



**Research Seminar Series on Ethical Issues for  
the Practice as Research Network**

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**Ethics-Research-Practice:  
Two is company, three is a crowd**



**How can we understand ethics, research and practice from a systemic point of view? How does “aesthetics” clarify (if it does) the intertwining relationship of the three?**

**A tour de force has been unfolding during the last four decades where professionals of mental health, researchers and educators have been opening up the dialogue on ethics, practice and research from an epistemic and ontological point of view.**

**It seems that unless we contextualize the meaning of these ideas in a systemic epistemology we, as professionals, will be losing the great significance of their connections by focusing on the divided, Cartesian way of understanding them.**

**May the tour go on..**

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- **But how?**
  - **Systemic epistemology looks for connections.**
  - **Ethics: Ethical codes are guidelines for what therapists/researchers can and cannot do.**
  - **However they are ambiguous by design.**
  - **They are not static; they are formed inside of a context.**



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- A dark grey arrow points to the right from the top left corner. Below it, several thin, curved lines in shades of blue and grey sweep across the left side of the slide.
- **How ethical are ethics?**
  - **How guiding or guided are the guidelines?**

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- **1970s The Belmont Report to protect people from human research.**
  - **Practice is a word which produces a differentiation between meaning and sense, concept and expression, ethic and aesthetic (Barbetta et al., 2022).**
  - **As a concept, practice has to do with ethics; as an expression, it deals with living experience (*aesthesis which means sensory, perceptual and corporeal experience*) (ibid, p. 2)**

# “Grandmother cell theory”



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- **We live by engaging, relating, making sense of our experience.**
  - **Ethics/Research/Therapy are epistemological and ontological entities; how we live, understand, and engage with the world (Barbetta et al, 2022).**
  - **Systemically speaking we, as researchers and practitioners, need to move in between different territories of knowledge and action: biology, neurology, neurobiology, mathematics, quantum physics, sociology, ethology, social anthropology, psychiatry, the Arts.**
  - **The reality is that life is a connection between all these subjects.**

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- **Gunter Schiepek et al defined systemic research as a theoretical and methodological approach that measures, analyses and models the structures and functioning of complex dynamic systems at a biological, mental and social level.**
  - **Biopsychosocial agents, influence and are being influenced by internal & external environment(s).**
  - **As long as we hold these concepts divided, we will be having trouble capturing their essence.**

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- **Ecosystems/humans are part of**
  - **2<sup>nd</sup> order cybernetics: a complex system observing a complex system (Nora Bateson, 2022).**
  - **Observing—reflecting**
  - **We need an ongoing reflecting search for the multiple senses of reality (Barbetta, et al.)**

► Maturana & Varela (1984), us being part of an ecological thinking system and being able to reflect upon our actions, their consequences and their embedded in a relational context.

