

DSV Seminars 2018



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI TRIESTE

DIPARTIMENTO DI
SCIENZE DELLA VITA

PhD Program in Neural and Cognitive Sciences

Monday, May 14, 2018 - 2:30pm

Emiciclo, Q Building – Via L. Giorgieri, 5

Trix CACCHIONE

Institute of Psychology
University of Bern

Invited by Dr. Cinzia Chiandetti

Essentialism and trans-temporal identity judgment in human infants and great apes

Human reasoning is characterized by psychological essentialism. In reasoning about objects we distinguish between deep essential properties that define the objects' kind and identity and superficial properties that objects of a given kind usually share such as their appearance. If you change essential properties, you change the objects' identity. Superficial properties, in contrast, can be changed without altering the identity of the object in question. Painting a tiger like a crocodile, e.g., does not turn it into a crocodile.

Essentialist reasoning has been amply documented in adults and older children from age four (Cimpian et al., in press; Gelman, 2003; Keil, 1982). Little is known so far, however, about the roots of psychological essentialism, both ontogenetically and phylogenetically. In particular, it is unclear whether psychological essentialism is based on the acquisition of linguistic means (such as kind terms) and is therefore uniquely human, or whether it is a more fundamental cognitive capacity possible without language. In a series of experiments we addressed this question in human infants and non-human apes. In particular, we explored whether sortal object individuation in these subjects already involves essentialist modes of thinking.

