



CENTRE FOR ASIAN AND
TRANSCULTURAL STUDIES

INSTITUTE OF
ANTHROPOLOGY



UNIVERSITÄT
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Public Lectures

Approaches to Gesture: Dance and Ritual Bodily Movement in Eastern Nepal



Sakela dancer in eastern Nepal. Photo: Alban von Stockhausen 2011.

**TUESDAY,
October 31
17:00 c.t. –
19:00**

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Once or twice a year, the Kirat Rai of Eastern Nepal celebrate a public ritual festival with offerings to the deity of the earth. During these ritual celebrations, participants perform the sakela dance, a dance with a continuous basic step easy enough to be learnt by anyone who wants to join in. Forming a dance circle and based on the basic step, participants perform dozens of gestural sequences of stylized agricultural techniques, weaving techniques, or imitations of animal movements. On the go, they synchronize with a dance leader in charge of deciding the order of gestural sequences. In this lecture, the sakela dance serves as main example to point out how gestures are a crucial aspect in the rituals – especially in ritual dances – of South Asia and the Extended Himalaya. I invite you to discuss with me how this importance of gestures in ritual dance can be explained. What is it about gestures that makes them so appealing for ritual performance? Can gesture research, which since decades focuses on language, speech, communication, and cognition, provide satisfactory theoretical approaches for a gestural dance tradition that treats words separately? Shall anthropology continue to leave research on gesture recognition to psychology, robotics, and computational science? Is it helpful that dance anthropology has given up adopting ideas from structural linguistics and kinesics and instead turned to phenomenological approaches to embodiment?

LOCATION: South Asia Institute, Lecture Hall (010.01.05), 1st Floor