SENSORY ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE HIMALAYAS

This course will take the senses as its main object and instrument of inquiry. The very foundation of our experience of reality, the senses mediate our relationships with the environment, society, objects and all else. In the last few decades, the sensorial turn in anthropology (which has since impacted other disciplines) has shown that the senses, far from being just the neutral fruit of cognitive processes or neurological mechanisms, are constructed historically, culturally and politically. A first goal of this course, then, is to explore the particular ways with which individuals in Himalayan cultures relate to their realities through the senses. Its second major goal is to expand the boundaries of experience through the “re-sensualization” of the body of the “ethnographer-in-training.” By stretching the limits of participant observation, this course aims to instill a fuller sensorial experience.

Having the ethnographic literature pertaining to this region as its basis, the course will explore the theoretical insights of sensorial anthropology by directly applying them to fieldwork experiences, which will include excursions to religious rituals and festivals, pilgrimage, and other explorations of the Kathmandu valley’s urban and rural life. The course will also promote mini-workshops in which local artists and professionals will introduce students to basic notions of thangka painting, Nepali music, and culinary arts, among other expressive forms. The intention of these workshops is to offer students the opportunity to bodily participate in some of the artistic and practical activities of the Himalayan peoples. Throughout the course, students will be guided to consider how each cultural expression connects with its particular physical setting and the valley’s wider natural environment. Assignments will include an experimental presentation that can be defined as an aesthetic appropriation of the sensible world through multiple media (40%), and a final theoretical essay about this presentation (60%). Students will be encouraged to select topics that will contribute to their final integrative projects.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK #1 (Sept 1-6)

The Body and the Senses

1. TUESDAY (9/1/2015)

Readings

Required readings:

Optional Further Readings:


2. THURSDAY (9/3/2015)

Readings

Required readings:


Optional Further Readings:


WEEK #2 (Sept 7-13)

Sensing the Body in Death

1. TUESDAY (9/8/2015)

Readings

Required readings:

  *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 260-293.

**Optional Further Readings:**


**1. THURSDAY (9/10/2015)**

*PASHUPATINATH*

**Readings**

**Required readings:**


**Optional Further Readings:**


**WEEK #3 (Sept 14-20)**

*The Body and the Cosmos in Sensing and Organizing Urban Space*

**1. TUESDAY (9/15/2015)**

*LALITPUR*

**Readings**
Required readings:


Optional Further Readings:


2. THURSDAY (9/17/2015)

*BHAKTAPUR*

Required readings:


Optional Further Readings:


WEEK #4 (Sept 21-Sept 27)

*The Body and the Cosmos in Sensing and Organizing Domestic Space*

1. TUESDAY (9/22/2015):

Readings

Required readings:

Optional Further Readings:


2. THURSDAY (9/24/2015)

Required readings:


Optional Further Readings:


WEEK #5 (Sept 28-Oct 4)

Knowing the World through the Body

1. TUESDAY (9/29/2015):

Readings

Required readings:


Optional Further Readings:

2. THURSDAY (10/01/2015)

Required readings:


Optional Further Readings:


WEEK #6 (Oct 5-Oct 11)

Healing the Body: Senses, Emotion and Possession

1. TUESDAY (10/07/2015)

Readings

Required readings:


Optional Further Readings:


1. THURSDAY (10/09/2015)
Readings

Required readings:


Optional Further Readings:


WEEK #7 AND #8 (Oct 12-25) (Trip to Yolmo)

*Sensing Yolmo Lives*

Readings

Required readings:


WEEK #9 (Oct 26-Nov 1)

*Sight*

1. TUESDAY (10/27/2015)

Readings

Required readings:


Optional Further Readings:

2. THURSDAY (10/29/2015)

Readings

Required readings:


Optional Further Readings:


Workshop I – Thangka Painting

WEEK #10 (Nov 2-Nov 8)

Hearing

1. TUESDAY (11/03/2015)

Readings

Required readings:


Optional Further Readings:

2. THURSDAY (11/05/2015)

Readings

Required readings:


Optional Further Readings:


Workshop II – Traditional Music of Nepal

WEEK #11 (Nov 9-15)  
*Smell*

1. TUESDAY (11/10/2015)

Readings

Required readings:


Optional Further Readings:
2. THURSDAY (11/12/2015)

Readings

Required readings:


Optional Further Readings:


Workshop III – Tibetan Incense Making

WEEK #12 (Nov 16-Nov 22)

*Pilgrimage, Touch (Contact) and the Creation of Place*

1. TUESDAY (11/17/2015)

Readings

Required readings:


Optional Further Readings:


2. THURSDAY (11/19/2015)

Readings

Required readings:

• Buffetrille, Katia (1994) *The Halase-Maratika Caves (Eastern Tibet), A Sacred Place Claimed by both Hindus and Buddhists.* Pondichéry, Institut Français de Pondichéry (Pondy Papers in Social Sciences, 16), selections.

Optional Further Readings:


WEEK #13 AND #14 (Nov 23-Dec 6): *Trip to Solokhumbu Sensing Sherpa Lives through the Mani Rimdu Ritual*

Readings

Required readings:


Optional Further Readings:

WEEK #15 (Dec 7-Dec 13)

Taste

1. TUESDAY (12/08/2015)

Readings

Required readings:


Optional Further Readings:


2. THURSDAY (12/10/2015)

Readings

Required readings:


Optional Further Readings:


Workshop IV – Nepali Cuisine (including Farewell Feast!)