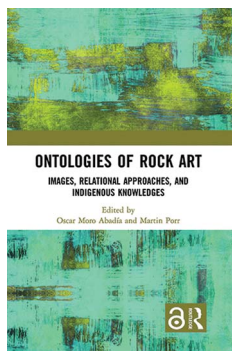


OSCAR MORO ABADÍA & MARTIN PORR (ed.). 2021. *Ontologies of rock art: images, relational approaches, and Indigenous knowledges*. Abingdon: Routledge; 978-0-367-33780-3 hardback £120.



This book has a Foreword, Introduction and 20 papers by 48 named contributors. There are 90 figures and one table. Despite being about ‘Indigenous knowledges’, only two of the papers have authors who identify as Indigenous. There are 18 authors from Australia, nine from the USA, six from Canada, and one from South Africa (all countries with significant Indigenous populations), six from England, three from France, two from Spain and one each from three other countries. Nowadays, how can a book that addresses ‘Indigenous knowledges’ and has majority contributions from three colonised countries have only two papers with Indigenous authors? Indigenous woman Zoe Todd (2016) wrote that “Ontology [is] just another word

for colonialism”. Does this book do anything to dispel that idea? Elsewhere there was a debate about whether “ontology is just another word for culture” (Carrithers *et al.* 2010). Do these questions about ontologies arise in Indigenous societies, or, indeed, among the non-humans that some ontologists insist have the same worldviews as humans?

There is a very thoughtful introductory chapter by the editors that seeks to relate ontology with alterity (another word needing definition—is ‘Otherness’ good enough?) and expose the pernicious ranking of societies imposed by ideas of progress that the powerful thought they had over ‘primitives’. Moro Abadía and Porr (p. 11) join Alberti in recognising, in his focus on ‘alterity’, that ontology is “often synonymous either with reality itself, ‘what there is’, or people’s claims about reality” (Alberti 2016: 164). Many social institutions, including rock art, are ways of defining relations of power, and these, in turn, define an Out-group as Other than an In-group. Where you are determines who is Other. For example, the Foreword by Fowles and Alberti explores the implications of considering the Black Lives Matter movement as Other. Academia tends to define everyone else as Other—*they* have ontologies, not us. I am not convinced. Culture, ontology and Otherness are slightly different for each individual due to the unique developmental processes by which we learned them. *We* have them too.

The papers are grouped into four parts: I) Philosophical and historical perspectives; II) Rock art and Indigenous knowledges; III) Humans, animals and more-than-human beings; and IV) Syncretism, contact and contemporary rock art. I comment about one paper from each section and one other. That will introduce the archaeology of another species and rock art of three countries with large Indigenous populations. None of these papers includes Indigenous authorship.

Moro Abadía and Chase consider ontological ways to view the Palaeolithic art of Iberia, and the possibility that some of this art was made by the non-human species Neanderthals

(Chapter I.4). They depend heavily on theory from Viveiros de Castro. The relationship between Neanderthals and humans was different in behaviour, location and time—but anthropological theory is not good at dealing with time, as the authors explore. They conclude, perhaps brilliantly, that Neanderthals were just different from modern humans in their ways of being.

Porr writes about the ontology of images of the *WanjinaWuhggur* tradition, of Australia's Kimberley Region (Chapter II.8). Aboriginal beliefs about these images are themselves complicated and open to change. Anthropological theory of ontology is also complicated. I am not convinced that the combination by an outsider clarifies anything without including an Aboriginal author. Porr gets close to the issue, I think, in recognising that art is not everything, but people give it agency through the “narratives and stories” (p. 190) they relate. It is through the interaction of people, the stories, and the objects they paint, that the images are “Energies that keep us alive”, in Mowaljarlai's phrase published in *Antiquity* (1988, cited as his on p. 190).

Parkington and de Prada-Samper explore elephant/human images in the Olifants River region, South Africa (Chapter III.10) in a paper that is light on use of the word ‘ontology’ and does not cite any of the trinity of Descola, Latour or Viveiros de Castro. Instead, the authors go back to the work of Bleek and Lloyd, whose nineteenth century ethnographic texts inspired both the work of Vinnicombe on medicine-men (1976) and then Lewis-Williams (who switched to calling them ‘shamans’ in 1985). Most importantly, the authors use the ethnography and Biesele's work to guide interpretation that always has people telling stories about their relationships with elephants. “There seems little doubt that, in the Kalahari, at least, elephants reminded humans of themselves” (p. 238). Well, the elephants were not doing any reminding: the people did that.

