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Silence, Dissonance, Noise: Guided Listening in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*

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Abstract: Sinha's *Animal's People* is a novel premised on sound, through the transcription of Animal's voice and recorded interviews. Despite its centrality, sound is occluded by the novel's own textual form. This essay explores the metatextual relationship between sound and text, subaltern voice and novelistic form, by focusing on a particular moment of "guided listening" in Animal's narration. I propose that Animal's invitation to the reader, to hear beauty in the deathly silence of the Kampani's abandoned, toxic factory, compels a mode of counterintuitive listening. This moment presents an impasse, advocating experimentation and a reflexive encounter with the novel going forward. In doing so, Animal's "guided listening" reconfigures Animal's voice not as a matter to be recuperated by the reader and represented through the text, but rather as a voice whose agency lies in its capacity to reorganize the novel's associative economies and inspire the reader to do the same.

Keywords: subalternity, dissonance, silence, noise, performance studies, transcription

> And so I have been preparing myself to play with Cecil Taylor, to hear what is transmitted on frequencies outside and beneath the range of reading.
>
> Fred Moten, *In the Break*

Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* is a reimagining of the Bhopal industrial disaster, a deadly chemical leak in 1984 at the factory of the American

Chemical Corporation, Union Carbide, in Bhopal, India, by way of Sinha's fictive Kampani factory toxic leak. The chemical outflow in the novel spreads across the town of Khaufpur, polluting air, water, anatomy, and the body of its subaltern protagonist, Animal, whose resulting scoliosis forces him to walk on all fours. Following Animal directly into the source (as the reader, near the novel's beginning, is invited to do) thus feels counterintuitive. In a novel premised on humanitarian efforts to reckon with the leak's enduring bio-imperial effects, to enter the factory feels, simultaneously, to exit the novel's prevailing logics. And yet, if one follows Animal, navigating the "rusty pipes and metal stairs," one encounters a world of beauty (Sinha 30). The factory, Animal relays, is his "kingdom," and it is through his sovereign sense that the reader's own attention is directed to the scent of ajwain, the forest ("[so] beautiful, you forget it's poisoned" [31]), and the silence: "Listen, how quiet it's," Animal narrates, "[n]o bird song. No hoppers in the grass. No bee hum. Insects can't survive here. Wonderful poisons the Kampani made . . . after all these years . . . still doing their work" (29). It is a resonant statement, given the nature of the novel. *Animal's People* is a novel about both the colonial-imperial nexus of the Bhopal disaster and the shifting location of the subaltern amidst its ensuing liberal humanitarian interest and representation. Within this context, Animal's claiming of the factory and his invitation to the reader to revel in its sounds, presents a moment of discord that is rich in implication: a political dissonance suggestive of a particular kind of autonomy—an autonomy seemingly bound to its counter-intuitive aesthetics. In other words, in a narrative framework in which Animal's voice is contingent on layered metatextual mediations (the journalist's recorder, the interview tapes, the transcription of the interviews to the novel's text, and the Editor's Note), Animal seemingly divests from the ways these layers reify one another, and in turn, him: "Step through these holes," he directs, "and you're in a different world" (29).

The factory scene, in its conjuring of "wonderful poisons" and sonic dimensions, invokes and subverts the novel's dominant themes. *Animal's People* is, broadly, a novel about humanitarianism and music. While set in the fictitious town of Khaufpur, Sinha's novel offers a meditation on both the real, enduring effects of the 1984 Bhopal gas leak and the

humanitarian impetus it engenders. Animal, the novel's narrator, is a figure orphaned and disfigured from "that night" (1) and thus forced to view the world from below the "eye level" of humans ("lift my head I'm staring into someone's crotch" [2]), voices a subaltern experience explicitly entangled with the material violence of western imperialism. In many ways the Bhopal tragedy's poster child, Animal animates the subaltern's shifting significance amidst regimes of global development. Indeed, orbiting Animal are various, and at times conflicting, humanitarian interests. Elli is an American doctor who has set up a clinic in Khaufpur to aid victims, intent on correcting Animal's spine. Zafar, an activist who has come to Khaufpur to try the American company in court, offers Animal a job. The subject of Elli and Zafar's shared concern, and a confidante to each, Animal becomes a keen observer of their humanitarian relations and schisms: while Zafar organizes a boycott of Elli's clinic—a site, his sentiments imply, of neocolonial occupation—Elli expresses wariness of Zafar's overly-idealized activism. Encompassing these dynamics is the work of a foreign journalist who seeks to share Animal's story with the world, and whose recorded interview tapes with Animal comprise the novel's content. *Animal's People*, while narrated by Animal, is thus simultaneously about the various humanitarian perspectives and representational regimes seeking to "humanize" Animal amidst bio-imperialism, western corporate greed, and the global literary market.

