

Notes to talk about M Strathern Barbara Bodenhorn, Sr. Research Associate, Department of Social Anthropology

It was fun moving between both volumes over the past week; it only deepened my appreciation (like others in this room) of *Nature, Culture and Gender* and the intellectual rigour of both Carol MacCormack and Marilyn Strathern. What struck me was how lively the ethnographic details had remained in my memory even as I had forgotten much of the theoretical background being invoked (I'm an anthropologist because of my love of those details, not the other way round – it is the theoretical argument made through ethnographic detail that sticks in my head).

I'd just like to note a couple of things – which resonate with but don't simply replicate our speakers here today.

- A) In 'No nature/ no culture', Strathern takes on what she identifies explicitly as the 'ideological intention' in forming dichotomies out of 'sets of combinations.' ... 'That same logic poses difference as opposition.' [WE CAN OF COURSE EXCAVATE THE FULL AND EXACT QUOTE IF YOU'D LIKE]

Strathern was referring to feminist arguments of the 1970s about women and men as categories but it remains a strongly pertinent point if you want to talk about 2016 global politics, race, sexual orientation, or the ethics of ARTs.

'Nature-as- environment ' comes out of this, she continues. Again, such a statement looks slightly different in 2016, particularly at a time when much climate change rhetoric is marked by the search for engineering fixes. I don't need to gender this for you, I'm sure.

As with 'human nature,', 'wild nature' implies a fixed immutable basis of being that does us no favours either analytically or pragmatically. [not least because it oversimplifies the systems dynamics that engineering is meant to 'fix']

- B) Many themes that have marked Strathern's intellectual trajectory are already present in NCG – most specifically the position that gender is relational, moving between sameness and difference that allows shifts through time and across space – and inviting shifts in our own, analytical, perspectives when considering them. 'The relation' was the subject of Strathern's inaugural lecture at Cambridge and has been at the core of Strathernian exploration ever since.

[anecdotal aside: When Marilyn first arrived as the William Wyse Professor, rather a lot of my colleagues moaned that her texts were 'difficult to understand'. I'm reminded of a comment made by a Yup'ik elder to Ann Fienup Riordan in the 1970s. 'Naming is like the tide;' he said, ' it's never exactly the same, but if you watch it for a while, you see how it works.' Strathern's texts are like the tides – they are never exactly the same, but if you read them for a while, you see how they work.]

But the relation I want to close with is the image of Marilyn Strathern as a person (I'd even go so far as to say individual) – deeply committed to engaged teaching. As head of the Social Anthropology Department and REF organiser, she was relentless about publication. But that never got in the way of her appreciation of the importance of engaged, face-to-face teaching as a critical contribution to knowledge. It seems to me we lose that appreciation at our peril.