatopoeic words to represent the noise they experience. Noises give headaches, drown out someone's words, and *distarb garchha* ("make a disturbance"—mainly used in the sense of something annoying or bothering one). What people hear as noise is usually continuous, not simply a punctuated sound. Reduplicative words signify this aspect of noise: *jhyau-jhyau* is the sound of someone

<sup>6</sup> Ballinger and Bajracharya give a relatively complete listing of Nepali musical instruments (1960) and their characteristics. While they remark upon the presence, also, of *baja* like the harmonium, saxophone, and violin (399), I would add gitar (electric and acoustic), dram (sets and machines), and ki bord to the list of instruments common in the Kathmandu Valley now.

<sup>7</sup> "Cosmetic" comes from the Greek word, *κοσμεω* meaning "arrange" as well as adorn (from the root word, *κοσμος*, which means not just the universe, but the ordered universe). Thus, one unlikely interpretation of the quote by The Plus would be that music is a skillful arrangement or adornment creating order amidst the sometimes harsh soundscape of the Kathmandu Valley.

talking, usually complaining, on and on; *dhyang-dhyang* is a repetitive striking, like someone hammering on the roof; *khalabala* is the noise of a crowd demonstrating on the streets; *chichyai* is a shriek that pierces the night

Many words are doubled in both Nepali and Newari language sentences for emphasis. In Nepali: "*tyo kitab sano sano chha*": that book is [really] small. "*Mero gilās choddai choddina*": I'm [definitely] not giving up my glass.<sup>8</sup> Nepali-language adjectives and adverbs reduplicate relatively directly, while people use idiomatic verb forms to add on to the grammatically essential verb.<sup>9</sup> Onomatopoeic reduplication, on the other hand, by mimicking the repeating structure or ongoing nature of different sounds, recreates in talk the actual experience of those sounds. Not all of these reduplications are for noise of course, and strikingly, not all onomatopoeia in Nepal specifically mimic sound. Sometimes onomatopoeic reduplications are intersense modalities (Merriam 1964), iconic sound representations crossing over into the worlds of sight and sensation. In a Nepali schoolbook, for example, a description of domestic animals includes lambs "*milijuli uphrinchha*," leaping about together: while *milijuli* stems from *milnu* (to be in agreement), it also speaks of doing something together. A folk song includes a *jhanjhan istakot*, a flashy vest: the onomatopoeia is perhaps in the repeating pattern of the

<sup>8</sup> The use of "ai" as a substitute ending for many Nepali words usually serves to draw attention to the word, yet sometimes to qualify it. For example, saying "*tyo matrai?*" rather than just "*tyo matra?*" would express surprise at how little food you had received, and might be translated as "That's all?!" instead of "Only that?" But *ramro* means indisputably "good," while *ramrai* means more like "not bad." Or if I asked someone how they were, the response would rarely be "*sañcho chha*," which might suggest perfect health, and would instead be "*sañchai chha*," meaning relatively healthy. The -ai ending is common in both written and spoken Nepali, although it sounds more prominent in spoken Nepali because people also often raise its pitch, lengthen it, and emphasize it. Newari speakers meanwhile infix "-he-" into a word, often with the aspiration dropped. For example, a qualification of *bhañla*, ("good") is *bhañhela*, which in everyday talk becomes *bhañela*.

<sup>9</sup> With nouns, a common usage in Nepali and Newari is to reduplicate one word to refer to a group of objects similar to or accompanying that object. In Nepali, for example, *chiya-siya* means tea and probably biscuits or maybe a fried egg, *fanta-santa* refers to Fanta and other cold drinks. In Newari, reduplicated words also switch middle "-a-" sounds to "-i-" sounds and vice versa: *khicha-khacha* implies a pack of assorted dogs, *macha-micha* means a group of children, and *vija-sija* or *pyaspart-pispart* suggests travelling documents ("visa, etc.," or "passport, etc.").

cloth or in the dazzling effect of the weave.<sup>10</sup> Something that is ticklish *kutkuti lagchha*, an itch *chilchili garchha*, a throbbing pain *dhukdhuk garchha*. Many of these intersense modalities refer to visual and tactile sensations that are characteristically noisy in their insistent repetitions.