Emerging through these representational endeavors, Animal's narrative voice thus animates the subaltern's theoretical dynamism and dilemmas. As Gayatri Spivak's theory of subaltern silence asserts, amidst the self-reiterating structures of western power, the subaltern is bound to a state of representation and re-representation—a state in which a person is denied self-assertion and akin to political muteness ("Can"). Whether in relation to the foreign journalist's tape recorder or Elli's and Zafar's philanthropy, Animal's voice emerges in contingent relation to others' efforts to facilitate it. More than an authentic or sovereign voice, Animal's voice is mediated by foreign or elite interests and thus presents, as Brigitte Rath argues, a hallucination. Simultaneously, as the shared subject of diverse, humanitarian concern, Animal animates the subaltern's shifting significance in a contemporary global order. Whereas

the original subaltern, Spivak asserts, animates how representational regimes prohibit access to the center, today's global climate presents "the new subaltern": "No longer cut off from the lines of access to the centre" but rather incorporated by the centre, the new subaltern is a "source of trade-related intellectual property" (Spivak, "New" 326). Indeed, while the "authenticity" of Animal's voice may be obscured by its representational regimes, it is also hyper-valued across the novel's humanitarian concerns.

Importantly, for the purposes here, if Animal's narrative invokes relations between humanitarianism and subaltern studies, it also invokes musical relations. Situated at the interstices of differing humanitarian perspectives, Animal is also situated amidst their accompanying sounds. Whereas Elli plays classical piano, Somraj—a patriarch of the local community and father-like figure to Zafar—is a singer. These sounds serve as metaphors for, and aestheticizations of, the novel's political landscape. As Animal relays, Elli and Somraj's neighboring dwellings—Elli's home, just above her clinic, and Somraj's, the gathering place for Zafar's political organizing—are also musical spaces, competing for sonic space in Khaufur. From his perch in the frangipani tree, Animal listens as Elli practices classical piano and Somraj, his sitar—a sonic encounter that, he notes, "sounds at first like it's accompanying the piano, but soon the two musics move apart" (Sinha 132). This aesthetic relationship animates the conflicting, ideological differences of Zafar and Elli's humanitarian work. As these spheres eventually unite, however—as Elli and Zafar reconcile, Somraj and Elli enter into a relationship, and Zafar ceases the boycott—sonic harmonies emerge. As Somraj instructs, there is "a certain beauty in the clashing of our musics" (199). Somraj's advocation of harmonious listening (as he notes, "I don't distinguish. . . . I try to hear it all together, all at once" [216]) anticipates the novel's conclusion, as these once disparate factions unite to "all live together now in Pandit-ji's house" (365).

At its most dominant registers, therefore, Sinha's novel presents a structure of humanist harmony. *Animal's People* offers a meditation on the conflicts of humanitarianism, expressed through music, and a meditation on music, advocating notions of humanity. In this broader

framework, the factory scene resounds as a moment of political sonic dissonance. In a novel about music's sounding of humanitarian ethics, Animal's attention to silence departs from the novel's dominant exegetics, emphasizing gaps, pauses, and lacuna. In a novel about humanitarianism, Animal's language of "wonderful poisons" subverts the prevailing narrative of the Bhopal tragedy as a dehumanizing force whose victims are to be recuperated through humanitarian schemes. In the invitation to listen otherwise, Animal's lessons thus call reflexive attention to the novel's logics, and, importantly, how they bear on him. A character asserting himself as "Animal" despite humanitarian insistence otherwise (whether it be Zafar's insistence that he is "especially abled" or Elli's that he is "human") and producing noise and jangled speech often deemed rude or crass by other characters, Animal maintains a subtle, yet persistent, performative discord with the novel's prevailing humanitarian and musical context. In a novel resolutely seeking to harmonize and humanize, Animal's lessons in listening otherwise assert the value of taking this performative friction seriously. In other words, these early lessons in interpretation offer one avenue to read *Animal's People* through Animal's terms, attuned to the subtle ways he actively differentiates himself. Animal, the novel's guided listening suggests, is a character whose subaltern voice is not to be recuperated through traditional literary analysis but holds the capacity to reconfigure literary analysis itself.

