



Quarterly Newsletter

THE CENTRE FOR LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING IN RISK

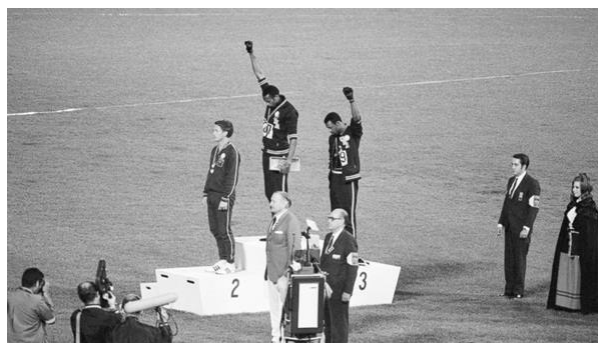
Theme - Gesture

The theme for this newsletter is gesture, the unconscious giving and receiving of semiotic communication.

You can find all past newsletters free to download here: <https://spor.com.au/downloads/newsletter-archive/>

Gesture as Embodied Semiotic

Gesture is one of those things we don't 'think' about and is mostly unconscious. We learn from a very early age how to point and change facial expressions, to reach out for a hug and push away from what we don't want. Such actions are the formation of gesticulation - gestural language that will later connect action to text. This is how language is learned, through connecting embodied action to text. By the age of three words like push, point, on, off and yes make sense. By 5 years of age then such words become written text anchored by embodied knowing.



Gesture is from gesticulation, the action of using the body to communicate. When we scratch an itch we are saying, 'this is itchy'. When we 'grab' a bottle we are saying, 'I want this bottle'. In this way scratching, grabbing and a host of foundational embodied actions later become language and the metaphor we use to construct meaning. Then as we acquire language the gestures remain and often accompany language, particularly when we think we are not being understood. All gestures are either experienced as a direct expression of desire or are learned through mimesis (copying).

Understanding gesture is fundamental to understanding cultural knowing, language formation, communicating to the unconscious, understanding emotions and anticipation of the actions of others. Understanding gesture and its anchored semiotics is not a simple process. For example, the nature of a greeting such as a handshake is not just a symbol for the expression of friendship but is anchored to cultural history in a certain situation that is not present in others.

We learn hand, mouth and body movements from a very early age and these movements shape the

mirror neurons in our bodies that resonate with the mirror neurons of others. In this way when we cry, the mirror neurons of others are activated and they know we want something or are in pain. The resonance of mirror neurons is the foundation of a collective unconscious. The Still Face Experiment (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apzXGEbZht0>) is a wonderful example of how gesture is an unconscious form of communication.

It is through shared experience that we understand an other's gesture as a heuristic. We don't just recognize an action through its movement but our mirror neurons are activated in a similar way as if we were doing the same. This is also the foundation for empathy.

We know from extensive research that we like people who mimic us, who look and sound like us, such is the comfort given in unconscious recognition. Similarly, we are not attracted to people, images and symbols that repel us. We learn from an early age what gestures attract and repel including gestures that offend us (eg. Lefevre (2011) *Rude Hand Gestures of the World*). We learn and intuit to recognize gestures that repel or attract. For example: we learn from an early age that a clenched fist resembles violence, sometimes learned that hard way in pre-school. The clenched fist is the global symbol for violence, left-wing political affiliation and resistance. The famous 'black power salute' of the 1968 Olympics captures well the history of the clenched fist gesture. **See Figure 1. 1968 Olympics Salute.**

The open hand image signifies the opposite of the clenched fist and means welcome, acceptance, help and peace.

We learn the semiotics of all gestures intuitively from an early age.

Learning how to use symbols and gestures increases congruence and power in communication between the conscious and unconscious (<https://www.scienceofpeople.com/hand-gestures/>).

Incongruence in gesture between conscious and unconscious expression limits communication and sometimes drives the complete opposite of what one intends to communicate. (further read Hostetter, Alibali and Niederthal *Embodied Thought: Linking Concepts, Emotion and Gesture* <https://study.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/chapter%2011.pdf>).

One can be as well intentioned and passionate as one wants but without a well founded knowledge in semiotics it is unlikely one will be able to communicate to the unconscious strategically.

If one imagines the resonance of mirror neurons between humans as a shared circuit then, unconscious incongruence between circuits creates dissonance between the conscious and unconscious Mind and it is the unconscious that has the greatest power in emotional formation and expression. For further research on gesture read McNeill, D., (2005) *Gesture and Thought*. University of Chicago Press. New York. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/229068064_Gesture_and_Thought

What Has Gesture To Do With Risk?



The risk and safety industry is plagued by the fixation on conscious thought, behaviourism and materialism. The fixation on objects and hazards draws the industry away from understanding persons, communication, the unconscious and meaning.

Most of the images, icons and symbols of the risk and safety industry have been formed by an engineering worldview that sees the world through the lens of objects. Such objects have low resonance with the common

gestures, symbols and metaphorical meaning making of humans.