People mark different kinds of noise not only with standard onomatopoeic expressions, but also with improvised words. Both Nepali and Newari are extremely accommodating in that the words for do (or make), *garnu* (Np.) and *yaye* (Nw.), can combine with other existing or invented words to create reusable or disposable verb forms.<sup>11</sup> In part, this may be because there are no strongly unified linguistic practices called Nepali or Newari, and different speakers have different capacities to borrow words from Hindi, Urdu, and other languages. When I was learning the Newari language with Subarna Man Tuladhar, he frequently substituted non-Newari words, plus *yaye*, for Newari words that I didn't know or that weren't common. "*Anusandhan yaye*" means to do research (*anusandhan* being a Hindi or Nepali word), and we discussed "*riyaj yaye*," practicing an instrument (*riyaj* being an Urdu word), another day. Likewise, if I'm telling a story in Nepali about how an avalanche went right past my house, I might say a sound that *dhwang-dhwang garyo* woke me up in the middle of the night. Rather than use a metaphor, as I might in English (such as "the avalanche thundered down the mountainside"), I would tend to preserve the sound that I remember the avalanche making in my recounting of the event.

So noise often remains noise in speech. It is an unerasable mark, an untranslated voice. Silence, however, rarely leaves such an imprint. One common word that implies silence is *santi* (*santa* is the nominal form), yet this word also means peaceful or tranquil. Many prosperous suburban Nepalis, like British householders, name their homes, and both *santi ghar* (house) and *santi mahal* (palace) are common monikers etched onto the concrete walls or wrought into the iron

<sup>10</sup> The daughter of my singing teacher one day saw the vest that he had sewn for me and invented a pun on how Nepalis wore *istakots* while foreigners wore *westakots* ("Westcoats" or "waistcoats"). Many of my Nepali friends have a wonderful penchant for word play, and an ability to slide back and forth across different languages (on one memorable occasion, from Newari to Spanish to Nepali to English to German back to Nepali again), disrupting intent for the pleasure of unusual interpretations, that is essential to humor. At the same time, these examples suggest that linguistic practices are quite flexible and open to the invention of new words, including improvised onomatopoeia.

<sup>11</sup> Many turns of phrases are indeed improvisatory, while others draw on a conventional repertoire of sound representations. The important point here is that both kinds of imitation sound improvisatory because they are iconic and indexical rather than metaphoric.

gates. Translating these names as "silent house" or "silent palace" sounds ludicrous, even though part of the charm of these homes is their distance from the noise of the city. So unlike silence, which refers explicitly to the lack of noise, *santa* is inseparable from the sentiments that silence brings. *Maunata*, from the Hindi, and the common Nepali word *chup* (always used idiomatically with the verb *lagnu*, and never used to mean silence itself) both refer more typically to the human voice: if I want a child to be quiet, I will say, "*chup laga*."

*Santa* is one kind of silence, the silence of parks, forests, mountains, and suburban retreats. For people who don't have everyday access to such places, silence merely creates boredom. Friends who got sick and had to stay home for a few days became restless. For them, *dikka lagyo* (a state of being bored came over them) and their days *bor bhayo* (became boring). Although *bor* is a word borrowed from English, it is used as if it were a direct translation of *dikka*, and those who are afflicted by either of these sicknesses get restless and become upset as well. Like *myujik*, which doesn't necessarily translate as "music," *bor* signifies the frustration of not being able to do something, or the hurt of not wanting to participate in what other people are doing. When Nepalis talk about how they listen to music in their free time, in the holes in their day, they are responding to the pleasureless silence of being or feeling alone with nothing to do.

So while people use songs to cover up both unavoidable noise and unwanted silence, maybe there's a deeper reading of the epigraph that began this section. Maybe music is a cosmetic of the heart, a foundation for the mind. When Nepalis start to talk about the internally felt pleasures of song, it is easy to assume that they experience music the same way anyone else does. But what does the architecture of the soul look like in Nepal? Where do emotion, reason, and memory reside inside the body, and how does this interior space sound?

