

---

# The Significance of Semantics: The Ontological Trouble with Terms

Margaret Conkey\*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of California [Berkeley] (UCB) – Berkeley, CA, États-Unis

## Résumé

In this paper, I want to try to probe into the ways in which the use of specific terms has predisposed us to certain ways of doing our research and certain kinds of interpretations. This will be addressed in particular with regard to the term of "art" as it has been used to refer to not only the material forms of the Paleolithic period in Europe but to the material culture/materiality of other hunting-gathering groups. What do we know about the history of the use of the term, "art", what ontological presuppositions have underlain its use, and how it is has and has not structured the resultant approaches to its study and interpretation? What have we missed by using this term, and how has it enabled certain interpretive directions? Is the debate over its use a distraction or useful itself? This will be considered in relation to specific examples from various of the Paleolithic "arts".

**Mots-Clés:** semantics, ontologies, Paleolithic art, interpretation

---

\*Intervenant