
Understanding The Social Psychology of Risk Body of Knowledge



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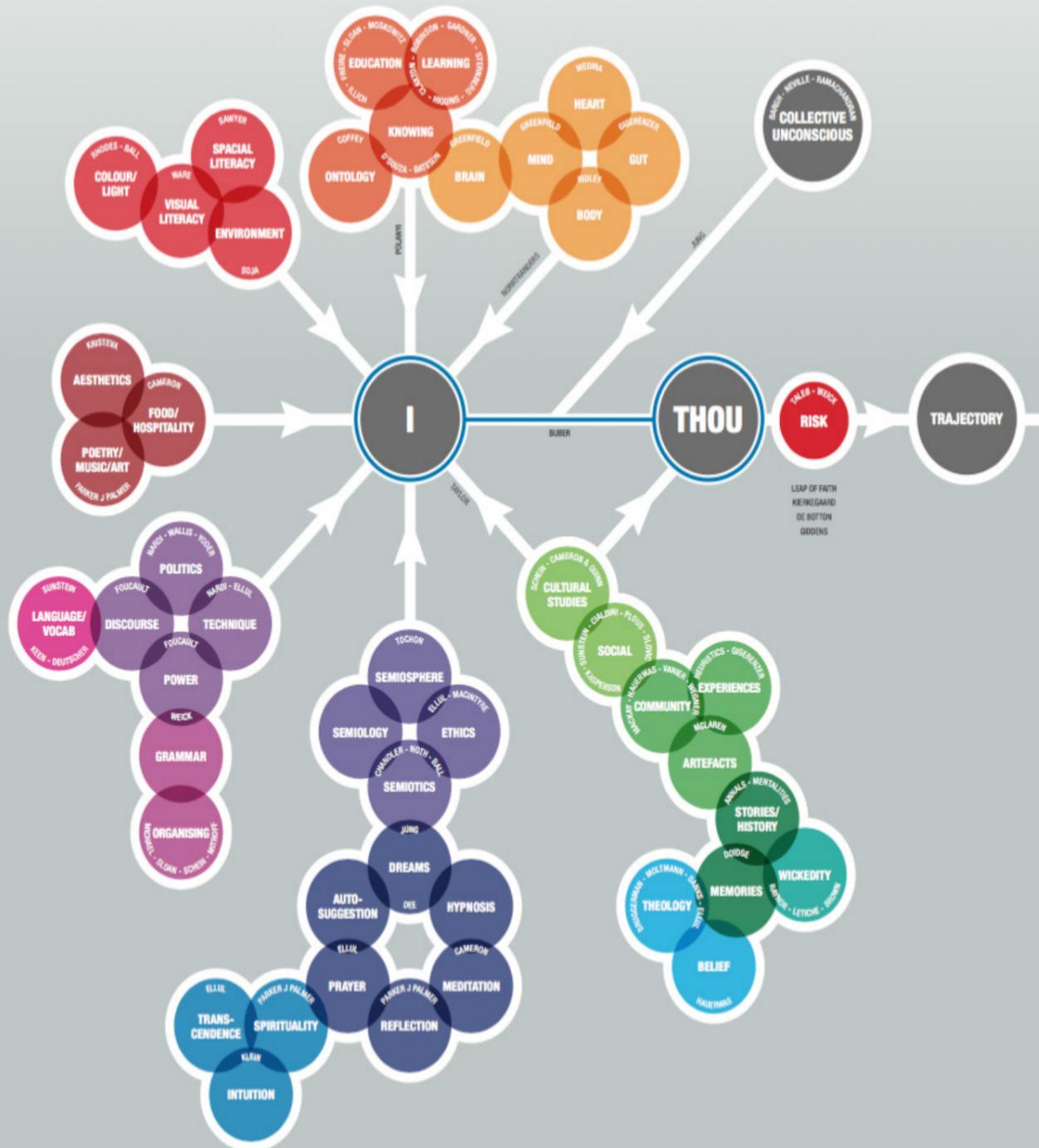
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MAPPING THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF RISK



In SPoR we need to see and experience how knowledge is relationally interdependent and socially-psychologically dependent. Our decision making is best described as a rhizome (matter set of roots) of inter connected influences. Many things like: context, history, organising, heuristics, time, place, people, personality and culture all influence the nature of decision making.

The SPoR Body of Knowledge is comprised of strands of inter-connected 'bubbles'. The reason for the bubbles metaphor is to capture the nature of aspiration (air / spirit) and floating movement. Unfortunately, the model is in only two dimensions but were it in three dimensions one could imagine all these bubbles held by a thin web of strands, all floating in the 'semiosphere'. Each bubble is centred on a 'concept' and around the circumference is an example of critical authors and researchers whose work needs to be read to assist understanding of the central concept. The concept of a 'semiosphere' captures the notion that all meaning is conveyed through symbols, signs and text as metaphor.

