

FALL 2015 COLLOQUIA SERIES

Date: Wednesday, November 4

Time: 3:15 – 5PM

Location: Social Sciences 1, room 261

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Making Sense: The Semiotics and Ethics of Deaf-Hearing Conversations in Nepal

This talk draws on long-term fieldwork in Nepal to explore how intelligible interaction between deaf and hearing people emerges from a complex relationship of semiotic and social-ethical motivation. While Nepali Sign Language (NSL) signers use a fully elaborated language with each other, to communicate with hearing people they instead use “natural sign” – far more lean and variable systems of signs and gestures. Natural sign is also the primary communicative mode for deaf people who have not acquired NSL (in fact, the majority of deaf people in Nepal). Natural signs are frequently iconic or indexical (“motivated”), which scaffolds but does not guarantee understanding. Through ethnographic analysis and video examples, I will argue that shared understanding in natural sign is contingent upon form-meaning mappings embedded in the cultural-material landscape *and* on the embodied willingness of signers to orient to the sometimes-difficult task of sense-making.