I. Hearing Subaltern "Voice": Animal's Metatextual Negotiations

Subaltern representation is a robustly theorized aspect of *Animal's People*: it undergirds depictions of human rights (Moore), literary humanitarianism (Rickle), and abjection and the grotesque (Holoch) and manifests textually in Zafar and Elli's efforts to represent Animal's interests. Yet these dynamics also manifest metatextually in the novel's transcribed form. As a novel emerging through the journalist's interviews, representational dynamics pervade *Animal's People's* content but also the materiality of the book itself. Animal's early invocation of the journalist—"[m]y story you wanted, said you'd put in a book" (Sinha 3)—reminds us that *Animal's People,* in its material form, is the journalist's own project of subaltern representation. These metatextual dynamics

permeate the novel. As the introductory Editor's Note details, the journalist's recorded tapes of Animal's testimony are patchy: "[S]ome tapes contain long sections in which there is no speech, only sounds . . . including music [and in one case] inexplicable laughter," and "[d]ifficult expressions" were replaced with "correct spelling for ease of comprehension." In this ostensibly neutral preface, distinctions between speech and sound are made, parameters of sonic inexplicability established, and reader publics conjured. The preface offers one early reminder that the novel is laden with regimes of interpretation and representation with which the reader must actively contend.

This metatextual dimension of *Animal's People,* or the fact of its transcription, bears on the configuring of subaltern voice. As Jonathan Sterne observes, across subaltern studies "voice" typically emerges not as a literal, sonic mode, but as a political and symbolic mode, conflated with "ideas of agency in political theory" (9). Indeed, Animal's argued hallucinatory lack of "voice" bespeaks how, in subaltern studies frames, voice's material composites (such as questions of timbre and pitch) are subsumed by discursive, symbolic significance. The fact of transcription in Sinha's novel troubles this tendency: as the Editor's Note affirms, the novel's process of transferring Animal's voice from sound to text is no neutral endeavor—it is, indeed, subject to the editor and transcriber's own capacity to listen—and yet bears a guise of neutrality within the novel. Animal's lessons in listening thus prove significant. If the scene, in its language of "kingdoms," voices subaltern agency, it also advances a notion of voice beyond metaphor—that is, a notion found not in the novel's symbolic but rather in its sonic, realm. What is to be made of Animal's invitation to "[l]isten, how quiet it's" as an invocation of sounds beyond the novel's textual scope (Sinha 29)? What does it mean that Animal declares his sovereignty and yet renders it in intimate relation to deathly silence—a sound evading both the conventions of sound and, further, the visual economies of text? What does it mean to listen to silence, let alone listen to a text, at all? If Animal's claiming of the factory as his kingdom asserts subaltern agency, then the sonic terms of Animal's pronouncement suggest his desire not solely for recognition but also for readerly methodological reflexivity. As the subject of a novel

produced through the recording, transcription, and editing of his own voice, Animal is himself cognizant of the transferences in media—from audible to visual, from sonic to textual, and from his voice to recorder, to transcription, and then to edited form—distancing him from his original vocalization of it. As Animal's demand, "give me the address of this editor-type!" (9) affirms, Animal is not only aware of how the novel's humanitarian scope fails his political voice, but also of how its transcribed form divests him of his material voice. "Remember," he cautions, "you do not hear me, the things I say by the time they reach you will have . . . changed" (21).

Animal's lesson in counterintuitive listening thus invites a wariness of the novel's formal premises as an edited, transcribed, and textual account. At stake in recognizing Animal's voice, Animal suggests, is recognizing the novel's textual eclipsing of sound. Animal's invocation of the inaudible, sonic realm outside the novel necessitates a reading not of Animal's muffled capacity for voice so much as his negotiation of it, as a character deeply cognizant of the process of transcription to which he is subjected. Animal's lessons in the factory, and ongoing metatextual references, compel consideration of what listening to Animal, in an effort to move closer to him, might do.

