Workshop on Tuesday 25 June 2019 at Wolfson College, Oxford

GESTURE, BODY AND LANGUAGE IN TIBET AND THE HIMALAYAS

This workshop will be 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 markets, pre-verbal communication between adults and children, in dance, Buddhist debate, ritual and trade in the region of the Tibetan plateau and the Himalayas, in their own right. How do such forms of expressions create social relations, distinct ways of being and forms of knowledge? How do they relate to the past? 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 Prof. 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, Hariot-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 other access requirements please contact the organisers.

I. Gestures in Buddhist Debate and Dance
II. Co-speech Gesture, Sign Language and “Spontaneous Sign”
III. Gestures in the Everyday

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. Contact: Theresia Hofer Theresia.hofer@bristol.ac.uk and Prof Elisabeth Hsu Elisabeth.hsu@anthro.ox.ac.uk

The workshop is funded by the Wellcome Trust, London, and Wolfson College, Oxford.