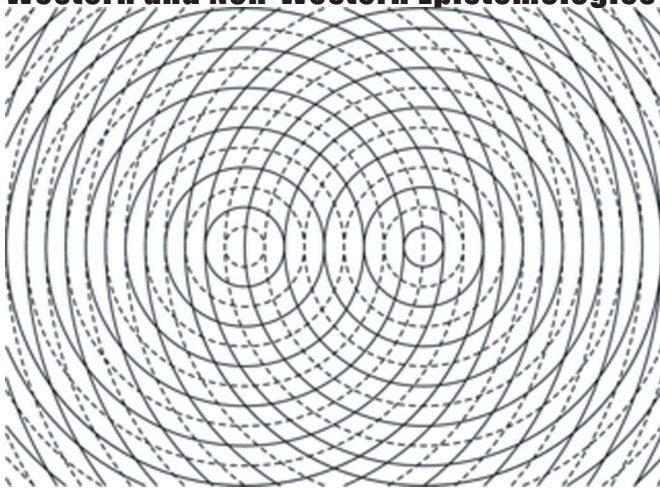Call for Participation

DIFFERENCES DIFFRACTIONS ASSEMBLAGES:
Western and Non-Western Epistemologies

Workshop with Helen Verran
(Melbourne University)

24 March, 2011

Knowledge production does not operate according to a single, universal logic. In our globalized postcolonial world we are faced with the challenge of finding forms of generalization that work as processes of translation between different rationalities. But how can we think about different rationalities without resorting to essentialism and/or relativism? How can we accommodate differences without reducing them to sameness? How do we conceptualize the relationship of knowledge/epistemology and reality/ontology?

Helen Verran has been posing and working through questions like these in her research. She proposes an alternative to both philosophical realism and social constructivism/relativism by conceiving of knowledge/knowledge making as performativity that co-produces reality (method assemblage). In her research with Australian Aborigines she argues that practices of knowledge making are embedded in collective memory that cannot be separated from the particular ways in which objects are culturally conceived of. At the same time she supports the Aborigines' use of electronic databases as a resource of collective memory. The two engagements can be seen as contradictory on first sight or as a way of resisting or interrupting Western epistemologies incorporated in electronic databases.

However, both contradiction and interruption imply the assumption of an essential difference between Western and non-Western epistemologies. Beyond these reifying views on cultural differences, Verran proposes alternative forms of generalization that allow for connected transformative movements in different knowledge traditions, and consequently for diffractions or assemblages of onto-epistemologies.

This workshop aims to explore the impact of Helen Verran's work on understanding ontology and epistemology.
Such a concept requires a close reading of her articles. Thus, we expect participants to do some reading before the workshop. This material as well as information about the exact venue will be sent to you after registering.

Please register informally no later than 15 March, 2011 by sending an email (with the subject "registration workshop with Helen Verran") to Hanna Meißner:
hanna.meissner@tu-berlin.de

No registration fees.

Prof Helen Verran

Helen Verran is a Reader in History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Melbourne, Australia.

With a background in the biological sciences Helen became interested in asking philosophical questions about the relations between the sciences and society while teaching science education at Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria during the 1980s. This puzzling eventually led to the publication of her prize-winning Science and an African Logic (2001).
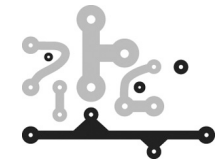
Returning to Australia near the end of the 1980s Helen began working in Aboriginal Australian communities in the Northern Territory amongst people who had fought for and secured legal ownership of their lands. Helen found herself diverted by a whole new set of puzzles. These concerned the attempts of scientists to work with groups of Aboriginal Australians determined to collectively retain their traditional knowledge practices and life ways.

More recently Helen has become interested in using the insights gained through working with Yoruba West African and Yolngu Aboriginal Australian thinkers to puzzle about how to go beyond European Enlightenment understandings in re-imagining knowing nature.

Technical University Berlin
Straße des 17. Juni 135
10623 Berlin

24 March, 2011
10.15 a.m.–1.00 p.m.
in room XXX

Organized by
Corinna Bath (Humboldt University Berlin) and
Hanna Meißner (Technical University Berlin)