II. Counterintuitive Listening: Animal's Methodology

Animal's performativity therefore animates not only the general concerns of subaltern literary studies but also its amendments. As J. Maggio has argued, while Spivak's theory of subaltern silence has driven efforts to recuperate the subaltern's voice, it also necessitates consideration of how voice is initally recognized. As Maggio suggests, subaltern silence in Spivak's configuration is not the absence of literal voice but the interpreter's incapacity to hear across registers of difference. Theory, as an abstract and distanced mode of analysis, "cannot act as an elixir to the issues of the subaltern," and the question for interpreters should not be whether or not the subaltern can speak but whether they can be heard in the first place (Maggio 420). Maggio's nuancing of Spivak's work shifts the onus of interpretation from the subaltern's need to "perform a particular subjectivity" to receive the "right to have rights" (and hence reinforcing

"the agency of those who endeavor to speak for him or her") to the interpreter's capacity to self-consciously engage their own recognitional mode (Rickel 89). As Maggio proposes, the primary question, before anything else, should be: "[C]an the subaltern be heard at all?" (421).

Maggio's question invokes the utility of performance and sound studies to subaltern studies. As Dwight Conquergood asserts, while the reliability of textocentrism has been long privileged over the "riskier hermeneutics" of performance studies, "risk" is necessary for any study of negotiated power (149). As Conquergood argues, "[d]ominant epistemologies that link knowing with seeing are not attuned to meanings that are masked, camouflaged, indirect, embedded, or hidden in context"; indeed, "subordinate people do not have the privilege of explicitness, the luxury of transparency, the presumptive norm of clear and direct communication" (146). Experimenting with interpretive methods beyond those immediately compelled by a work's formal constraints thus offers, Conquergood argues, modes of engaging disempowered subjects beyond the medium's often disempowering terms of engagement. Orienting instead towards a text's lower, marginalized, or erased registers unsettles the ways in which certain modes of representation privilege particular forms of expression and displace others. The political significance of engaging a text's sidelined and indirect dimensions is elaborated elsewhere. For example, Tina Campt's study of Britain's state-sponsored photography archives (such as passport photos, ethnographic photos, and incarcerated photos) of Black diasporic subjects advocates for a reading of the images outside of power-laden and surveillant terms of engagement. Listening to images, or turning to the "highly generative space of the counterintuitive," Campt argues, offers a mode of engaging with subjects that are disempowered by the terms of visibility to which they are subjected (7). Listening to images, in other words, offers a mode of engaging subjects beyond the "sovereign gaze of the regimes that created them" (5). In dialogue, Conquergood's and Campt's work is instructive when contending with the power dynamics of *Animal's People*'s own sovereign gaze and its implications for its subject, Animal. If the Editor's Note affirms the bearings of the transcriber and editor's perspectives in shaping Animal's narrative, Animal's interpolation of the

reader as "Eyes" implies his awareness of such regimes. As Animal asserts early on: "You are reading my words, you are that person. I've no name for you so I will call you Eyes. My job is to talk, yours is to listen. So now listen" (14). It is a statement emphasizing the discrepancy between Animal's sonic output and the visual, textual regime into which it is being translated; a foregrounding of the unequal terms of engagement through which his testimony has been produced.

It is a moment, in other words, of reader-interpolation calling for awareness of the power-laden negotiations of mediation—of sound and site, listening and reading—accompanying Animal's testimony. Animal's interpolation of the reader as "Eyes" has been productively interpreted as signifying the "spectacular invisibility that defines third world poverty under recent globalization" (Mahlstedt 60). Yet, at the level of the literal senses, seeing and hearing are themselves laden with cultural hierarches. Whereas sight—many sound scholars suggest[1]—is often privileged as bearing greater proximity to objectivity, hearing typically connotes immersive experience. This elevation of cultural "prenotions about the senses (prejudices, really) to the level of theory" finds its genealogy in empire (Sterne 9). As Fred Moten asserts, through the era and process of Enlightenment thinking, "what becomes clear is a historical movement from the priority of sonic gesture to hegemony of visual (which is to say theoretical) formulation" (59). Alongside Animal's referencing of his reader's positionality, there is also, perhaps, a referencing of the very privileging of sight Animal presumes of them. In a novel abundant with sound, whose very source is sound, Animal's recurring interpolation to his reader—"Eyes, are you with me still?" (Sinha 31)—might imply the textual reader's inability to hear him. Alongside Animal's reflexive play with his readers, as they endeavor to perceive him amidst his "spectacular invisibility" (Mahlstedt 60), is perhaps Animal's play with the reader's expectation that they might find his voice without ever listening to it at all.

