

ANTH 6020 – SEMINARS IN RESEARCH METHODS

人類學研究方法研討課
(Subject to Modification)

Course Syllabus

2020–21 Spring Semester

Instructor: Mark Stevenson (mark.stevenson@cuhk.edu.hk)

Office Hours: NAH 411, by appointment

Class meetings: Tuesdays, 6:30–9:15 pm, Online (Zoom) Covid-19 arrangement.

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“Méthode, c’est le chemin après qu’on l’a parcouru.” Marcel Granet

This seminar class provides an opportunity to explore the role methodological questions will play in your own research projects as well as in anthropology more broadly. As a seminar class, it has been designed around discussion rather than lectures. This approach allows you to make the class as relevant as possible to your needs, while also fitting some of the more formal requirements of research planning and administration. This last component is given material shape in the preparation of your research proposal, the major item of assessment. While the proposal is (thankfully) a *relatively* informal procedure at our university, you will find that it is one of the most important skills you can have—particularly given its relationship to securing funding, as well as plum post-doc opportunities.

Learning Outcomes:

- Knowledge of the key elements of research design and proposals in anthropology.
- Appreciation of the relationship between research questions, data, and methodology.
- Knowledge of techniques of data collection and interpretation.
- Understanding of recent innovations and debates in anthropological research.
- Appreciation of the ethical requirements of contemporary social science research.
- Understanding of the dilemmas of ethnographic representation.

Course Requirements

Research Project Outline (Week 2)	10%
5 X Reading Reports (300 words each) (Weeks 3–12)	30%
Research Proposal (10–12 pages) (April 27)	60%

I am sure you are by now used to reading ahead and participating actively in seminar discussions.

The aim is to hold seminars in the etymological sense of “**seeding**.” The topics and items found in this syllabus are not destinations, they are starting points. In brief, the course attempts to accommodate very divergent needs, inviting you to share your developing understanding of methodological questions with your classmates. A further feature of this class is that its focus is on preparing you for noticing, sensing, responding, and thinking your way through the complex field of human cultural and social processes. In that respect the syllabus is not focused on research

techniques (which tend to be highly specific), but neither is it designed purely around abstract epistemological paradoxes (which may come up all the same).

This year I have decided for the first time to build the series of seminars around **a specific advance in anthropology**, namely the publication of Marilyn Strathern's *Relations: An Anthropological Account* (2020). I hope you will not find this too restrictive or specialised. Indeed, I shall aim to ensure that Strathern's intellectual adventure stimulates your own. The roots of Strathern's book go back at least to her inaugural professorial lecture at Cambridge University in 1994! She was William Wyse Professor of Social Anthropology from 1993 to 2008. *Relations* is a major **reappraisal of a key methodological concern** of social anthropology—**relationships**. And just as it reviews recent rethinking from a range of directions around that theme, the set of questions Strathern raises are likely to set the tone of coming debate for some time to come. Even if you don't feel your research lies centrally within social anthropology, you can be sure relations are not things you can take for granted. Strathern's book demonstrates their vast analytical potential and scope.

Assessment wise the course is still built around the progressive development of your thesis/research proposal, the document in which you set out your research design. Clearly the two, doing and designing, are related! **This has two broad aims**. The first is to assist you to design your research in terms of personal, institutional, and discipline expectations before you head out into major engagement in fieldwork (allowing that field research is unpredictable). The second aim is to deepen familiarity with the fundamental methodological challenges anthropologists face in the collection and interpretation of data (and the methods that have been designed to address them). You may find that in the field (and afterwards) it is your ability to think through such fundamental challenges that is most useful as you adapt to complexity.

On five occasions from Week 3 onward to Week 12 inclusive, in our opening session you will each be expected to introduce two items of further reading, new or classic, that suggest links between the week's theme and your research. Two "teams" will rotate each week over those ten weeks. This is an additional way of us getting to know your research interests and questions. Each week I will use our closing session to orient our thinking for the themes of the following week, including a guide to the required readings, their backgrounds, and something of their implications (your interruptions and questions are welcome).

Class format: 1) additional reading reports in brief (students), 2) brainstorming research proposal development (students and instructor), 3) introduction to the following week's topic/s (instructor and students).

Assessment

Assessment 1. Research Project Outline. (10 marks, 10% of assessment.)

Each of you will present this to the class in Week 2. **No more than 500 words**, plus a brief List of References (i.e. list of references not included in word count). Double or 1.5 spaced, 11 point sans-serif font (e.g. Calibri). Referencing: author-date format.

