

Seminar SAW

Rethinking Practice and Culture in the History of Science

organized by Koen Vermeir and the SAW project's group

Université Paris Diderot, Condorcet Building
room 366A - 9:30 am to 5:30 pm

<http://sawerc.hypotheses.org/seminars/practices>

Programme December 3rd, 2015 - Session 1

Readers and Speakers

Justin Smith, *How Can the Anthropology of Culture Help Us to Overcome the Bias of 'Civilisation' in Intellectual History?* *Lecture de Marshall Sahlins, Adam Kuper and Jack Goody*

Koen Vermeir, *Lecture de Koen Vermeir "Historicizing Culture. A Revaluation of Early Modern Science and Culture"*

Jonardon Ganeri, *Pluralism about Epistemic Cultures: Reflecting on the Sanskrit Knowledge Systems*

Karine Chemla, *Mathematical cultures in ancient China. Previous views and new insights*

Justin Smith (Université Paris Diderot, SPHERE)

How Can the Anthropology of Culture Help Us to Overcome the Bias of 'Civilisation' in Intellectual History?

Text readings of

Marshall Sahlins, "Goodbye to Tristes Tropes: Ethnography in the Context of Modern World History." Journal of Modern History 65 (1993): 3-4.

Adam Kuper, Culture: The Anthropologists' Account, Harvard University Press, 1999.

Jack Goody, The Eurasian Miracle, Wiley, 2010.

Koen Vermeir (SPHERE, CNRS & Université Paris Diderot)

Text reading of Koen Vermeir "Historicizing Culture. A Revaluation of Early Modern Science and Culture"

Jonardon Ganeri (New York University)

Pluralism about Epistemic Cultures: Reflecting on the Sanskrit Knowledge Systems

Abstract - "Epistemic cultures", says Karin Cetina in her seminal study of knowledge societies, are "cultures that create and warrant knowledge, and the premier knowledge institution throughout the world is, still, science". Although a pluralist about epistemic cultures Cetina is not a relativist or social constructivist about the world they explore. In my own work too I have sought to inhabit the elusive ground that respects epistemic pluralism but denies social constructivism. I have investigated the plurality of classical Indian philosophical *śāstras*, a *śāstra* being not merely a systematic representation of a network of ideas but a fluid disciplinary practice for the production of knowledge of a certain sort in a certain domain. They have been described as "Sanskrit knowledge systems", and since their concern is not only with the manufacture of a body of belief but with how such beliefs are warranted—how beliefs are argued for and what kinds of evidence can be provided—it seems entirely correct to describe them also as "epistemic cultures" in Cetina's sense. I will draw upon materials from within the tradition to defend a "plural realism": pluralism about epistemic cultures combined with realism about the world they investigate. I will argue that there is a convergence between this defence and recent work by Geoffrey Lloyd, Charles Taylor and Hubert Dreyfus, and I will show why the argument against epistemic pluralism put forward by Paul Boghossian in his influential book *Fear of Knowledge* does not succeed.

Karine Chemla (ERC Project SAW & SPHERE UMR 7219, CNRS & Université Paris Diderot)

Mathematical cultures in ancient China. Previous views and new insights

Abstract - In (Chemla 2016 Forthcoming, 2010, 2009), I have suggested an approach to "mathematical cultures", based on last decades of research on the history of mathematics in ancient China. I have also emphasized how these mathematical cultures changed over time, and suggested how these changes were characterized by a mixture of breaks and continuities. After four years of collective work in the context of SAW, my views on the phenomenon of mathematical cultures, and on the form it took in ancient China, have been transformed. In this talk, I intend to offer a sketch of both a general framework I suggest to approach mathematical cultures, and new insights I have gained over the last four years with respect to the mathematical documents written in China.

References

- Chemla, Karine. 2009. "Mathématiques et culture. Une approche appuyée sur les sources chinoises les plus anciennes (revision and translation of "Matematica e cultura nella Cina antica" by Delphine Vernerey)." In *La mathématique. 1. Les lieux et les temps*, edited by Claudio Bartocci and Piergiorgio Odifreddi, 103–152. Paris: Editions du CNRS.
- Chemla, Karine. 2010. "從古代中國數學的觀點探討知識論文化 (An approach to epistemological cultures from the vantage point of some mathematics of ancient China)." In 中國史新論科技史分冊：科技與中國社會 (*New views on Chinese history*, edited by 祝平— Chu Pingyi, 181-270. Taipei 台北: 聯經出版社 Lianjing Publisher.
- Chemla, Karine. 2016 Forthcoming. "Changing mathematical cultures, conceptual history and the circulation of knowledge. A case study based on mathematical sources from ancient China." In *Cultures without culturalism*, edited by K. Chemla and Evelyn Fox-Keller.