The factory scene is one example that emphasizes the multifaceted politics of listening in, and underlying, the novel. To consider the politics of listening invites a return to the novel's very beginning. In this early scene, we see Animal through the journalist's eyes: "the floor of earth, rough stone walls, dry dungcakes stacked near the hearth" (Sinha

4) and Animal, his "pawled legs like hanks of rope" (5). Yet, if the scene relays the visual economies of Animal's representation (the reader, by virtue of Animal's narration, sees what the journalist sees), the scene's sonic dimension disrupts its visual poverty narrative. The journalist, who does not speak Hindi, has paid for Animal's recorded story, to later be translated. As Animal listens to his voice "earning fifty rupees," he revels in this moment of sonic difference, extending a silence before proceeding to sing a "nasty tune" (6). Despite being subject to the journalist's gaze—one reading Animal's "heaving ribcage" and "twisted haunches" as affirmation of the "horrible stories [he had] come to hear" (5)—the scene's sonic dynamics bear a reversal. Animal, who relishes the journalist's confusion and then misguided appeasement, lays claim to the journalist's very inability to hear: "Jarnalis," he narrates, "I was trying not to show that I was laughing at you" (5).

The scene, and the journalist's inability to discern meaning from it, affirms listening as a multifaceted endeavor, consisting of content and tone. Moreover, it implies the rootedness of listening modes in historical-cultural vantages. As the journalist interprets Animal, visually merging him with tropes of "really savage things, the worst cases" (4), Animal observes the journalist's extractive mode of listening. On that first day of recording the journalist's hunger is palpable: "I could feel your hunger" (4) Animal narrates, "[y]ou were like all the others, come to suck . . . stories from us, so strangers in far off countries can marvel there's so much pain in the world" (5). If the journalist conflates Animal with a particular tragic narrative—one "that will sell many stories" (6)—Animal conflates the journalist with a particularly dispossessive mode of interpretation. As Dylan Robinson suggests, while listening comprises any "sonic encounter between . . . perceptual logics and . . . bodies" (2), colonialism's preferential mode of "hungry listening" is premised on "non-reciprocal modes of recognition" (7), relying on "[solely] palatable narratives of difference" and orienting the ear towards "identifying standardized features and types" in order to make sense of them (7). In hungry, or extractive, listening, "the listener orients teleologically toward progression and resolution, just as hunger drives toward satiation" (50). As this scene reveals, Animal not only is subject to western

poverty narratives but he understands and refuses their terms of satiation. As he notes: "You were hoping the gibberish sounds coming from my mouth were the horrible stories you'd come to hear," but "[n]o way was I going to tell those stories" (Sinha 5).

These early moments invite the reader to tend to sound but to do so discerningly. As Animal's merging of the journalist and the reader in a polyvalent "you" suggests, listening techniques driven by easy satiation invariably fail Animal's voice. Yet if this scene merely cautions against listening for "standardized features and types," the factory proves generative. Animal's elaboration of the factory's tranquil beauty, indeed, fulfills not readerly expectation but rather counterintuition. Animal's assertion of the factory's "wonderful poisons" imbues the humanitarian, tonal structures of the novel with atonality—it is an assertion that resonates because of its dissonance or "perceived wrongness of sound" (Heble 31). Animal's following refrain, "Eyes, are you with me still?" affirms his anticipation of such. It's a refrain both acknowledging the likelihood that the reader might well abandon him in this moment of discord and inviting them to linger.

To stay with Animal, and linger in his atonality, conjures methodologies in the realm of sound. Describing a lack of harmony among notes (the inverse of consonance), the interjection of a dissonant chord (typically, a major or minor second or seventh) into a harmonious arrangement is a technique of producing aesthetic tension. Yet, as Ajay Heble argues, rather than reflecting an innate quality of dissonance, these tensions reveal the diatonic assumptions of Western chord structure, which, when elevated to a form of "natural law," render dissonance Other. Diatonic music posits a "variety of relationships between tones and their respective meanings" (Heble 31) and is, hence, both a theory of music and shifting economy of signification and interpretation—"a system of organizing tones which was held for the longest time to the natural law of Western music" (32). Deviations from "the rigid rules of tonality were originally seen as grammatical errors and solecisms" (33). In a novel shaped of harmonious humanitarian tone, Heble's insights are instructive. Animal's dissonant appreciation of the factory—like the interjection of a minor second—resounds beyond its singularity, reflecting

the assumptions and tonal structures by which he is encompassed. As Dipesh Chakrabarty's assertion of the subaltern's scalar implications suggests, like a dissonant note in a major chord, the subaltern's singularity disrupts "our thought systems, with all their aspirations to grasp things in their totality" (36). The subaltern represents a rupturing of hegemonic theoretical forms and in that, "designates the limit of how we [academics] are trained to think" (Chakrabarty 36).