Task: In essay format, write an overview of your research which details what you are going to research and how you are going to conduct it. It should demonstrate that you have done some preparatory reading on your proposed research and **must cover the following areas: 1) the topic, or what you are researching and where, 2) its significance, or why it is important and worth researching, and 3) the main questions you will be addressing and the methodology these imply (at this stage).**

Within the above it should also include the following elements (within the original 500 word limit): a clear and well-focused title, timing and length of research activity, scale or sample size, why it is innovative, and *some* of the following key social research considerations (variables, measurement, validity, reliability, cause and effect, and theory). It **should not** include a literature review.

Tip: I suggest you start out by writing down the research idea you have in mind as if you were answering a friend's or teacher's casual inquiry. Then, without obsessing over the topic (which you will be developing as you go), focus on making it complete and clear in terms of the expected content described above. Remember that most good projects have narrowly defined questions. And, within all that, please just be yourself! You will have to prepare many such condensed statements over your career, under time and word limits that are just as crazy as here, even if you don't go on to a career in anthropology or archaeology. This experience of writing a brief statement may also be useful in preparing the abstract for your full proposal submitted at the end of semester.

Assessment 2. Additional Reading Reports. (Alternate weeks in Weeks 3–12, 5 X 300 word reports, 30% of assessment.) Week 12 presenters will look back at Week 11.

Task: Identify, read, and report and write on two items (usually academic articles or book chapters) of further reading—recent or classic—that show strong links between the relevant week's theme/s or questions and your research project. Your sources for *this* assessment **should never be from this course syllabus**.

Present to the seminar a brief introduction (10 mins) of your two selected sources explaining their relevance to the week's theme/s and your research. **Submit your written report** (300 words) on the two items to the teacher and class at the commencement of your presentation. In addition, as part of each presentation, you should introduce one image, audio clip, or audio-visual clip that captures something of the idea/s you are concerned with.

I would hope the items you select will contribute to the stock of resources upon which your thesis project (and proposal) will be founded.

The ARR segment will be assessed on the following scale: Non-submission, 0; submission and completion, 3; or submission and careful completion, 6. (This is similar to the plus, check and minus grading some of you may be familiar with.) One sign of careful completion is the level of productive discussion a presentation generates, so don't go over your allotted time.

Assessment 3. Research Proposal. (60 marks, 60% of assessment.)

Proposal Format Guidelines

Please write your proposal in a style that is accessible to academics who are non-specialists in your field. Clarity and effective communication of your ideas is critical. The proposal should follow the order of items below as specified:

- Title
- Abstract
- Research question/ problem, aims
- Literature review
- Methodology including conceptual framework
- Conclusion: Contribution to knowledge and statement of significance
- Statement regarding ethical issues

- Occupational Health & Safety issues
- Budget
- Timeline (Gantt Chart)
- References
- Appendices.

Formatting requirements of proposals:

- 10–12 pages in length plus references
- optional Appendices (maximum of 4 pages in total)
- 11 point Calibri font or 12 point Times New Roman font must be used
- Line spacing should be one-and-a-half (1.5)
- Top, bottom, left and right margins of 2.54 cm (Word Normal).

A more complete guide to these elements of the proposal will be provided in the first week of semester (and in Week One in Blackboard); **however, assessment of your proposal will be according to the structure given above.**

Task: In addition to the written proposal as outlined above, a class 'conference' will be organised during Week 13 when each of your proposals will be workshopped (depending on the number of students in the course this may mean organising a longer session for that week). Each class member must present their proposal for feedback from the class and instructor. Your proposal introduction will be brief, with the aim of eliciting discussion and feedback from the seminar. **To facilitate full panel discussion, fully-drafted proposals (i.e. very close to ready for assessment) must be provided to the Instructor at least 4 days before the Week 12 or 13 class, preferably circulated to the entire class via Blackboard. You will have a further 10 days to revise your proposal before submission (April 27).**

Anthropology MPhil students are reminded that department approval of their project is due by the end of May (at least that is what I understand, it is worth checking).

Course Outline

Week 1 (Jan 12), Research Proposals and Other Rituals among the Anthropologists.

The question of who you are and what you feel (or believe) you most need to be thinking about as you begin your project. Another question: do you have a favourite thinker or theorist in a discipline outside anthropology?

Besteman, Catherine. 2015. "On Ethnographic Love." In *Mutuality: Anthropology's Changing Terms of Engagement*, edited by Roger Sanjek, 259–284. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Silverman, Sydel. 1991. "Writing Grant Proposals for Anthropological Research." *Current Anthropology* 32(4): 485–489.

