



TITLE AND FULL NAME: Professor Dame Marilyn Strathern

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TITLE OF PRESENTATION: 'New and old worlds: A perspective from Social Anthropology'

#### ABSTRACT OF PRESENTATION

People build bridges in many ways, and not least over time, spanning the different epochs that define their lives, looking in the past for clues to the present or to what the future might bring. For social anthropologists, this process is far from self-evident. Diverse ways of reckoning time and thinking about transitions demand attention (analytically, theoretically). Anthropology's traditional mode of making bridges -- and it would be a very narrow bridge that only allowed one-way traffic -- is cross-cultural comparison, thinking about one situation through another. This lecture thus interweaves materials from Europe and Melanesia, but it also has to go beyond anthropology and beyond the social sciences as well. Stimulated by an account of an East German town being precipitated into a new world, it focuses on abrupt transitions, and on their recurrence. What is happening when a radical break with one kind of past is also recalled as looking forward to a moment when another kind of past might finally come into its own? What, indeed, happens after the end of the world? Pursuing these paradoxes, the lecture turns to today's Papua New Guinea where many have seen colonialism -- like socialism -- come and go in a lifetime. People's aspirations for the future, raising questions about the abruptness of such breaks and the kinds of crisis new times create, throw out challenges as to how to envisage worlds old and new. *Their* frontiers take us to the frontiers of the discipline.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Marilyn Strathern is Emeritus Professor of Social Anthropology, and Life Fellow of Girton College, Cambridge University, and Hon. Life President of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth (ASA). She had the good fortune to begin her research career in Papua New Guinea, which led to work among other things on law, kinship and gender relations. In the UK she subsequently became involved with anthropological approaches to the new reproductive technologies, intellectual property and audit cultures. She is probably best known for *The gender of the gift* (1988), a critique of anthropological theories of society applied to Melanesia, which she pairs with *After nature* (1992), a comment on the cultural revolution at home. Her most recent book, *Before and after gender* (2016), is also one of her first, unpublished since the early 1970s. Her first departmental position was at the University of Manchester, UK. She is a Fellow of the British Academy (FBA), and received a national honour (DBE) in 2001; she was awarded the International Balzan Prize for Social Anthropology in 2018.