### "The music is created by heart & developed by mind" (Littluns)

The seat of emotional thinking in the Nepali body is the *man*, the heart-mind (cf. Jacobson 1992, March 1992). This heart-mind is where most expressions of empathy and desire reside. It is not located in the anatomically correct spot for the heart itself; when asked where it lies, Nepalis may point further up and in the middle of the chest. The *man* can hurt (*dukhchha*, a verb used just as much for feelingful pain as for physical pain). It can be broken, *bigrinchha*, but this means merely that I'm in a bad mood or depressed, not on the verge of suicide. *Man* also *marchha*, dies, when I no longer care about something or when I become discouraged. And I am trying to steal (*chornu*) someone's *man* when I ask too many personal questions.

Likewise, in the Newari language, the *nuga* lives in the center of the body and both produces and receives feelingful thoughts. Sometimes the *nuga* is uncomfortable, *machhiñ*, suggesting that you are dejected. It can also weep or mourn (*khwala*) by itself, and other things can cause it pain (*nugalay syakala*)<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, it will blossom, *hwala*, when you are kind and sympathetic. Someone who is habitually generous has a slightly sweet heart, *nuga chacha dhala*. All of these uses make it sound like the English "heart," but it also does mindful things; for example, if you need to focus on doing something, *nuga chita*, tie it up so that it doesn't wander. Furthermore, the *nuga* is the heart-mind of memory, the place where remembering is wrapped up with feeling to keep you from forgetting. A person who has *nuga* is a person with a good memory, while someone who lost their memory, *nuga kwakhan yenkumha man*, literally had their heart-mind snatched away by a crow.

Both the *man* and the *nuga* argue against a predilection for thinking of feeling as being associated with the heart, or for feeling thought to be the provenance of the mind. A dualistic Cartesian imagination that opposes mind to body (represented in its most feelingful organ, the heart) immediately fails to grasp the unity of the body in the language of experience in Nepal. This is not to suggest that Nepalis do not make specific references to what goes on inside their heads or what strikes them inside their hearts.

Particularly heady stuff is expressed especially through the Nepali words *dimag* (brain or skull), *buddhi* (intellect), and *bichar* (thought). While *dimag* can refer to an idea, it more frequently suggests the character of someone's head. I might use the word to say that someone is crazy—*usko dimag kharab chha*, his brain is bad or wicked. More common is the use of *buddhi*—intellect, thinking ability, or common sense. In a recent letter I had mentioned to a friend that after smoking too much over the summer, a friend had helped me quit, and in her reply she said in part, "I also wasn't smart [literally, my *buddhi* also isn't]. Because cigarette smoking made me sick, two months have passed in which I haven't had a cigarette. So maybe you are giving me *buddhi*." Lastly, *bichar* is a common word used to get someone to express a thought or opinion. If I asked someone why he never heard songs he liked on the radio, he might very well respond, "*Thaha chhaina malai*"—I don't know (literally, knowledge is not [had]

<sup>12</sup> When the action of a Newari sentence is directed toward an object, the suffix -ay marks the object as the recipient of the action. As is common with many nouns, *nuga* is a shortened pronunciation of the archaic form *nugala*; when such nouns are suffixed, the "-a" sound lengthens to "-al-" before taking the suffix. "*Syakala*" is a causative form of "*syaye*," which means merely to be in pain.



by me). Then I would have to add, in your *bichar*, your thinking, your opinion, why don't you hear such songs?