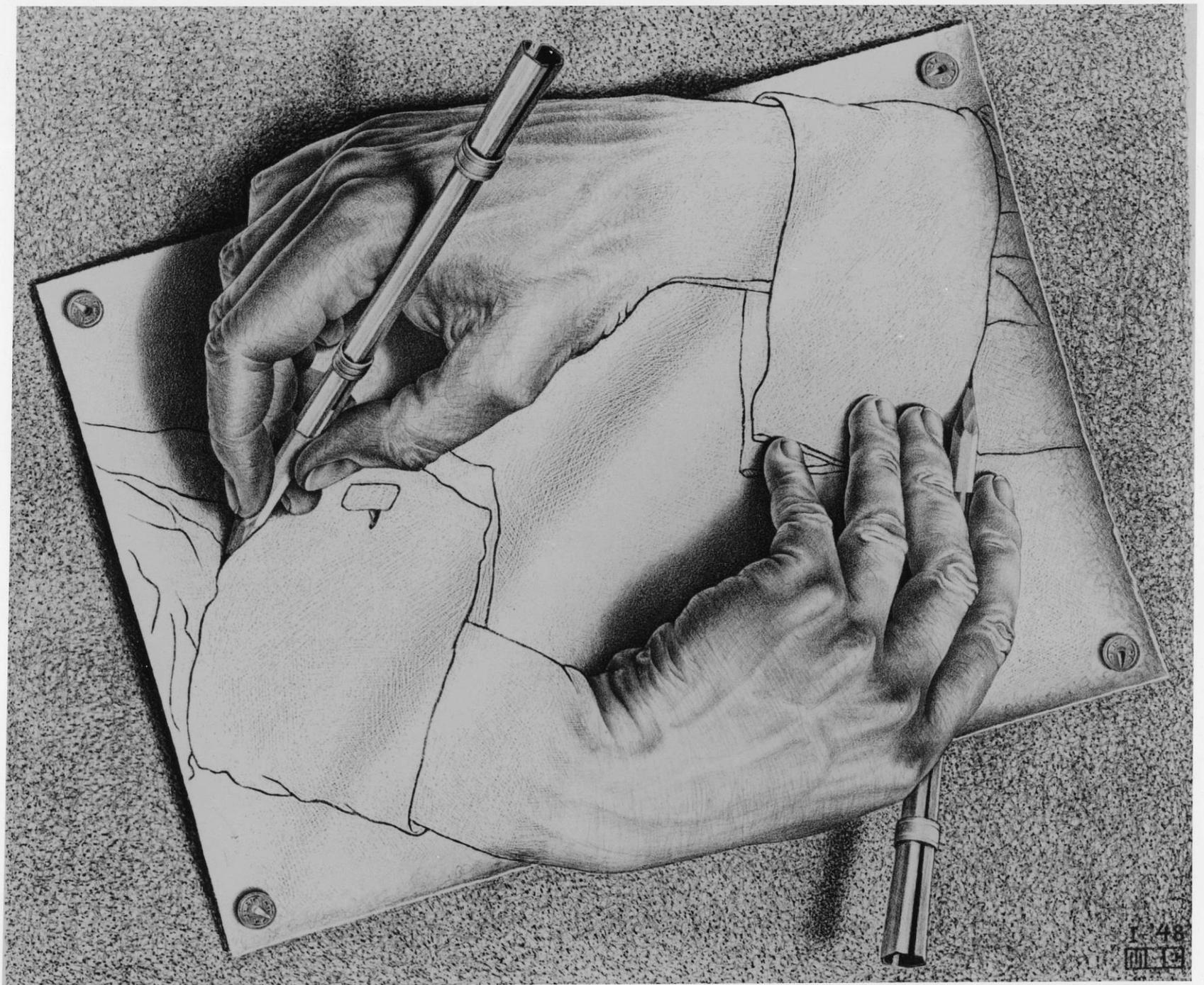
► the New York Zoo, Bronx, 1963.

inscription: “the most dangerous animal in the world”.



**M.C. Escher the most popular image maker of the 20th century**

**One of E. clearest explorations of the illusionism implicit in representational art, as the line between two-dimensional drawing and three-dimensional reality are cleverly at play**



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- **William James supported the method of reflection as a research tool in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but it was quickly put aside as a research tool because it created a long battle among professionals over its accountability.**
  - **Reason being that it showed the difference between hypothesis and actual results. Instead of looking back/re-examining the hypotheses, the professionals started accusing each other over the methodology they used. (Capra, 2002)**

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- **Maturana & Varela: living systems are primarily mind-ful systems and the process of living is a process of cognition, a process of relating (1984, p.33).**
  - **Science of becoming (Cecchin et al, 2005, von Foerster, 1995)**
  - **Becoming---hold on to ambiguity, un-usual, difference that makes a difference (Bateson, 1979, Foucault, 2001)**
  - **How different research would be if we were to stay at the immanent plane where theory and practice meet and engage in a stochastic process where the final outcome is not known (Barbetta et al, 2022).**

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- **How different research and therapy would be if we were to hold on to the systemic premise that sciences should continually attempt to falsify their own hypotheses (Barbetta et al., 2022, p.4)**
  - **Or that we should never fall in love with our own hypotheses (Cecchin, 1987)**
  - **Indefinite triangulation (Knorr Cetina & Cicourel, 1987)**
  - **Synergetic system (Schiepek, 2020)**

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- **What are the patterns that connect? (Keeney, 1983)**
  - **Repeated interrelationships among all members of an ecosystem enable us to more fully comprehend the more encompassing recursive patterns connecting every living being.**

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- **How high does the complexity go?**
  - **We can work at a low level of complexity (lineal) but we always need to go back to the larger system because we cannot say people “are” like that (Nora Bateson, 2022).**
  - **“A part is an abstraction of a unifying whole” (Keeney, 1983, p.139)**
  - **Human beings exist in ecological relations which are circular, recursive, homeodynamic and cybernetic.**

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- **What we have to let go or be more skeptical of ...**
  - **Lineal thinking, “input/output” in order to explain living systems (Maturana & Varela, 1984, p.35).**
  - **How do we make distinctions? Through our reflecting actions we produce meaningful relational contexts.**
  - **Circular contexts.**

