

FEAR OF ONTOLOGICAL WOLVES: COLLABORATIVE INDIGENOUS ARCHAEOLOGY, COLONIALISM, AND THE PROSPECTS FOR AN “ONTOLOGICAL” TURN



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In this talk I offer a critical assessment of ontological questions in archaeology and anthropology. I do so from the perspective of recent collaborative Indigenous archaeological research and pedagogy in New England and Ontario. Drawing directly on the works of various ontological thinkers and bringing them into dialogue with different forms of Indigenous knowledge and practice, I outline the advantages that ontological questions offer archaeologists who work with Indigenous communities and who strive to decolonize our discipline. I also place emphasis on my fears and anxieties, what I see as the shortcomings and omissions of the ontological turns. These relate directly to certain arguments for dissolving or—in my opinion—glossing over the meta-ontological moorings of the archaeologist in favor of multiple ontologies and new explorations of alterity. Using archaeological examples to illustrate my points, I explain why I find these proposed ontological leaps both challenging and potentially colonial. I conclude by outlining the ways in which collaborative Indigenous archaeologies and “ontological” archaeologies stand to benefit from closer engagements with one another.

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