Online European Summer Research Institute (ESRI) 2020

'Grounding Knowledge in Uncertainty'

"*Experience of certainty is an individual phenomenon blind to the cognitive acts of others, in a solitude which (…) is transcended only in a world created with those others.*"
(Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela)

The pandemic as a state of uncertainty
The current situation of a global pandemic confronts us with a state of uncertainty. Fixed beliefs are suddenly questioned, deeply rooted societal priorities are re-negotiated, the processual and provisional character of science and the complex interconnectedness of reality become more visible. And in a very practical sense, lockdowns and social distancing urge us to find new ways to lead our lives and build connections.

For a long time, contemplative traditions have sought ways of intentionally orienting oneself towards the unknown. Similarly, some thinkers in philosophy, biology and in the cognitive sciences have emphasized the need to bracket the known and acknowledge the uncertainty of existence. Accordingly, such suspension of preconception opens new possibilities of understanding, insight and transformation.

What does knowledge and reality mean in the face of a pandemic?
ESRI 2020 intends to be an invitation to approach the topic of knowledge without falling into – or falling back to – the temptation of certainty. Our invitation is to recognise the uncertainty that emerges from the current pandemic, including its lockdowns and social distancing, as an opportunity to rebuild together, in a new way, our reality. The call is for us to reconstruct our world(s) in the direction of sustainability, deep participation, and responsible interdependence.

ESRI 2020
Thus we are designing ESRI 2020 as an experiment. Our idea is to use the technologies that in these extraordinary times keep us in touch as the means to explore the richness and creativity of uncertainty. Accordingly, we will dedicate ESRI 2020 to create a community engaged in proposing, experiencing and investigating new forms of being and creating meaning to confront the challenges ahead.

Together we will address questions such as how do we perceive? How does emotion participate in cognition? How do we think about the relationships between brain, body and world, self and other, mind and technology? How can we use technology to deepen our self-knowledge and to enhance our unity and self-development? In this exceptional period, how can our answers to these questions help to ground ourselves in the midst of uncertainty, while creatively engaging with our world?