The model is anchored from the centre of the I-THOU, Martin Buber's critical concept in understanding the nature of human identity. There is really no such thing as an individual, no-one is an island. The interconnection between the i-thou is made by a hyphen emphasising the dialectical social relationship between an individual identified by connection to another. From the moment of birth we explain our existence socially through relationships such as **mother, family, child, person**. This is where we must start in understanding the SPoR BoK.

The important distinction about representing a body of knowledge relationally (via a concept map) is that it demonstrates the social nature of the knowledge itself. Rather than write a book with forty to fifty or more chapters it is a much better proposition to show what kinds of subjects, disciplines and researchers comprise knowledge in the Social Psychology of Risk. It is also much more instructive to show inter and intra-relationships between sources of knowledge as knowledge is aquired socially and is sustained socially. This is demonstrated in *Figure 22. The Social Psychology of Risk Body of Knowledge*.

Understanding the Social Psychology of Risk Body of Knowledge Strands

The Social Psychology of Risk Body of Knowledge semiotic lays out a 'map' for understanding the interrelatedness, interconnectedness and interpenetration of knowledge from a social-psychological perspective. Each 'bubble' or 'balloon' represents an element of 'aspiration' (aspire - to breathe) and is collected in a strand in a common theme. Each bubble includes the name/s of key authors or researchers in the specific area of knowledge.

There are eight strands that connect to the i-thou foundation and each will be explained in the following discussion. The colours of each bubble are critical too and indicate psychological significance. All strands connect and combine to understand how SPoR knowledge creates a trajectory in knowing, understanding and tackling risk.

Each strand is connected through the social understanding of the world through Martin Buber's **i-thou**. The Body of Knowledge indicates what comprises the i-thou and therefore how persons in relationships can tackle risk. The psychology of colour for each theme also has semiotic significance. The eight themes that make up the Social Psychology of Risk Body of Knowledge are counterclockwise.

Strand 1. The Collective Unconscious and i-thou (grey)

The most effective way to understand the nature of organising and culture is through the Jungian concept of the 'Collective Unconscious'. Culture is about what we believe, do and signify in the creation of collective and social meaning. It was Professor Karl E. Weick who said 'How do I know what I believe until I hear what I say' and 'how do I know what I believe until I see what I do'. These statements capture the challenges of being a fallible person in a physical random world under the influences of all that is unconscious in decision making. The idea that culture is comprised of systems, leadership and behaviours simply distorts the complexity of understanding culture. Such an understanding anchors an understanding of culture to a materialist, behaviourist and reductionist ideology. A definition of culture is better served if understood semiotically as a cloud (<https://vimeo.com/118458068>), one can be in it, see it and experience its turbulence yet feel helpless to influence it. The Culture Cloud was introduced and fully explained in book four in the series on risk, *Following-Leading in Risk, A Humanising Dynamic*.

The i-thou is a triarchic text that shows that humans in social identity are always in existential dialectic between the individual and the social world. This is where the collective unconscious is most present, in that existential dialectic. This is why the i-thou is circled in blue on the model to highlight the dialectic tension of the i-thou as a whole.

Strand 2. Body, Brain, Gut, Heart and Mind (amber)

The first set of bubbles, moving in an anti-clockwise direction, is the physical-mind dimensions. Understanding the head, brain, heart, gut and mind in the making of personhood is a starting point for understanding the i in the i-thou. One of the best to read about the integration of all these factors in personhood is Norretranders. *The User Illusion*. On the meaning of Personhood also Martin, Sugarman and Hickinbottom *Persons, Understanding Psychological Selfhood and Agency*. The idea of **The Educated Person** is anchored to the work of R. S. Peters *The Concept of Education*. This serves as a neat segue to the next set of bubbles on Education, Learning and Ontology.

It is important here to understand that even illness, sickness and suffering are socially and psychologically constructed. Not that these are 'made up' but rather the meaning we give to illness, sickness and suffering are 'understood' through a social understanding of embodiment and culture (further see Radley, A., (1991) *The Body and Social Psychology* Springer, New York also, Radley, A., (1994) *Making Sense of Illness, The Social Psychology of Health and Disease* Sage, London). All bodily activity such as dance, drama, exercise, sport, play and even lovemaking are given meaning socially.

Strand 3. The Educated Person (orange)

Once we have a good understanding of personhood and its ontology (a discipline of metaphysics) we are then able to tackle the big question of what makes an educated person. In this strand we understand its connection through the work of Polanyi and the idea of Tacit Knowledge. It was Polanyi in *The Tacit Dimension* who said: 'We know more than we can say'. This changes the way we should think about knowing and being beyond the cognitive-behaviourist paradigm that is so much associated with modernity. Authors and researchers such as: Julia Sloan *Learning to Think Strategically*, Donald Michael *Learning to Plan and Planning to Learn*, Gregory Bateson *Mind and Nature*, Guy Claxton *The Wayward Mind*, Howard Gardiner *Frames of Mind*, Parker J Palmer *To Know as We Are Known* and Ken Robinson *Out of our Minds* are essential reading for an holistic understanding of education, learning and being.