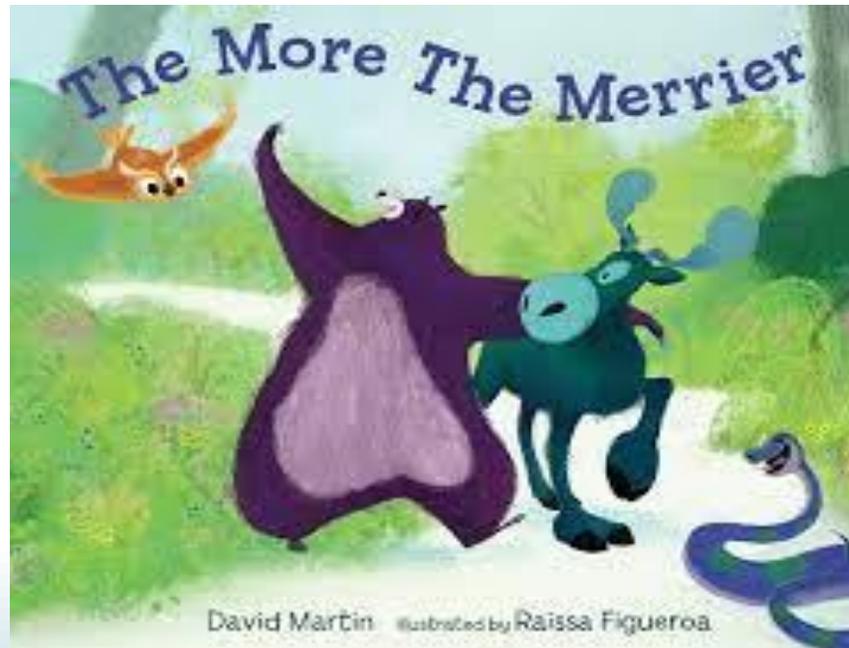
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- **We are responsible of what we do and how we do things (Maturana & Varela, 1984)**
  - **Responsibility is not individually-centered, it is not a tautology but it becomes meaningful within human/living contexts.**

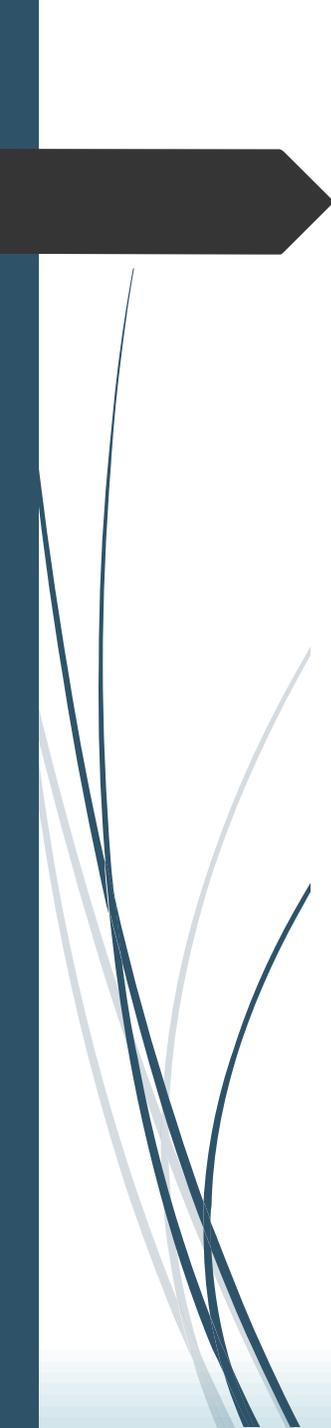
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- **Communal engagement (McNamee, 2011)**
  - **Relational research (Britt-Krause, 2022)**
  - **Searching for perspectives**
  - **Transforming relational practices**

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- **What is labeled as truth or fact, ethical or unethical, researchable or non researchable, therapeutic or nontherapeutic enjoys that status only by virtue of communal engagement.**
  - **Because we live in a complex world, the best our research can do is provide access to that diversity and complexity.**

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- **Orienting ourselves towards seeing patterns that connect leads us to experiencing aesthetics in our ecosystem (Keeney, 1983).**
  - **And that means creating a shift (Damasio, 2019) in our epistemology and ontology where we move from low levels of complexity to higher levels of complexity. From cause and effect to a more encompassing, systemic understanding of what it means to be part of a ecosystem.**
  - **“Ubuntu”: I am what I am because of what we all are.**

two's company,  
three's a crowd





*Thank You!*

**Dr. Elena Tragou, Systemic Psychologist**

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