

Workshop on Tuesday 25 June 2019, 8:30 to 17:30, Wolfson College, Oxford

GESTURE, BODY AND LANGUAGE IN TIBET AND THE HIMALAYAS

This workshop is a cross-disciplinary exploration of the relationships between gesture and language, and the role of signifying embodied movements more broadly, in culturally Tibetan and related linguistic areas of the Himalayas.

Research on gesture, body and language is still scarce, even though this theme has recently attracted increasing attention among linguists, historians and anthropologists. Research on the role of gesture in spoken and signed Tibetan languages is almost non-existent, although many aspects of spoken and written Tibetan languages are being documented. However, as the research by Dr Theresia Hofer, the initiator of this workshop, has demonstrated, the Tibetan Sign Language (TSL), which only recently has been formalized, evidently bears traces of wider Central Tibetan gestural repertoires.

In this workshop, we will explore two main topics. One is how Tibetan repertoires of gesturing, speaking and signing are related to patterns of visual and bodily communication in everyday life and other domains. The other is the use of gesture, in its own right, in the everyday, and how it relates to other forms and functions of speech and text, in dance, Buddhist debate, ritual, trade and hunting in the region of the Tibetan plateau and the Himalayas. How do such forms of expressions create social relations, distinct ways of being and forms of knowledge? How do they relate to written and/or visual historical records? Spanning these topics is an exploration of the various affordances of the visual-gestural modality for communicative purposes, and how they are modified to accommodate diverse sets of meanings and recreate asymmetrical relations, as our aim is not to lose sight of the wider social processes and political history of the region.

The workshop comprises three parts, each with two presentations and discussion; and the keynote lecture will be given by Professor Mara Green, Barnard College, NYC, on the shared linguistic resources between deaf and hearing people in Nepal. The forum will open up to a wider audience through the public screening of the ethnographic film "Ishaare", by Dr Annelies Kusters, Harriot-Watt University, on gesture and communication between familiar and unfamiliar deaf, deaf-blind and hearing vendors and customers in Mumbai markets.

The event will be BSL interpreted and the venue is wheelchair accessible. If you have any particular access requirements please let the organisers know.

I. Gesture and Buddhist Debate: Tenzin Choephel, Jonathan Samuel (Wolfson College)

II. Gesture and Sign: Theresia Hofer (University of Bristol), Kelly Fagan Robinson (UCL)

III. Gesture and Dance: Ann David (Roehampton), Dawn Collins (Independent)

*This workshop is co-organised between Argo-EMR (Anthropology Research Group at Oxford on Eastern Medicines and Religions) at the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford; the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology and the Linguistic and Language Variation Cluster, University of Bristol; and the Tibetan and Himalayan Studies Cluster, Wolfson College, Oxford. **To register please email:** Theresia Hofer Theresia.hofer@bristol.ac.uk or Elisabeth Hsu Elisabeth.hsu@anthro.ox.ac.uk*

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