Animal's performance is also premised on specific techniques of dissonance. As Heble cautions, while dissonance is a sound associated with alterity, and in that, reflects the ways in which we are trained to think and hear, it is also the product of specific technical maneuvers. While dissonant music (notably jazz) is often relegated to an opaque evocation of feeling in western musicology—positioned as a kind of radical antithesis to musicological structure—it is rather, much like diatonic music, a learned, semiotic economy. The tendency to "think of jazz as a spontaneous expression of the performer's emotions clouds our awareness of the fact that jazz, like language, is a system of signs" (Heble 31). As Heble argues, via the improvisatory techniques of Charlie Parker and Louis Armstrong, what is often celebrated in western musicology as abstract alterity is, in fact, systems of learned techniques, dependant on the intimate labours of relational performance. Heble's wresting of dissonant jazz from the overly abstracted realm of celebrated difference, and resituating of it in specific technique, has implications for subaltern studies. As Victor Li cautions, idealizing the subaltern's rupturing of totality threatens to overlook the specific, performative work such idealization purportedly privileges. In fetishizing the subaltern's incompatibility with hegemonic forms, the subaltern, Li argues, becomes an empty sacrifice towards postcolonial theory's necroidealism—a symbolic wherein "the individual is sacrificed so that the larger concept of subaltern resistance can be affirmed" as akin to death (285).

Like Armstrong or Parker, Animal performs dissonance, but he does so through signifying strategies. Rather than an aesthetically innate quality, Animal's dissonance might suggest a methodologically rigorous mode of self-positioning in relation to the novel's broader soundscapes. Following Heble, we might read Animal's sonic performativity thus as,

more than "authentic" or "inauthentic" voice, a performative, improvisatory, and semiotic negotiation of the text he inhabits.

III. Silence, Dissonance, Noise: Animal's Performance

Animal's People is a musical novel. And, given that music, like humanitarianism, has a long history of performing "the human," music's role in connecting the novel's foreign and local humanitarian spheres is symbolically significant. As Animal observes, the once disparate sounds of Elli's piano and Somraj's sitar—initially, a cacophonic representation of political strife as Zafar boycotts Elli's clinic—are transformed into a "wondrous harmony" as these camps become politically united. These metaphorical relations are further solidified as Animal, a student of both Elli and Somraj's musical teachings, comes to observe their overlapping languages. While Elli plays "clusters of notes . . . and [Somraj plays] one note after another" (Sinha 173), they are nonetheless bound by a common language: "[I]n [Elli's] music re is called re, which is the same as in [his]" (173). "Re," in *Animal's People*, thus comes to signify a nexus of legibility, binding the novel's humanitarian and musical dimensions. Simultaneously, "re," as a "universal" note, invokes the novel's metatextual question of transcription. As a shared note, "re" links shared associations between text and sound, animating the logics by which the novel's prevailing soundscapes are translated to the novel's text itself. Unlike Animal, who (as he reminds the reader) cannot be heard, the humanist harmonies of Elli, Zafar, and Somraj are compatible with the novel's legible, and importantly, transcribable soundscapes.

As the novel's narrator, Animal's attention to "re" reveals the legible structures of consonance, harmony, and diatonic structure that render his dissonance, invariably, Other. Animal takes narrative efforts to elucidate this: when Elli asks Animal for a song recommendation on the piano, Animal, knowing only "film tunes" (not "proper music") and not wanting to "look ignorant," suggests a Raga Bhimpalashri, a song he learned from hearing "Somraj talk and teach" (94). Rather than voicing his own musical orientations, Animal conduits between Elli and Somraj's "elevated" musicology. Animal, the moment affirms, is not only cognizant of but also invested in articulating the sonic hierarchies

to which he is subjected. This dynamic re-emerges when he attempts to deploy Elli's and Somraj's musical theories himself. For Somraj, he informs Farouq and Zafar, the world "is made of music, [for] Elli . . . of promises," asking, "can these worlds fit together?" (248). To which Farouq responds: "don't get ideas above your station, which is low in life" (248). Yet Animal persists, insisting that "'the note of *dha* always stays the same distance from *sa*, isn't that a kind of promise?' Zafar groans, saying, 'Go away, Animal, I wish Elli had never said you were an intellectual'" (249; emphasis in original). Animal's encounters with musical theory, and the way he relays those encounters to his reader, affirm the dominant musical theories of *Animal's People* but also, importantly, Animal's silence within them. In these moments of music, speech, and sound, Animal's silence resounds, as Spivak's assertion that the "location of subalternity is being covered over by . . . elite theory" ("New" 234) resonates through the novel's very musical theories that offer symmetry, legibility, and standardized features and types to the reader.

