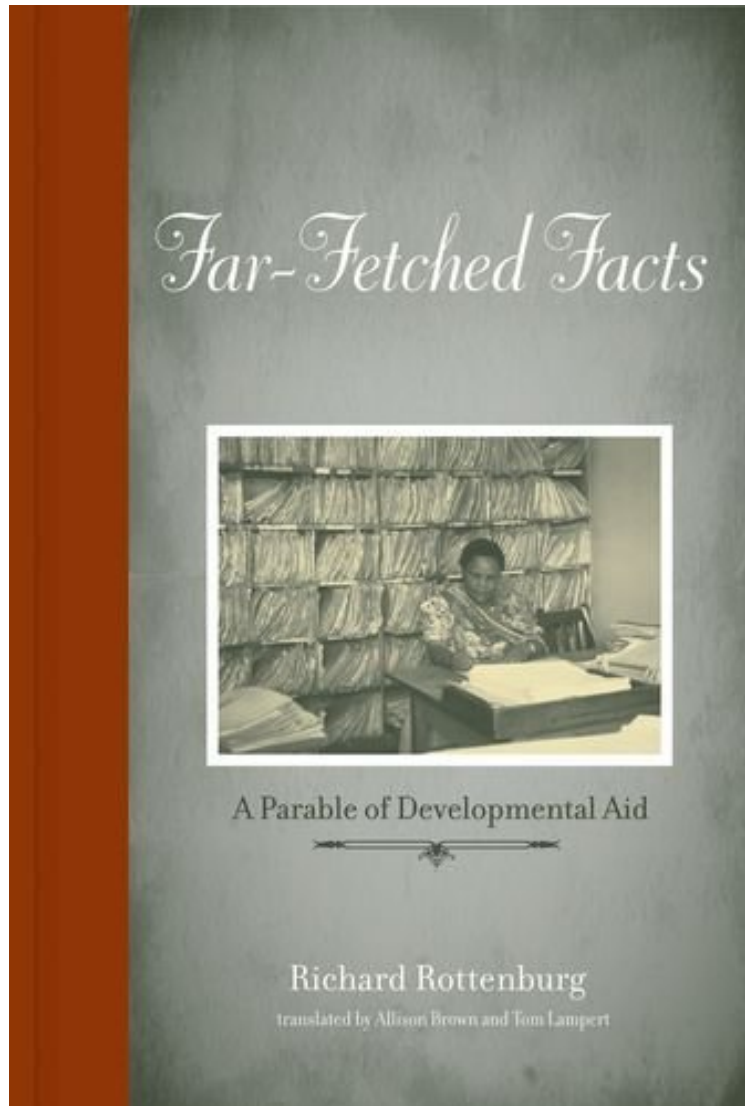


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## Far-Fetched Facts: A Parable of Development Aid (Inside Technology)

*Richard Rottenburg, Allison Brown, Tom Lampert*  
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**Richard Rottenburg, Allison Brown, Tom Lampert : Far-Fetched Facts: A Parable of Development Aid (Inside Technology)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Far-Fetched Facts: A Parable of Development Aid (Inside Technology):

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Imaginative and insightful scholarshipBy Andrew KThis is an extraordinarily incisive piece of organizational ethnography that should be read by not only development specialists but anyone interested in the fortunes of rationality in a global context. Rottenburg uses Latourian ideas (salted with Luhmannian insights) while addressing new institutionalist approaches to the study of organizational fields. Its main

contribution is its deft and nuanced account of how a development project was 'translated' across different institutional domains and actors, and how this process of translation led to disappointment compounded upon disappointment: a fate of many (and not just only) development projects. Though I was initially skeptical of Rottenburg's approach - which fictionalizes names, key details, places, etc. involved in the project he studied - the material makes it plain rather quickly how necessary this textual strategy is. I agree with Barbara Czarniawska's comparison of this work with Hirschman's *Development Projects Observed*: another book in which a keenly observant and wry sensibility working to great effect.<sup>3</sup> of 3 people found the following review helpful. A parable for our times  
By Czarniawska Barbara "Far-fetched facts" is the most important book written since Hirschman's "Development projects observed". Based on intimate knowledge of such projects, it shows, dispassionately, why these projects are doomed to fail in their present form. Yet the book is neither pessimistic nor are its insights limited to development projects only. Its conclusions can be applied to all projects undertaken in the contemporary multicultural world. Rottenburg suggests a pragmatist solution of the present impasse. By maintaining, consciously and temporarily, one illusion of the Enlightenment - of a language that signifies the actual world and is accessible to all who want to speak it - it is possible to reach understanding that can then be translated into local vocabularies. Apart from its important message, Richard Rottenburg's work is also a literary achievement. Using the rhetorical form of a parable, he is able to tell a story that transgresses disciplinary borders and renders interesting even the most mundane technicalities of a project. It is an accomplishment that may be difficult to imitate, but it is certainly worth admiration.

In 1996, the sub-Saharan African country of Ruritania launched a massive waterworks improvement project, funded by the Normesian Development Bank, headquartered in Urbania, Normland, and with the guidance of Shilling Partner, a consulting firm in Mercatoria, Normland. *Far-Fetched Facts* tells the story of this project, as narrated by anthropologists Edward B. Drotlevski and Samuel A. Martonosi. Their account of the Ruritanian waterworks project views the problems of development from a new perspective, focusing on technologies of inscription in the interactions of development bank, international experts, and local managers. This development project is fictionalized, of course, although based closely on author Richard Rottenburg's experiences working on and observing different development projects in the 1990s. Rottenburg uses the case of the Ruritanian waterworks project to examine issues of standardization, database building, documentation, calculation, and territory mapping. The techniques and technologies of the representational practices of documentation are crucial, Rottenburg argues, both to day-to-day management of the project and to the demonstration of the project's legitimacy. Five decades of development aid (or "development cooperation," as it is now sometimes known) have yielded disappointing results. Rottenburg looks in particular at the role of the development consultant (often called upon to act as mediator between the other actors) and at the interstitial spaces where developmental cooperation actually occurs. He argues that both critics and practitioners of development often misconstrue the grounds of cooperation -- which, he claims, are moral, legal, and political rather than techno-scientific or epistemological.

*Far-Fetched Facts* is a fascinating and thoughtful ethnographic analysis of developmental relations between the rich countries in the north and the poor countries in the south. Richard Rottenburg organizes his parabola of development aid around the central conflict of interests: the necessity for the donor countries to control the money flows, and the political goal of self-determination on the part of the recipients. The book combines ethnographic observation and critical reflection in an ideal fashion. (Hans-Joachim Rheinberger, Director, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin, and the author of *Toward a History of Epistemic Things*) The work is lucidly written and fluidly translated. Its modest objectives are both refreshing and realized. Sociologists of knowledge, anthropologists of science and technology, students of development, and historians of technology will all learn from this challenging and stimulating volume. (Steve Breyman Isis) About the Author Richard Rottenburg is Chair of Anthropology at the Institute for Anthropology and Philosophy at Martin-Luther University and a Max Planck Fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, where he heads the Law, Organization, Science, and Technology Research Group.