Week 2 (Jan 19), Culture and Society: The Types of Questions Anthropologists Research.

How do the discussions below (and last week!) help you think further about where your research relates to anthropology? **This week we will be hearing your project outline** and offering suggestions and reflections intended to stimulate the problematisation of your research. Are there specific approaches within anthropology (or archaeology) that you want to deepen your engagement with? Why?

Everyone please also browse through the “Index of Subjects” in Strathern’s *Relations* (the book) and identify three items you are highly attracted too, and the three which make you most anxious. Be prepared to talk about your choices.

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1991. “Writing Against Culture.” In *Anthropology in Theory: Issues in Epistemology*, edited by Henrietta Moore and Todd Sanders, 466–479. Oxford: Blackwell. The full essay can be found in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, edited by Richard G. Fox, 137–162 (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1991).
- Reynolds, Barrie. 1983. “The relevance of material culture to anthropology.” *Journal of Anthropological Society of Oxford* 14 (2): 209–217.
- Weiner, James. 1993. “Anthropology contra Heidegger: Part I: Anthropology’s Nihilism.” *Critique of Anthropology* 12(1): 75–90.

Week 3 (Jan 26), Juggling Four Common Levels of Analysis: Particular, General, Theoretical, and Reflexive.

The breakdown of perspectives in this week’s themes represents one way of thinking about how our research addresses different requirements all at once. How do they look at this stage in your project? Do you find yourself wanting to rename the four elements named in this week’s topic? Do you see your research as closely connected to a discipline other than anthropology (or archaeology)? Which one (note, areas studies are not disciplines)? You might have a preference among the paradigms covered by Guba and Lincoln, but do any of their other paradigms offer you anything?

A similar breakdown can be found in Christopher Tilley’s preface to the edited volume *Reading Material Culture: Structuralism, Hermeneutics and Post-Structuralism* (1990: viii):

1. Questions of time, history, cultural change and continuity. **[particular]**
2. Discourse, style and textuality: processes of reading and writing the social. **[general]**
3. The constitution of the subject and subjectivity in relation to social totalities and cultural practices. **[theoretical]**
4. Politics and the socio-political role of the intellectual. **[researcher-reflexive]**
5. The manner in which a consideration of the first two points relates to an understanding both of material culture and the manner in which material-culture studies are at present constituted within disciplinary forms, in particular archaeology and anthropology. **[discipline-reflexive]**

A somewhat different (but possibly related) way of breaking things up for analysis:

... to [1] distinguish among events, [2] to differentiate the networks and levels to which they belong, and [3] to reconstitute the lines along which they are connected and engender one another. From this follows [4] a refusal of analyses couched in terms of the symbolic field or the domain of signifying structures, and [5] a recourse to analyses in terms of the genealogy of relations of force, strategic development, and tactics. Here I believe one’s point of reference should not be to the great model of language (*langue*) and signs, but [6] to that of war and battle. (Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*. New York: Pantheon, 1980, p. 114)

Benthall, Jonathan. 1994. “The Raw, the Cooked and the Marilynated.” *Anthropology Today* 10(6): 15–16.

- Guba, Egon G. and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 1994. "Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research." In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 105–117. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Ryan, Gery and H. Russell Bernard. 2003. "Techniques to Identify Themes." *Field Methods* 15(1): 85–109.
- Strathern, Marilyn. 1995. *The Relation: Issues in Complexity and Scale* (Prickly Pear Pamphlet No. 6). Cambridge: Prickly Pear Press.

Week 4 (Feb 2), Introducing Marilyn Strathern, *Relations*, and *Relations*.

Twenty-five years separate Strathern's new publication and the 1995 lecture pamphlet which we read last week (see the 2020 preface for the intervening publications on which the new book draws). From simply comparing the 2020 introduction and the 1995 pamphlet, what do you perceive are Strathern's new concerns and questions? Do those concerns contain her previous ones, or are earlier concerns superseded or otherwise left behind?

- Strathern, Marilyn. 2020. "Introductions: The Compulsion of Relations." In *Relations: An Anthropological Account*, 1–21. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Weiner, James. 1993. "Anthropology contra Heidegger: Part II: The Limit of Relationship." *Critique of Anthropology* 13(3): 285–301.

Marilyn Strathern on Youtube

Marilyn Strathern: Taking care of a concept: anthropological reflections on the assisted society
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDavTWIKqM8>

Interview with Marilyn Strathern - part 1
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYPvmhdQfpE>
 (Interview with the anthropologist Professor Dame Marilyn Strathern, part 1. Interviewed by Alan Macfarlane in May 2009.)