Two words that refer more specifically to the heart are *aredil* and *mutu*. Unlike *man* or *nuga*, both of which are practical everyday terms, *dil* and *mutu* are more expressly poetic words. These images of the heart are common in songs about love, and they suggest to Nepali and Newari speakers a sentimental alignment of the heart. *Dil* is an Urdu word common in Hindi-language film songs (which are popular in urban Nepal as well), and this contextual coding may explain why *dil* is often used poetically. Like *man*, it can also be translated as "mind," but in Nepali contexts *dil* usually loves and desires rather than reasons and analyzes. *Mutu* is a Nepali word for heart that is used in medical contexts, but which I have heard most often in songs.<sup>13</sup>

Example 1: Babin Pradan, "*Jadaichhu ma*," from 1993:

*jadaichhu ma timilai chhoda*  
(I am going, leaving you behind);  
*samjhana chha timro yo mero mutuma*.  
(your memory is in this heart of mine);  
*bolauchaichhu ma chhayañlai chhoda*  
(I am crying out, leaving illusion behind);  
*samjhana chha timro yo mero mutuma*  
(your memory is in this heart of mine).

My argument here has not been that the inner space of the self in Nepal is radically different from other selves elsewhere; the existence of these thinking and feeling zones inside each of us makes it in fact possible to talk about emotion instead of some specifically Nepali term for which no English word exists. But I emphasize that the architecture of experience is arranged somewhat differently in both the Nepali and Newari languages. Although both hearts and minds have their own domains, there exists further a naturally tender and inevitably private *man* or *nuga* in the center of the body, attached to neither the heart nor the mind.<sup>14</sup> These are the terms which don't translate, and they collect, organize, and represent everyday experience both feelingfully and thoughtfully, making apparent that the anatomy of emotion in Nepal elides the difference between empiricism and rationalism, between the world of the senses and the world of self-evident truths, between affect and logic. Their existence is an ongoing argument against the Cartesian truths that used to

<sup>13</sup> Occasionally I heard Newars deliberately mishear *muTu* as *mhutu*. Newari for "mouth." (As I remarked earlier, there are no retroflex consonants in Newari.) This misinterpretation once led to a joke about the sentiment of love being only in the mouth of the beholder.

<sup>14</sup> "Soul" is also not a useful translation, for the religious implications of a soul make *atma* the more appropriate match for it.

compel much of the philosophical and commonsensical discourse on the meaning of mind and body on this side of the planet.

### "The sound which touches your heart is music" (Who Doz)

The *man* is a palpable presence inside the body that grammatically acts and responds on its own. Sounds (and other phenomena) touch the *man* quite literally in everyday expressions through the verbs *lagnu* and *parnu* (Jacobson 1992; Henderson 1996: 461). *Lagnu* means literally, to adhere, and aside from things that adhere, like leeches or evil spirits, feelings and bodily states also stick to you. Love, fear, happiness, worry, hunger, thirst, sickness, and exhaustion all *lagchha*. You don't feel them: they put themselves upon you. Instead of feeling happy (*khusi*), to you *khusi lagchha*. The subject of the English version must be converted to a direct object in Nepali using the suffix, *-lai*. I, *ma*, feel thirsty, but *malai thirka lagyo*. This makes feelings seem to originate outside yourself, depending on what you mean by "yourself." Even though many feelings, such as lassitude or hunger, derive from the perception of internal physical states, it is still clear that such feelings have at least a grammatical agency of their own. This linguistic empiricism—in which the perceiving subject disappears and allows the perceived object to appear on its own—makes feelings into more obviously social phenomena, things with which everyone can empathize. The question of whether your feeling of hunger is identical with someone else's feeling of hunger becomes irrelevant, for hunger is the single producer of infinitely differentiated experiences of it.

Just as feelings *lagchha*, the *man* also adheres to things in the sense of "to want." If I wanted to say that, "Ma, I want to watch television," I would again have to become the indirect object of my sentence: *malai ti bhi herna man lagchha*. This is almost like saying your heart-mind is fixated on the watching of television, but the meaning is not quite this emphatic. *Man* is also combined with the verb *parnu* to mean "like." Meaning literally, "to fall" (which can also be interpreted as "to happen"), *parnu* is what rain, hail, dew, frost, amoebas, and roundworms do; but if I like to listen to folk songs, *malai lok git man parchha*. Although this is easy to translate idiomatically, it more explicitly seems to mean that my heart falls toward, or is inclined toward folk song. Again, I don't like *lok git* directly. However, I can use the causative form of *parnu* to make more explicit my own cultivation of taste: *ma lok git man parauñchhu* (literally, I have caused my heart-mind to fall [towards] folk song).

