

THE ARCHAEOLOGY CENTRE PRESENTS

DEBATES IN ARCHAEOLOGY

EXPLORING
RELATIONAL,
ONTOLOGICAL,
AND POSTHUMAN
TURNS IN
ARCHAEOLOGY

OCTOBER 2-3, 2020
ARCHAEOLOGY CENTRE, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

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THEME

On the rise in contemporary archaeological theory is a radical new set of questions and debates concerning relationality, ontology, and posthumanism. Relational approaches look to the deep interconnections between people, things, and landscapes. Ontological approaches ask about the mind-independent nature of the world, the arbitrariness of the western gaze, and the possibility for radical difference. Finally, posthumanism questions human exceptionalism while asking archaeologists to move beyond the notion of the “default human” as a white western male.

The origins of these new approaches are multiple. Some derive from theoretical debate and critique within the discipline, while others emerged from a general dissatisfaction with the colonial roots and tendencies of archaeology (Deloria 1969, 1995). Bjørnar Olsen’s (2003) critique of post-processual archaeology and his call to “re-member” things provides an early example of the former. Thus, a host of new questions has arisen about relations, things, and the status of the human in our work. Emerging from the latter tension were calls to diversify, decolonize, and Indigenize the discipline, leading to increased attention on Indigenous expertise, knowledge, sensitivities, and interests while scrutinizing the discipline’s Enlightenment-inherited defaults. These theoretical developments raised new concerns over relationality, more-than-human approaches to the past, and, crucially, western appropriation of Indigenous concepts (Todd 2016).

In the end, the symposium focuses on the relationship between these new but different directions, a complex and often unexplored dimension of archaeological theory (cf. Tallbear 2014). Speakers will take into account multiple perspectives on relationality, ontology, and posthumanism from within archaeology and anthropology in order to better situate these lines of theory in contemporary thought and practice.

Referenced Cited

- Deloria, Jr., Vine. 1969. *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Deloria, Jr., Vine. 1997. *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and The Myth of Scientific Fact*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum.
- Olsen, Bjørnar. 2003. *Material Culture After Text: Re-membering Things*. *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 36(2):87-104.
- Tallbear, Kim. 2014. *Standing With and Speaking as Faith: A Feminist-Indigenous Approach to Inquiry*. *Journal of Research Practice* 10(2): 1-8.
- Todd, Zoe. 2016. *An Indigenous Feminist’s Take on The Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ is Just Another Word for Colonialism*. *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29(1):4-22.

SCHEDULE

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 2

KENYNOTE LECTURES

1:00 - 3:30 PM ET/ 11:00 AM - 1:30 PM MT/ 6:00 - 8:30 PM UK

ONTOLOGIES OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL COLLABORATION

Benjamin Alberti, Framingham State University

RELATIONALITY IS NOT A METAPHOR: ENACTING WAHKOHTOWIN AND KÎHOKEWIN THROUGH MÉTIS ARCHAEOLOGY

Kisha Supernant, University of Alberta, Director, Institute of Prairie and Indigenous Archaeology

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3

PANEL PAPERS

10:00 AM - 12:00 PM ET/ 8:00 - 10 AM MT/ 3:00 - 5:00 PM UK

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY RELATIONAL ANYWAY?

Oliver Harris, University of Leicester

BYZANTINE BREAD STAMPS: IMPRINT, IMMATERIALITY AND THE SACRED THROUGH THE ONTOLOGICAL TURN

Sophie Moore, Newcastle University

LUNCH BREAK 12:00 - 1:00 PM ET

PANEL PAPERS

1:00 - 3:00 PM ET/ 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM MT/ 6:00 - 8:00 PM UK