Yet if Animal's narrative illuminates the silencing dimensions of the novel's musical landscape, it is also through this context that Animal's dissonance sounds forth. Described as "growling, rude and crude," and speaking in a mash-up of dialects, registers, and "gibberish," Animal's speech, deemed "foul-mouthed shit" or "crazy hissing [and] fishguts noises" (Sinha 365), evokes noise, which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as "sound . . . that is loud or unpleasant." It is a sound, hence, that troubles the bounds of explicability that the Editor imposes, as they contend with tapes that contain "no speech, only sounds" (Editor's Note). Yet, while the Editor was quick to discern between sound and speech, sound scholars are less insistent on such distinctions. As David Novak suggests, while noise is defined by "exclusion from the category of music . . . on the grounds of aesthetic value," it is still, notably, "a relational concept [only taking on] meaning by signifying something else" (126). Noise, Novack asserts, "must remain incommensurably different from that thing we do know and understand" (126). Indeed, "It is only because certain types of people are outside any representation of social harmony that their speech and other sounds associated with them

are considered to be noise" (Kahn 429). Noise sounds difference by refusing its terms of intelligibility. Noise, thus, arguably becomes a kind of speech, as it both reflects and refuses the aesthetic regimes to which it is subject and through which it is defined.

IV. Subaltern Resonances: Listening Otherwise

Animal's invitation to the reader, to hear silence in music and to hear speech in noise, testifies to the multilayered textuality of Sinha's novel. Yet it also testifies to Animal's strategic manipulation of the novel's textual limits. Animal's encouragement to recuperate the novel's sonic dimensions advocates a reading of his subalternity as not unrepresentable difference but rather as expressive difference—dissonant, silent, and noisy—that has the ability to inflect the novel.

Animal's performativity has broader implications for postcolonial literary studies. Resonances might be heard, for example, in relation to an earlier text of postcolonial interest and its subaltern figure: Caliban, another dissonant character, likewise encompassed in a context of transcendentally humanist musicality. Like *Animal's People*, *The Tempest*'s political strife is symbolically resolved through the unifications of melody. Renaissance philosophies of the Music of the Spheres are indeed so central to *The Tempest* that musicologists, such as Joshua Cohen, have advocated, amidst the play's postcolonial interest, for "the older perspective: a profound and compassionate view into the human problems of conflict and discord . . . wonderfully dissolved into harmony" (70). Yet, in dialogue with Animal's lessons, such an effort to reclaim *The Tempest*'s musicology seemingly catapults into the very heart of postcolonial inquiry. Musical harmonies, Animal suggests, are laden with colonial difference, as are the stakes of deeming them "wonderful." Indeed, Cohen's effort to retrieve Caliban from the tight grasp of subaltern concern deploys humanist frames as a means of negotiation: "In spite of his outward deformity . . . and treachery," Cohen argues, "Caliban is a man—not a monster—and his place is among other human beings" (80). If the reader is doubtful, Cohen appeals to the humanism of music itself: "[Caliban] speaks in blank verse and is capable of poetic utterance . . .

above all, he has a feeling for music" (80). Caliban's humanity, in this reading, seemingly lies in his capacity for assimilation into the play's dominant musical theories and harmonies.

Like Animal, Caliban's performative friction—his ongoing crassness and harshness of tone—intervenes in *The Tempest*'s musical structures. Yet, like Animal, Caliban is generous to the reader, providing lessons in hearing the so-called "Prospero's Island." Caliban's most famous speech could, more than an expression of his humanity or capacity for poetic utterance, be a call to the reader to reflexively consider the regimes of "music" and "the human" *The Tempest* seemingly upholds. "Be not afeared," Caliban assures a trembling Stephano and Trinculo, "the isle is full of noises / sounds and sweet airs that give delight" (3.2.137). Like "wonderful poisons," Caliban's reconfiguring of the forest's fearful noises as "sweet airs" unsettles the play's aesthetic assumptions. The moment, similarly, presents an impasse: Caliban's speech invites the reader to engage Caliban's world on Caliban's terms and, in doing so, contend with the ways in which their own listening tendencies reinscribe relations or, perhaps, reimagine them.