EASA2020 Keynote: Terms of Engagement by Marilyn Strathern
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aQT7Ey_lys

Week 5 (Feb 9), The Past is a Foreign Country: The Lessons of Dead English Relatives.

This chapter of Strathern introduces or reminds us of the indeterminate nature of concepts and the words associated with them (and many other things researchers deal with). This is the lesson of history and a historical perspective. The chapter is a lesson on this lesson of/from/in history. There are also lessons about language and meaning, and how any researcher is compelled to choose and use words very carefully. Don't worry too much about the details (philosophers, periods, theorists), or arriving at a firm conclusion. Rather, whenever you can, note connections (relations!) you are beginning to make, and especially questions or insights that crop up in connection to your proposed project, and be prepared to share them in class.

- Strathern, Marilyn. 2020. "Experimentations: English and Otherwise." In *Relations: An Anthropological Account*, 25–44. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Gell, Alfred. 1999. "Strathernograms, or, the Semiotics of Mixed Metaphors." In Alfred Gell, *The Art of Anthropology: Essays and Diagrams*, edited by Eric Hirsch, 29–75. London School of Economics Monographs on Social Anthropology, Vol 67. London: The Athlone Press.

Spring Festival Vacation

Week 6 (Feb 23), The Games People Play: Knowing You, Knowing Me.

Anthropology compares. Strathern performs an anthropology of anthropology, a comparison of comparisons, and there is an interest in reflexivity and reflection throughout her book. Human beings don't just relate, they relate consciously, reflectively, purposefully, although not in all these ways all the time. All the same, conscious participation in relations makes them meaningful. What does that mean for anthropology, social relations, and personal relations?

Strathern, Marilyn. 2020. "Registers of Comparison," and "Coda to Part I." In *Relations: An Anthropological Account*, 45–70. Durham: Duke University Press.

Macfarlane, Alan. 2004. "To Contrast and Compare." In *Methodology and Fieldwork*, edited by Vinay Kumar Srivastava, 94–111. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

McHugh, Ernestine. 2004. "Moral Choices and Global Desires: Feminine Identity in a Transnational Realm." *Ethos* 32(4): 575–597.

Week 7 (Mar 2), Macrocosm and Microcosm in Ethnographic Encounters.

Building on last week's reflections, this week we turn our attention to the relations our work on relations produces, a kind of recursive expansion. Relations are unstable, and that makes research design both interesting and frustrating. How do relations relate to identity? What anchors relations, what transforms them? How should we speak of their "place" in social life? Do relations tend to make "the material" malleable.

Strathern, Marilyn. 2020. "Expansion and Contraction." In *Relations: An Anthropological Account*, 73–95. Durham: Duke University Press.

Roberts, Elizabeth. 2013. "Assisted Existence: An Ethnography of Being in Ecuador." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (n.s.) 19(3): 562–580.

McHugh, Ernestine. "The Fate of Embodied Beings." In *Love and Honor in the Himalayas: Coming to Know Another Culture*, 29–57. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Week 8 (Mar 9), English, Melanesian, and Latin American Perspectives on Difference and Relation.

The way researchers are accustomed to thinking relations do not usually coincide with the way they are thought in the ethnographic situations they research. Nor are researchers always aware of their own assumptions, which often only become manifest when confronted with a different set of assumptions during the research process. Different metaphysical (or ontological) frameworks construct different differences, and tripping over them is how anthropologists discover much of their data. How is all this analogous to the shape of geopolitics in your project?

Strathern, Marilyn. 2020. "The Dissimilar and the Different," and "Coda to Part II." In *Relations: An Anthropological Account*, 97–118. Durham: Duke University Press.

Quijano, Aníbal. 2007. "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality." *Cultural Studies* 21(2–3): 168–178. (Aníbal Quijano, "Colonialidad y Modernidad/Racionalidad," in *Los conquistados: 1492 y la población indígena*. Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores, 1992, 439–48.)

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 2002 "North Atlantic Universals: Analytical Fictions, 1492–1945." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101(4): 839–858.

Week 9 (Mar 16), Reification and Abstraction Marry, Identity and Relation Divorce.

Abstraction tends to imply forms of detachment (extraction), first from context, and second from (vested or personal) interest. It is a kind of dis-relation or distancing, and yet it aims at capturing or encapsulating an essence—the heart of whichever matter. Nevertheless, abstractions participate in everyday life and ongoing relationality. Do abstractions in fact come with everyday territory... wherein the intimate possibilities of blind spots?