In the Newari language, unlike in Nepali, there is a distinction between sensation and sentiment marked respectively, by the verbs, *chaye* and *taye*. While both would be translated as "to feel," *chaye* is for sensations like hunger, cold, thirst, and pain, and *taye* is for



sentiments like happiness, delight, and sadness. However, the distinction is a little blurry, for it is possible to feel sensations deeply as well, from within (*duneu chaye*) or from the heart-mind (*nugalau chaye*).<sup>15</sup> Both *chaye* and *taye* are active verbs: the one doing the perceiving remains the grammatical subject of the sentence.

However, as in the Nepali language, expressions of affinity in Newari do commonly make the one who likes to do something into the grammatical object of a sentence. Unlike the man, the *nuga* usually does not take part in these expressions. Newars say they like or dislike something using stative forms of the verb, *yeye*. If I like to listen (*nyene*) to songs (*mye*), I say, "*jita' mye nyene ya*," I f I don't, I say, "*jita' mye nyene maya*." Here, just as in the Nepali language, I (*ji*) became the indirect object (*jita*) of my sentences. Neither in Nepali or Newari is the most common verb for liking itself grammatically passive, yet in both languages the person who likes becomes the passive recipient of a state of affinity.

Statements of desire in Newari also leave the person who wants off to the side of the wanting itself. Wanting or not wanting to do something is expressed by using the stative pair, *nhya* and *mha*. The meaning of these two words is more like suggesting that I'm either willing or not willing to do something. *Waya mye nyene nhya*—his song listening (*mye nyene*) [is] pleasurable to him (*waya*), or he is interested in listening to some songs. On the other hand, it is possible to express desire actively by using the phrase, *chway chway dhaye*, "up-up saying." Newars attach this to verbs to show an eagerness to do something.

Returning to the "sound that touches the heart," idioms of affinity in the Nepali language make it seem that music literally does touch the heart by sticking (*lagnu*) or descending (*parnu*) onto the heart-mind (*man*). This affective agency that songs and emotions appear to have is strengthened by the grammatical reframing of the individual as the object and affect as subject. *Myujik* enters into the heart-mind as an interloper into consciousness; it speaks to and simultaneously from within the heart-mind. "The powers of the work of affecting presence are the powers of being subject. And the work is a subject because it exists in that estate of intending something which is a capability alone of a sentient being" (Armstrong 1981: 124). In a more specific grammatical sense, Nepalis recognize affect as a presence originating externally that resounds internally, in the body's center.

<sup>15</sup> Just as action directed toward an object marks the receiving object with the suffix -ay, action directed outward from an object marks the object with a nasalization of the final vowel sound, or with the suffixed nasalization, -au. So these two phrases would be translated literally as "feel from within" or "feel from the heart-mind."

But partly because of ongoing translations—between one language or experience or idea and another—music's subjectivity is never complete. Especially when one's world shifts back and forth between the Nepali and Newari languages, the feelings prompted by music can be both subject and object. Remembering that, unlike in Nepali, the Newari words for "to feel", *chaye* (for sensation) and *taye* (for sentiment) do not make the feeling itself into the subject of a sentence, I would suggest that emotion is never located fully in social phenomena or entirely in personal experience. The grammatical complexities of feeling are reflections, but also encoders of the social complexities of musical meaning. One further bit of evidence for the agency of emotion, which works both outside and inside the person experiencing emotion, is found in memory.

### "Music is the Medium for refreshing & erasing of memories" (Sparsha)

Music resounds harmoniously, if sporadically, in memory. While memories are often dormant, events in the world will sometimes send them up to the surface of experience, where they resonate strongly with the sensations and sentiments surrounding both the present and the past. Rather than express the act of remembering, Nepalis and Newars often speak of memories, *yad*. Climbing a hill to a holy place, a friend of mine remembered hiking up to the temple of *Mankamana*<sup>16</sup> with me in 1995, and wrote in a letter, "Walking along in that place, in every step, *tapaiñko yad ayo*"—your memory came [to me]. Affective memories come to you and wrap themselves up in the fabric of living, reminding you also of things that may yet come to pass. Rarely do people remark on their memories unless they also hold potential for the future.

People also sit around remembering things, thinking about people and places far away, doing *yad* rather than having memories come to them. But here too it is precisely the sociability of a memory that causes it to reappear in the quiet spaces of daily living. *Samjhana*, a more specifically Nepali word for memory, like *yad* is often plural, a collection of memories rather than a single image of the past. Talking about a relationship with somebody you might say, "*samjhana dherai chhan*"—there are many memories.<sup>17</sup> Memory becomes in such expressions a malleable set of overlapping mental representations. And although you can remember—*samjhanchha*—just like you can do *yad*, people *samjhanchha* more often when they are trying to

<sup>16</sup> The name of this temple comes from why people visit: *kamana* means "wish," so people travel to this hilltop temple of Bhagavati near Gorkha to pray for the fulfillment of their man's desire. In particular, women who have not had a child, or who have not yet had a son, go here to worship.

<sup>17</sup> Or "remembrances," as several Nepali friends translate this idiomatic expression when writing in English.

find specific things in their memories, ones that they have momentarily forgotten. Memory, like affect, is a subjective presence that haunts everyday objects and activities. Nepalis seem to say that they are most often reminded of things rather than actively remembering them.

Likewise, song takes its affective power from the words that evoke a palette of memories—fragments of life that add to and rearrange themselves every time they are summoned out of the depths of experience. But even as memories design themselves anew, they also seem to be static imprints of the past.

Example 2: Dilip Kumar Kapali, "*Sunaun bhane*":

*Sunaun bhane kaslai sunaun*  
(If I tell, to whom will I tell);  
*nasunaun bhane git*  
(If I don't tell [this] song);  
*jati samjheñ uti dukhchha*  
(As much as I remember, that much it hurts);  
*jivan bhariko prit*  
(the love of [my] full life).

Here the poet remembers isolated moments connected to specific times and places; in the chronological and geographical ordering of the mind, memories do seem to be discrete objects. Yet the patterns established between them change, and each remembrance brings a new pattern of memories. Thus while the words of a singer at first became the memories of a listener, the lines of a song continue to repeat over top of each other and produce new meanings the next day or the next year.

Explicit in this song too, is the need to tell, the need to speak of those memories even if they are never made concrete. The verb *sunaunu*, means "to make heard." It is the causative verb form of *sunnu*, meaning "to listen to." Here, the singer invokes his own version of my argument throughout this article by wondering aloud how to express his experiences, his memories, his pains. Language and grammar never represent reality precisely, but call to mind different experiences of reality. The one who *sunaunchha* must first find a sympathetic ear, and the one who *sunchha* brings in his own memories and experiences in order to make sense of what he hears. While music, far from being a simple reproduction of cultural truths or social values, must be continually heard to become continually more meaningful, we must also give lasting attention to language to make it speak properly.

The Nepali and Newari languages still open new worlds of social experience for me. Yet in the way that we sometimes take language to be a clear window overlooking reality and start to impose ethnographic order upon our research, we often risk closing ourselves off from these new worlds. I'm not exactly an anarchist, and I'm not advocating that we throw order out the window. But when I read travel literature, the

sense of disorder that I find in descriptions of the Kathmandu Valley is something I want to keep, not something I hope to obliterate through the process of writing down objective reality. Language about music helps us to document the linked processes of change and revitalization that I outlined at the beginning of this article. We must however, take care to listen to the nuances of language use as we sort through the disorderly mess of our fieldnotes and research data. The order that we create should always be temporary and unfinished, as language itself—and the way people speak their worlds—is.

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*Ed note: This essay was originally titled: "Noises outside of my window, or, things that go bump in my fieldnotes."*

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