



SCUOLA SUPERIORE DI STUDI UMANISTICI



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Creative *thinging*: How Things Shape the Mind

What kind of being are we? This is probably the kind of general question that an anthropologist should be able to answer. The short answer I would like to propose in this lecture is the following: *Humans are situated creative organisms*. My basic thesis is simple: Humans evolve by creating new things, embodied practices, technics and modes of collaboration which in turn transform our minds, our experience of selfhood, and the ways we sense of the world. Humans construct signs, draw lines and leave memory traces. Importantly, they maintain a transactional and creative relationship with other beings (human and non-human) that surrounds them. This applies to the modern forager of digital information as it applies to the Palaeolithic hunter-gatherer and tool-maker. There is nothing in our genes, as there is nothing in our cultures that can explain that. Instead, we need to look at the lived space 'in-between', that is, the space where brain, body and culture conflate. This openness of the human mind to what can be described better as a form of Bergsonian creative evolution, rather than Darwinian natural selection, is one of the distinctive features of our species' ability to evolve. I call that special feature of human becoming *metaplasticity*; and as I will explain in this lecture it operates by means of creative material engagement. We are plastic creatures inextricably intertwined with the plasticity of forms that we make.

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