

MONTGOMERY COLLEGE  
Germantown Campus

Anthropology 101 - Dr. Lucy E. Laufe

Due: 12/2/07

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Displaying Culture:  
The Analysis of Himalayas: An Aesthetic Adventure at the Sackler Museum**

The Sackler Museum, part of The Smithsonian Institution, is charged with portraying the aesthetic themes that have shaped Asian cultures. This mission is carried out with the exhibitions of Asian Art. The exhibition on the Himalayas is comprised of 163 objects that represent the cultures and belief systems of the peoples who inhabit this region.

“Extending for 1,800 miles, the harsh Himalayan terrain is interspersed by cultural oases found in the valleys of India, and Nepal, as well as on the Trans-Himalayan plateau. Merchants, monks, and artists traveled between these centers of civilization in Nepal, Kashmir and Tibet for almost two millennia, bringing with them the intellectual, spiritual and material culture of *diffusion* neighboring India, China, and Central Asia. Local artists transformed and developed those beliefs and aesthetic ideals to create the unique and richly varied art of the Himalayas.”  
([www.si.edu/exhibitions/current/himalayas.htm](http://www.si.edu/exhibitions/current/himalayas.htm))

As anthropology students you are reading and viewing ethnographic portraits of a wide variety of cultures. You will also be writing about a cultural scene in our own society. The analysis of this exhibit is an opportunity to think about how cultures are depicted in the museum setting. This particular exhibition also allows you to think about art as expressive culture. Base your comments on the content of the exhibit and your knowledge of anthropology.

Using your observation skills, you are to collect information from this exhibit and answer the following questions.

1. In a paragraph or two, define what this entire exhibit is about? What are the general themes and topics that are portrayed about the subject matter?
2. Look at one of the regions featured in the exhibition (not including the collection of Tibet Buddhist manuscripts) and try to describe what you learn about the culture of this region from the art on display. Include in your description some of the key items on display that help you understand this cultural ~~the~~ *the* from a holistic perspective.
3. From the artifacts presented is it possible to understand the beliefs and values of the cultural region you are analyzing? Include in your discussion examples of the pieces in the exhibit that support your anthropological analysis.

4. Keeping in mind that this museum is primarily government funded, but also receives corporate and private funding, is there an agenda in what aspects life and culture are shown? What does this exhibit want to convey to museum goers about Himalayan culture in general? What are the selective observations and interpretations exist within this format that influence the presentation of information in this exhibit? *in context of purpose*

5. Paul Richard's review of the exhibition in the Washington Post on October 22, 2003 focuses on the art and its connection to the religion and beliefs of the Himalayas, primarily Hinduism and Buddhism. What new insights did you gain into these religions from the artifacts on display? Again use specific pieces to support your views. *7 I, first person*

*when I looked at this piece. I - - - -*

Please write in essay form. The entire paper should not exceed 5 typewritten pages.

*go to website to find funded groups.*

## An 101-H and PL 203-H Style Sheet

A couple of you have asked for a style sheet that lays out the writing expectations we have for your written work, both in terms of fieldwork, semester papers and in the case of PL-203, the yet to be completed Film Review assignment. So here are some “basics.”

For AN-101 the writing need is two-fold. One the one hand, your writing must be clear and communicative, and to that extent “good prose.” At the same time, as one writes from a social science perspective, it is necessary to write clearly *and descriptively in the third person* so that the reader may glean from the description exactly what the writer puts into it—no more and no less.

Now, obviously, if the writing is clear, the reader will glean exactly that, i.e., what the writer sees and writes about. But the second portion of the “social scientific need” requires that the writer stand divorced from self-interest or personal bias so that the “what’s there” or “what is seen” is actually what is communicated. This means the writer must examine any and all biases built into his or her writing/reporting style and ask very specific questions. For example, how do I know that my observations here are really accurate, and not just my own “take” on the circumstance in front of me? Well...

- What sparked my interest in this topic?
- Is that particular interest helping me to harbor a grudge about the topic?
- Is it helping me to push a perspective in favor of it?
- Are the norms of this group so different from my own that I can’t really express them as such but need to put them into “my frames” and “metaphors” for experience?
- Does my own personal history and social location—age, background, gender, race, ethnicity, upbringing etc., etc., etc., put “definitions” onto these observations that shouldn’t be there?

These are the kinds of questions to keep asking as one describes phenomena from a social science perspective. And this is even before one gets to the patterns!

Is there no place for the “I”? Yes, of course. But as indicated in class, it is at the end of the task, and not the beginning. This is because after all is said and done, each of us does have perspectives, opinions, etc. but they are to be put on hold in the descriptive writing process. AND AFTER the writer has done the reader the service of describing and portraying the phenomena in question—AFTER THIS IS DONE your, the writer, may speak your mind.

For PL-203. The writing process for PL 203 is similar to AN 101. In particular, as one writes about a specific group and how it becomes such—that is, as one describes the specific behaviors, words, movements or whatever that characterize a group of individuals over time (the class example was getting coffee, chatting and finally starting class at 7:15), one must be writing in the third person precisely because it is those behaviors done by those specific individuals that are making them a group and that must be described. And at the end of that grouping process, the members might say, “OK. Now we’re ready to work...”

In the context of say, for example, a religious visit, however, one is not (at least for the philosophical portion of the course) looking to describe how the particular behaviors make up the group, but rather how this particular group embodies, practices or perhaps articulates this tradition in terms of its basic symbols, doctrines, beliefs, motifs etc. And whereas the *anthropological task is to describe the group making behaviors of these particular individuals*, the religious visit task for PL 203 reflects a *difference of scale in the object being described*. The goal is to indicate how the worship or faith group evidences its belief in its *collective* worship and/or faith behavior. Why, for example, does a particular group sit/kneel/sing/chant/dance (or not) at certain points in a ritualized event? And how might the latter influence the next day's behavior (or not) and what makes you say that?

Does the religious visit writing need distance from one's own biases, "frames," "metaphors," and the like? Of course! But in the object of description here is much larger than that of detailed individual behaviors that are the "mesh" of activities over time and about which you must politely inquire. More concretely, the object of description here for PL 203 is how does this group experience impact its members? (AN 101's interest is in the process of how are the folks here becoming a group as defined by the patterns of behavior observed?)

We hope this helps. If not, please feel free to ask for clarification in the break, after class, by phone, or per Dr. Walsh's penchant for email, the latter.

Dr. Laufe and Dr. Walsh

### **Formatting requirements.**

In contrast to the paper here, we expect YOU to write in a double spaced format, with one inch margins all around, and with your name on every page you give to us. Dr. Walsh prefers that your name and page numbers be in a footer or header format, and that seems a reasonable expectation. We also expect that you will spell check your work and proof it as well, so that those words passed over by spellcheckers don't get passed you! Over all, then, we expect...

- An effective introduction and or statement of the purpose of focus of your paper
- Clear descriptive writing divorced from self interest and other bias
- Appropriate paragraphing and grammatically correct sentences, punctuated correctly
- Correct citation form, when appropriate
- The insertion of self statements only AFTER THE TASK OF COMMUNICATING WHAT YOU HAVE OBSERVED, and last but not least
- A clear summary and conclusion, and where appropriate, a statement of questions and/or insights you have gleaned form your endeavors