Here we see the purpose of human being (ontology) in the learning person. Personhood can only be understood socially. We can only be defined as a person in relation to others. When we de-personalise we reduce humanity to the nature of an object and can do whatever we want to an object. This is how the Nazis were able to commit atrocities to other humans because they were renamed as 'vermin' and given a number. The educated person lives to upbuild and humanise others.

Strand 4. Visual and Spacial Literacy (red)

The way that place and space influence social psychological context is most important. A consciousness of visual and spacial literacy connects to the idea that we live in a semiosphere: a world of signs, symbols and metaphorical significance. This is what Soja in *Postmodern Geographies* called 'social geography', understanding that knowing why is vitally connected to who, where, what and how. Visual and spacial literacy is essential to understanding the unconscious power of semiotics.

It is through an awareness of space and place that we understand social influence. Our lived spaces can dehumanise or humanise us. Being visually and spacially literate enables us to see how our lived environment either values or devalues us.

Strand 5. Poetics and Aesthetics (maroon)

Poetics (fine arts) and aesthetics are a strong part of visual and spacial literacy and understanding how semiotics influence unconscious decision making. One needs to understand the influence on the unconscious by: music, art, dance, drama, tragedy, gesture, signs, graphics, iconography, food, hospitality and poetry. Works by Paul Ricoeur *The Rule of Metaphor*, Julia Kristeva *Desire in Language, A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, Winfried Noth *Handbook of Semiotics*, Yuri Lotman *Universe of the Mind, A Semiotic Theory of Culture* and Colin Ware *Information*

Visualization are essential for understanding how semiosis (the making of meaning through signs and symbols) are essential in understanding just how much unconscious decision making is driven by Poetics and Aesthetics.

All those activities which affect us unconsciously and our tacit knowing are part of the aesthetic world. Poetics, music, art, drama, play, food / diet, dance, gesture and sound all affect us and our unconscious in profound ways. For example, 'musak' in shops, colour of products, diet and the weather all affect us unconsciously. We can even feel depressed or anxious just by the temperature.

Strand 6. Politics, Discourse and Power (mauve)

This strand is anchored directly to the Critical and Cultural Theory schools of thinking that emerged out of the Frankfurt School (Adorno and Habermas) and the work of the postmodernists (Foucault) and deconstructionists (Derrida). The idea that all language carries social and political power (discourse) is essential for understanding this dimensions of this strand. Most critical of all philosophers in this strand is Jacques Ellul *The Ethics of Freedom, The Technological Society, Propaganda and The Political Illusion*. Ellul's existential dialectic forms a central role in the Social Psychology of Risk Body of Knowledge. It is Ellul's work that anchors SPoR thinking to a triarchic understanding of engagement. This is evident in the i-thou metaphor and the dialectic between the one and the many. The hyphen and the activity it represents are critical for understanding decision making and personhood as being non-binary. The dialectic of Ellul is nothing like the dialectic of Hegel, there is no synthesis is Ellul's existentialist dialectic. It is in the struggle, the tackling of wicked problems and ontological questions that people develop wisdom and discernment.

This theme is about the organising and 'grammar' of organising through semiosis. Semiosis is about the creation of meaning through language, text and discourse (power in language). It is in this theme that cultural and critical theory play a major part. The work of Ellul in particular should be highlighted in relation to social politics. It is important in this theme to highlight the importance of the word and language in listening. Language and text ought not to play a subservient role to visuals but rather exist in tension and dialectic with the seduction of only symbolic representations.

Strand 7. The Semiosphere and Transcendence (purple)

Essential to understanding personhood is the nature of transcendence. This is where Jungian thinking and non-materialist understandings of social arrangements are important. In this strand we need to tackle the nature of the non-conscious and unconscious nature of humans directly. Whilst understanding that dreams, meditation, prayer, reflection, ethics, morality and hypnosis are influential we need not accumulate a reductionist understanding of such phenomena. This is again where authors like Ellul, Palmer, Jung, Cameron and Klein are most helpful. Whilst not claiming to understand the full nature of this strand we need to acknowledge the place of spirituality and transcendence as an influence on decision making. This strand also makes direct connection to the power of semiotics and understanding the semiosphere as vital to how non-material activities affect humans socially and psychologically.

This theme incorporates all the transcendent activities of the unconscious in relation to semiotics, particularly the idea that the world is a semiosphere, that is, we understand our world through signs, symbols, significance and semiology. The importance of dreams, meditation, mindfulness and spirituality are critical to this theme.

Strand 8. Cultural, Social and Belief (green)

This theme captures all of the cultural complexities of community, social experience (existential), cultural history, wickedity and belief. This theme is linked to the duality of the i-thou, holding the i-thou in tension to each other in a dialectic 'dance'.

Conclusion - Trajectory and Risk (red-grey)

Finally, one needs to address the challenges of risk and engagement by reading Kierkegaard *Fear and Trembling*, De Botton *The Architecture of Happiness*, Giddens *The Consequences of Modernity* and Weick *The Social Psychology of Organizing*. With this knowledge in mind one is more able to tackle the challenges of human decision making and risk from a holistic perspective. Kierkegaard in particular is most helpful for understanding risk as a leap of faith;