Boyd describes the analysis of the imagery of the Pecos River-style (Chapter III.11), beginning with a truly amazing encounter with Matsihua, a Huichol from 600km away in Central Mexico, who could relate to the White Shaman panel painted 4000 years ago in Texas (just). We should all read this. Even Boyd's brilliant disentanglement of the symbols here does no more than make them interpretable in Nahua and Huichol mythology. It is people who learn those meanings and interpret them. That she and Matsihua reached connected points says no more than that people can disentangle the symbols and that the painting lays them out with the correct relationships. Even this is exciting, though, because it suggests that the detailed mythology of the Huichol was represented 4000 years ago at White Shaman.

Whitridge and Williamson (also avoiding the trinity) tackle graffiti from the Cold War in Newfoundland, Canada (Chapter IV.16), after history and literature review of the archaeology of graffiti. I am not sure they succeed in making the case that graffiti-marking is like cave and rock art elsewhere, but the argument is worth considering. After all, most of the work is done by segments of society—Others—who are themselves relatively powerless and ontologically different from others in the society.

If the past is another country, all archaeologists are from somewhere else, and confronting alterity and the ontologies of past or present societies other than our own requires archaeology

to confront fundamental questions about why we study the past. We must develop our own theories that will allow us to see that ontologies are not restricted to Indigenous people.

References

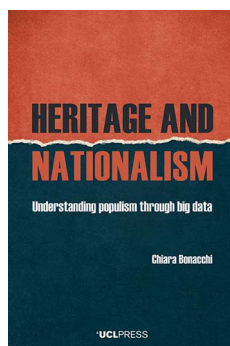
- ALBERTI, B. 2016. Archaeologies of ontology. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 45: 163–79. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102215-095858>
- CARRITHERS, M. *et al.* 2010. Ontology is just another word for culture: motion tabled at the 2008 meeting of the group for debates in anthropological theory, University of Manchester. *Critique of Anthropology* 30: 152–200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X09364070>
- LEWIS-WILLIAMS, J.D. 1985 The San artistic achievement. *African Arts* 18(3): 54–59 & 100. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3336356>
- MOWALJARLAI, D., P. VINNICOMBE, G.K. WARD & C. CHIPPINDALE. 1988. Repainting of images on rock in Australia and the maintenance of Aboriginal culture. *Antiquity* 62: 690–96. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00075086>
- TODD, Z. 2016 An Indigenous feminist’s take on the ontological turn: ‘ontology’ is just another word for colonialism. *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29: 4–22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12124>
- VINNCOMBE, P. 1976 *People of the eland: rock paintings of the Drakensberg bushmen as a reflection of their life and thought*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.

IAIN DAVIDSON

Emeritus Professor of Archaeology,
University of New England, Armidale, Australia
✉ Iain.Davidson@live.com.au

ANTIQUITY 2022 Vol. 96 (389): 1351–1353
<https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2022.105>

CHIARA BONACCHI. 2022. *Heritage and nationalism: understanding populism through big data*. London: UCL Press; 978-1-78735-803-4 hardback £40.



Humanity has long drawn on the past to make sense of, and negotiate, a challenging present. In our increasingly connected digital world it stands to reason that there might be parallels and congruities in how the ancient past is mobilised for contemporary political legitimisation in multiple national and international contexts. Bonacchi’s approach draws on big data to examine how aspects of the past may appear in populist and nationalist discourse on social media. This is the first “systematic analysis of the international currency of the repertoire of objects, places, people and practices within populist nationalist speech that relate to the Iron Age, Roman and post-Roman heritage of contemporary Europe” (p. 170). Bonacchi’s work, in fact, spreads beyond Europe (where the focus is on Italy and the UK) to the United States, considering the leveraging of the same Roman past in debates about immigration during the Trump presidency. This monograph is the latest output of the AHRC-funded *Ancient Identities in*

© The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Antiquity Publications Ltd.