Caliban's invitation to hear "Prospero's Island" differently, that is, through Caliban's ears, invites an aesthetic reading of *The Tempest*'s postcolonial matter—its depictions of colonization and dispossession, and the struggle for space. Animal's lessons likewise invite aesthetic readings of *Animal's People*'s own depictions of dispossession and reclamation. The concluding uprising against the Kampani that transpires in the factory (or "the Apokolis," as Ma Franci refers to it) is a noisy, dissonant affair: "the crowd surges into the wilderness beyond the gates . . . [with] no leaders to tell them what should happen next" (Sinha 311), producing the disparate sounds of the "cries of men . . . [and] howls of anger" (311), "great shout[s] of laughter" (312), and "chants begin[ning] again" and again (312). Yet if "the Apokolis" suggests a sonic lack of harmony, it likewise sounds political unity. As Animal notes, "[t]housands have come, they have heard of the fight at the factory" (314). "The Apokolis," while dissonant, is collectively so—its sonics performing the diverse expressions of its shared, anticolonial impetus. In the context of *Animal's*

People's musically harmonious soundscapes, the factory protest asserts a political harmony through discordant sounds. Beyond and, indeed, in discord with the prevailing musical tropes of harmony, political assemblages and coalitions are already well underway.

The novel's concluding return to the factory affirms *Animal's People* as a postcolonial novel in the tradition of writing back to empire.[2] Yet importantly, the factory protest affirms *Animal's People* as a novel contending with the reader-text relations and sonic-semiotic economies left in its wake. In the factory—beyond melodic, consonant, and diatonic notions of harmony—politics of refusal are in orchestra. Indeed, in this concluding return to the factory, Animal's early lessons in listening resound, compelling a productive skepticism of the language of "the Apokolis" through which it is cast. As anticolonial thinkers remind us, the apocalypse has, for many, always already been underway—indeed, "world-ending and world-making . . . have always occurred simultaneously" (Maynard and Simpson 26). Heard through Animal's invitation to listen otherwise, the uncoordinated anarchy of "the Apokolis" sounds as a strategically errant assemblage of resistance—a series of coordinated efforts to build liveable lives from the wreckage that was already there. If "the Apokolis" sounds disorder, it also reminds us that "disorder is not the same as chaos"—that disorder is a technique of building, and realizing, other worlds (Maynard and Simpson 10).

Animal's People has multivalent implications for the representational dilemmas of subaltern voice. In a novel laden with humanist harmonies, Animal's voice is oriented to the richness of silence, to atonality and dissonance, and to modes of interpretation in discord with the novel's prevailing frameworks. Animal's lessons thus invite a close consideration of the novel's own representational regimes, and importantly, how such regimes are revealed, negotiated, and subverted through agential, subaltern performance. Through emphasizing the silence of music, the speech of noise, and the sound of text, Animal calls on the reader to reflexively contend with their own interpretive logics, and as such position themselves, alongside Animal, not as a passive agent in the reification of worlds but an active agent in their reimagining.

Notes

1 As LaBelle argues, the particularly immersive and relational quality of sound renders it significant for thinking through matters of ethics and agency. LaBelle writes, "[t]he complex and entangled ontology inherent to an auditory position, of sonic thought and materiality, voice and care, is . . . enabling for a deep and generative ethics. . . . [I]n listening one is situated within an extremely relational instant. . . . Sound and sounding practices may therefore function as the basis for creating and occupying a highly malleable and charged relational arena" (8). For more on sound's disruption of textocentric and hierarchical ways of knowing, see Sterne and Chion.

2 Here with reference to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's work of postcolonial literature and theory, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (2003). As they observe, colonialism has engendered a literary dialectic between the margin and periphery, wherein

> paradoxically . . . imperial expansion has had a radically destabilizing effect on its own preoccupations and power. In pushing the colonial world to the margins of experience the 'centre' pushed conciousness beyond the point at which monocentrism in all spheres of thought could be accepted without question. In other words the alienating process which initially served to relegate the post-colonial world to the 'margin' turned upon itself and acted to push that world through a kind of mental barrier into a position from which all experience could be viewed as uncentred, pluralistic, and multifarious. Marginality thus becomes an unprecedented source of creative energy. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 12)

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