A POSTHUMANIST, FEMINIST APPROACH TO POWER

Rachel Crellin, University of Leicester

IN SEARCH OF DIFFERENT PASTS

Craig N. Cipolla, Royal Ontario Museum, and University of Toronto

COFFEE BREAK 3:00 - 3:15 ET

PANEL PAPERS

3:15 - 4:15 PM ET/ 1:15 - 2:15 MT/ 8:15 - 9:15 PM

INDIGENIZING ARCHAEOLOGY THEORY THROUGH SLIPSTREAM THINKING AND TRICKSTER HERMENEUTICS

Lindsay M. Montgomery, University of Arizona



ABSTRACTS

ONTOLOGIES OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL COLLABORATION

Benjamin Alberti, Framingham State University

There is a tension between generalized metaphysical approaches to the ontological turn in archaeology and approaches that draw on particular Indigenous metaphysics. The former inevitably subsumes the latter, a move that the latter clearly seeks to avoid. But are claims to be taking seriously Indigenous thought free from problematic colonial politics? In this talk, I address the question, What are the political implications of the type of theorizing I do? That is, what position am I adopting when I make a claim such as, “We need to treat Indigenous thought as fully theoretical”? Is such a claim a continuation of colonial, intellectual expropriation, subject to Zoe Todd’s warning that “ontology” is just another word for “colonialism”?

In response, I explore what collaboration in archaeology means when it comes to theorizing ontological questions. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro famously argued for the “ontological self-determination of the world’s peoples.” I am not in a position to help liberate anybody from their ontological chains. It goes without saying that transformative collaboration must happen, that the disciplinary reform it engenders and violence it counters are of utmost importance. Nevertheless, it may be important to maintain a distinction between intellectual engagement and other kinds of collaboration. Ironically, their elision and the insistence on one type of collaboration may stymie transformative encounters in the same way that generalized metaphysical accounts threaten to.



RELATIONALITY IS NOT A METAPHOR:
ENACTING WAHKOHTOWIN AND KÎHOKEWIN THROUGH MÉTIS
ARCHAEOLOGY

Kisha Supernant, University of Alberta, Director, Institute of Prairie and
Indigenous Archaeology

Much previous research on the archaeology and history of the Métis in Canada has focused on mixedness, hybridity, and creolization as a defining feature of Métis culture and identity. When I embarked on developing the Exploring Métis Identity Through Archaeology (EMITA) project in 2012, I too framed the research questions around ethnogenesis and hybrid material culture. However, over the past few years, engaging with the material culture and landscapes of my ancestors, alongside my deepening connections to living relatives, has shifted my thinking about my relationship to my Métis identity and the belongings of my ancestors. In this talk, I outline the tenets of a Métis theoretical approach to understanding the archaeological record, grounded in two Cree concepts: wahkohtowin (interrelatedness) and kîhokewin (visiting). Drawing on examples from excavations of Métis wintering sites over the past 5 years, I discuss the implications of these concepts for how I excavate, analyse, interpret, and care for the belongings of my ancestors and what it means to be in good relation. In my work as a Métis archaeologist, relationality is not a metaphor; it is a lived, embodied experience that connects me to the past, present, and future.



IN SEARCH OF DIFFERENT PASTS

Craig N. Cipolla, Royal Ontario Museum, and University of Toronto

In this paper, I divide ontological approaches in archaeology into four different lines of thought, focused respectively on worldviews, relations, objects, and worlds. I consider the relative strengths and weaknesses of each of these lines of thought, particularly as they relate to politically engaged North American collaborative archaeologies. I then bring these ontological arguments into critical dialogue with a variety of Indigenous thinkers in North America, including Sonya Atalay, Vine Deloria Jr., Zoe Todd, and Gerald Vizenor. I conclude with thoughts on how these different ways of thinking support broader efforts to reduce Eurocentrism in the discipline and open up archaeology to a much broader set of sensitivities, interests, and needs.

A POSTHUMANIST, FEMINIST APPROACH TO POWER

Rachel Crellin, University of Leicester

Power is traditionally viewed as something that subjects exercise over objects, and it is a critical political vector with obvious social and historical significance. In our own world we ignore power at our peril. Yet, all too frequently today power is understood to be exercised by male subjects over a multitude of increasingly powerless objects; objects including things, plants, and animals, but also women, minorities, and the less privileged. How then do we approach the subject of power when working within a relational and posthumanist frame that rejects the notion of clearly defined and bounded subjects and objects and seeks to critique the notion of human exceptionalism? What is power if it is not something that humans exercise over less-powerful others?

Posthumanist and relational approaches have attracted criticism and critique for their perceived failure to engage with power and, as a result, the political. We hear people ask: how can we demonstrate care and compassion for less privileged humans if we are busy extending agency and power to non-humans? Posthumanism, with many of its roots in feminist theory, calls us to pick up Foucault's baton and explore alternative ways to understand power. By opening up new understandings of power we make space to imagine not only new pasts but also new presents. This paper explores what it means to talk about power and to be political through posthumanist philosophy.



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY RELATIONAL ANYWAY?

Oliver Harris, University of Leicester

When an archaeologist says they are taking a relational approach, what does that actually mean? What are relations, and what role do they play in our interpretations and explorations of the past? Since the 1990s archaeologists have increasingly emphasized the importance of relations, yet these central questions often remain unexamined. In this paper, I explore archaeological approaches to relations, and argue these can be divided up into three broad categories: relations as epistemology; relations as methodology; and relations as metaphysics. In turn I suggest we need to do more to describe and characterize relations, and to do so we need a new vocabulary emphasizing their intensive, differential, and affective qualities. Drawing primarily on the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, this paper explores how we might offer a more specific account of what relations do in archaeology.

INDIGENIZING ARCHAEOLOGY THEORY THROUGH SLIPSTREAM THINKING AND TRICKSTER HERMENEUTICS

Lindsay M. Montgomery, University of Arizona

Over the past decade, archaeologists, especially those working in North America, have turned their attention towards Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies in an effort to develop alternative theoretical and methodological approaches to the material record. The result has been the proliferation of a variety of new historical accounts which emphasize Indigenous agency, resistance, persistence, and resilience. These presentencing narratives explicitly deconstruct and combat epistemic forms of settler colonial amnesia which erase Indigenous people, places, and stories. Building on these efforts, this talk will draw on the work on Anishinabe scholar Gerald Vizenor to propose an alternative model of archaeological thought rooted in Indigenous survivance. At its core, survivance is an “active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion” and can be actualized through Indigenous storytelling (Vizenor 2008: 1). Specifically, Vizenor’s concepts of Native slipstreaming—anon-linear way of thinking through cultural tensions—and trickster hermeneutics—oral textual, healing, and comic forms of discourse—offer two radical means of Indigenizing archaeological thought and praxis. Such a theoretical model repositions archaeologists as listeners rather than narrators of Indigenous histories and requires cultural grounding in the local epistemological and ontological systems of the storytellers.

Vizenor, Gerald. 2008. Aesthetics of Survivance: Literary Theory and Practice. In *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*, edited by Gerald Vizenor, pp. 1-24. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln.



BYZANTINE BREAD STAMPS: IMPRINT, IMMATERIALITY AND THE SACRED THROUGH THE ONTOLOGICAL TURN

Sophie Moore, Newcastle University

This paper shows how engaging with the ontological turn can open-up conversations in unexpected places. Taking a relational approach to the development of the Byzantine Orthodox tradition through a case study of bread stamps as proto-icons I will explore the potential for seeking radical difference in a past that is fluidly cast by sub-disciplines of Byzantine Studies as either entirely removed from, or absolutely integral to, the development of the 'western gaze'. Bread stamps in Byzantium sit at the intersection of sacred and secular material culture. The use of leavened bread in the Byzantine eucharist implies a unique material potential for movement between the quotidian universality of food and the development of the deepest mysteries of the early Christian church. Applying aspects of both the ontological turn in archaeology and a phenomenological approach to material culture to bread-stamps affords a nuanced avenue of exploration into how a long-term tradition of stamping bread was caught up in the developing traditions of icon production and the significance of haptic vision to byzantine concepts of materiality and immateriality.

Stamping bread in the Early Christian world has been described by Beatrice Caseau as an act which transformed loaves into blessing bearers "porteurs de benediction" (2014:615). Common throughout the first millennium AD as both quotidian and ritual objects, bread stamps and stamped bread articulate the presence of the divine in the every-day. My exploration of the relationships between icon, imprint and sacredness through bread stamps seeks to explore stamps as proto-icons through an ontological lens. Following Pentcheva's 2014 definition of icon as "a surface that has received the imprint of divine form" I will raise the question of how everyday imprints (in a cultural world full of seals, stamps and surfaces) relate to more formal icons and allows us to ask whether bread stamps can give us insight into a Byzantine ontology.