- Strathern, Marilyn. 2020. "Enlightenment Dramas." In *Relations: An Anthropological Account*, 121–142. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Jacob, Marie-Andrée. 2007. "Form-Made Persons: Consent Forms as Consent's Blind Spot." *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 30(2): 249–268.
- Tsing, Anna. 2012. "On Nonscalability: The Living World is not Amenable to Precision-Nested Scales." *Common Knowledge* 18 (3): 505–524.

Week 10 (Mar 23), Venturing Beyond the Structuring Framework.

What role/s do gaps play in relations? Once we are aware of gaps, are they gaps any longer? Very abstract questions, perhaps, but association, communication, knowledge, and cognition all appear to be gap spanning activities: relationality. What service might this term "relationality" provide for the work of anthropology.

- Strathern, Marilyn. 2020. "Kinship Unbound" and "Coda to Part III." In *Relations: An Anthropological Account*, 143–166. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 2001 (1967). "Structure, Sign and Play [and notes]." In *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass, 351–370 [443–4]. London: Routledge.
- Jackson, Michael. 2013. "Where Thought Belongs: An Anthropological Critique of the Project of Philosophy," and "Epilogue." In *Lifeworlds: Essays in Existential Anthropology*, 253–269, 271–277. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Week 11 (Mar 30), Encountering Knowledge in Relations.

Contemporary anthropological encounters with relations suggest that the work of knowledge is "never done." Strathern relates this insight to the "ever-unfinished nature" of relating. Strathern's puns are legion, and in this we might see the idea of the human as the "unfinished animal." But this distinction between other species and the human, this relationship of nonrelation, is open to be thought as the horizon from which human relations take their measure, and a relation acknowledged more and more as significant. How are these kinds of categories and restrictions related to your project, and what is there in your project that leads beyond, out of, or away from them? Or further in? Do any of her thoughts in this concluding chapter touch on new horizons emerging from your project?

- Strathern, Marilyn. 2020. "Conclusions: The Reinvention of Relation at Moments of Knowledge-Making." In *Relations: An Anthropological Account*, 167–189. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hage, Ghassan. 2012. "Critical Anthropological Thought and the Radical Political Imaginary Today." *Critique of Anthropology* 32(3): 285–308.
- Paerregaard, Kartsen. 2002. "The Resonance of Fieldwork. Ethnographers, Informants and the Creation of Anthropological Knowledge." *Social Anthropology* 10(3): 319–334.

Easter Vacation

Week 12 (Apr 13) Workshopping Completed Proposals I

See details for Assessment 3 above. See details for Assessment 3 above. Please be reminded that your draft proposal needs to be submitted to the Instructor by email 4 days prior to the seminar/workshop. Following the workshop proposals may be reworked for submission based on what has been learned from workshop discussion.

Week 13 (Apr 20), Workshopping Completed Proposals II

See details for Assessment 3 above. See details for Assessment 3 above. Please be reminded that your draft proposal needs to be submitted to the Instructor by email 4 days prior to the

seminar/workshop. Following the workshop proposals may be reworked for submission based on what has been learned from workshop discussion.

High-Level Research Writing:

A great selection of tips on writing from some very influential anthropologists can be found at Durham University’s “Writing on Writing” webpage.
<https://www.dur.ac.uk/writingacrossboundaries/writingonwriting/>

Additional Resources and Guides.

Atkinson, Paul, Amanda Coffey, Sara Delamont, John Lofland & Lyn Lofland, ed. 2001. *Handbook for Ethnography*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Baker, Therese L. 1999. “Defining, Designing, and Developing a Research Topic.” In *Doing Social Research*, 3e, 76–100. New York. McGraw Hill.

Bernard, H. Russell. 2006. *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 4e. Lanham: AltaMira.

Creswell, John W. 1998. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 2000. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2e. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

di Leonardo, Micaela ed. 1991. *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gardner, Andrew and David M. Hoffman ed. 2006. *Dispatches from the Field: Neophyte Ethnographers in a Changing World*. Long Grove: Waveland Press.

Maynes, Mary-Jo, Jennifer L. Pierce, Barbara Laslett, ed. 2008. *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Nordstrom, Carolyn and Antonius C.G.M. Robben. 1995. *Fieldwork Under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln & Linda Tuhiwai Smith. 2008. *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Ortner, S. B. 2006, *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject*. Duke University Press.

Grade descriptors are as follows for the assessment of this course:

Grade	Overall course
A	Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes.
A-	Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes.
B	Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, OR high performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.
C	Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses.
D	Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes.
F	Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements.