Vincanne Adams  
Professor of Medical Anthropology at UCSF

**Sherpas through their Riches: Notes on an Anthropology of the Fragment**

The question of whether there is such a thing as anthropological theory has been, since the 1980s, a vexing one. Is it possible to find grand analytical threads weaving together the work of provincializing, anti-orientalizing, liberal humanist, actor-networking, necropoliticizing, affectively-potent, exceptionalist-avoiding, ontologically-turning anthropological pursuits over the past thirty years? In this ethnographic depiction of a return visit to the Himalayas after a nearly twelve-year gap, I explore the possibility of ‘the ethnographic fragment’ as instructive for mapping anthropological practice since the time of what might be called the Berreman era. Specifically, I consider Sherry Ortner’s landmark “Theory... Since the Sixties” alongside Gerry Berreman’s steadfast commitments to the politics of social inequality. Riffing off of Ortner’s Sherpas Through Their Rituals, I start this inquiry with a 2013 encounter with an old friend, Ang Tenzing Sherpa, who had become quite rich since the time of our first meeting in 1986 and whose reunion meeting with me was now occasioned by the dual moment of death -- first the anniversary rites for his sister-in-law who perished soon after reaching the summit of Mt. Everest in 1993, and now, his own mother who uncannily died on nearly the same day 20 years later during my reunion visit. Pursuing an understanding Sherpas through their riches is an attempt to use the ethnographic fragment as a point of departure for thinking about what work remains possible in anthropology, the strange eclipse of theory-making by the certainty of death, the persistence of social inequality and the type of analysis that may continue to have impact in what others might call a post-theory world.