



Hertford College
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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I am writing in response to the advertisement for a **VISITING FELLOWSHIP POSITION FOR THE PERIOD 1-30 SEPTEMBER 2024 at the “Umberto Eco” International Centre for Humanistic Studies Institute of Advanced Studies**. I am Professor of Cognitive and Anthropological Archaeology at the Institute of Archaeology and Fellow at Hertford College, University of Oxford. Between 2010 and 2018 I have been Research and Teaching Fellow in Creativity, Cognition and Material Culture and Tutor in archaeology, anthropology, and human evolution at Keble where I have been also leading (with Chris Gosden) the Creativity research cluster. Before coming to Oxford, I was Balzan Research Fellow in Cognitive Archaeology at the University of Cambridge where I also completed my doctorate in cognitive archaeology (2005, Darwin College) supervised by Colin Renfrew.

My main field of research is cognitive and anthropological archaeology. My primary interest lies in material semiotics and the study of the interaction between cognition and material culture. I am studying the effects of materiality in human cognitive life (past and present). A major aspect of my work has been the development of Material Engagement Theory (MET) which forms the basis of my first authored book, [How Things Shape the Mind](#) (MIT Press, 2013). I have been addressing empirical and theoretical questions on topics extending from early stone tools and personal decoration, to the emergence of symbolic technologies of more recent periods, to the latest innovations in digital techniques and media. A second monograph, *An Anthropological Guide to the Art and Philosophy of Mirror Gazing*, co-authored with Maria Danae Koukouti was published with Bloomsbury in 2020 (<https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/an-anthropological-guide-to-the-art-and-philosophy-of-mirror-gazing-9781350135154/>).

In March 2024 I completed and submitted the manuscript of my new book *People are STRANGE: The Making of Human Consciousness* (to be published with MIT Press). I am also currently working on another monograph *Handmade: Understanding Creative Gesture in Pottery Making* (co-authored with Maria Danae Koukouti) which constitutes the principle deliverable of the ERC HANDMADE project and is under contract for publication with Bloomsbury Academic.

My approach to research and teaching has been cross-disciplinary (both by inclination and training) combining perspectives from anthropology, archaeology, philosophy, embodied cognitive sciences and neuroscience as well as speaking to contemporary concerns. My work critically examines many deeply entrenched assumptions about the boundaries, ontology, and evolution of the human mind, by taking a process-centred approach and focusing on the intersection between neural and cultural plasticity. I have been trying to understand and to articulate the basic principles of the creative entanglement between the plasticity of the human mind and the plasticity of the material forms and techniques that we make (metaplasticity).

Since 2018 I am PI to [HANDMADE: Understanding Creative Gesture in Pottery Making](#) funded through a European Research Council (ERC) Consolidator Grant. The HANDMADE project is focusing on the cognitive ecology and poetics of clay. HANDMADE attempts a comparative anthropological exploration of the creative dialogue between hands and clay through multi-sited participant observation in several traditional ceramic workshops spread around mainland Greece and the Islands.