The fixation of the risk and safety industry on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is the most common form of semiotic identity in the risk and safety industry. Most of the common relational and conversational gestures of real life and living are simply not present in the communication of the risk and safety industry.

Do a little Google search and enter the word 'safety', then click on the 'images' menu and see what you find. It is all about the obsession with the word 'safety' as a sign (object) or PPE.

In gestural terms, most of this stuff is simply alienating. If you enter the text 'zero harm' it gets even worse.

How strange this industry that seeks to influence the decision making of others when it has no cognizance of the relational, human, semiotic, gestural and unconscious nature of human decision making. For safety, it's never about the person, it's about what the person is wearing. It's rarely about do, the most common gesture in safety is don't.

Gesture as Unconscious Communication

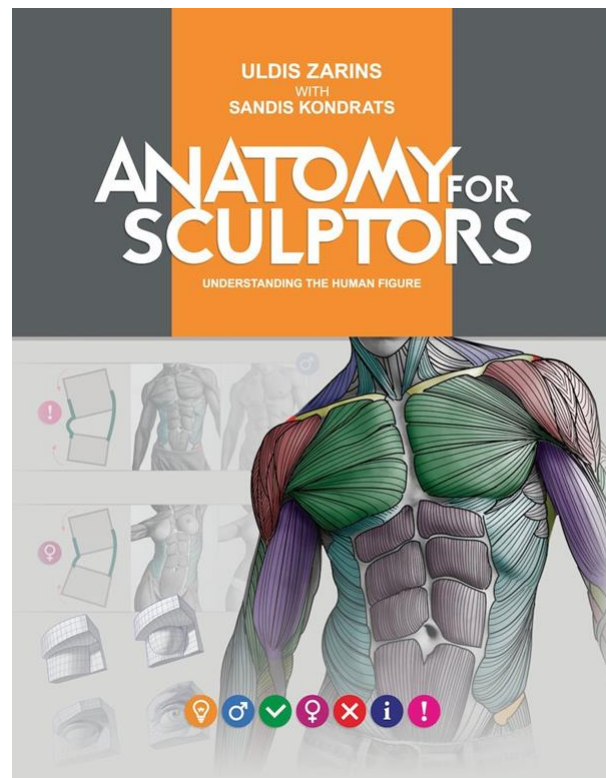
I have a nephew who works for one of Australia's largest movie businesses, he has spent 20 years in animation, movie making and the entertainment industry. He has been studying for some time the Anatomy for sculpting (<https://anatomy4sculptors.com/collections/books>). This kind of study is an excellent introduction into the nature of gesture and the unconscious in communication.

For some time the entertainment industry, acting, choreography and Theatre have been interested in the nature of human posture, gesture and movement. After all, when watching a movie or theater is makes sense that if you want the audience to empathize (mirror neuron resonante) with the story, actors and emotions of the movie, it is critical to get the actions of the actors to mirror the gestures of people so that those mirror neurons can fire off in resonance. Unless the gestures are sculpted effectively, there is little chance of congruence between audience and actor.

However, getting gestures accurate is a wicked problem. The nuances of human emotions are not just contained in the shape of a smile indeed, the smile itself can mean many things as conditioned by context, culture and intent. As much as face recognition has come some way, we are light years away from getting communication to the unconscious close to reality.

The complexities of congruence between gesture, context, intent, physical formation and intuitive knowing are only just being researched. Facial mimicry is so fast, automatic and unconscious that there is no computer in the world that can come close to 'reading' the gestures of another. You can read about some of the software and computing being used at present to simulate gesture and thought in entertainment here: (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/278025708_Expressing_Emotion_Through_Posture).

I'm not sure computers will ever be capable of doing what the embodied Mind can do in



milliseconds in the process of coding and decoding gesture.

Gestures anchor information expressed in the verbal channel in the physical and material world to the metaphorical world of humans intuitive knowing that is unconscious.

Knowing is so deeply social and we share gestures so rapidly that only the speed of the unconscious mind could possibly decode meaning. Given that so much of our shared knowledge is metaphorical (telling something by what it is not) it is simply miraculous that we develop shared meaning at all.

In most cases we map meaning between each other metaphorically in symbolic gesture such as GOOD is UP and BAD is Down, or POWER is UP and WEAKNESS is DOWN. Similarly, TIME is SPACE (eg. 'I moved the meeting on 2 days', 'I don't have the time') just as HEALTH is UP and SICKNESS is DOWN (eg 'I feel run down' or 'that boosted my spirits'.)

There is so little research on gestural expressions as metaphor and semiotic that we simply do not yet understand the transfer of abstract information between humans through paradoxical (metaphorical) expression. What we do know is that much of what we do communicate is unconscious, gestural and metaphorical.

Unfortunately, what we see in the risk and safety industry is a complete ignorance about such communication and a delusional attribution that conscious communication is the limit of knowing.

Gesture as Gift



In SPoR we conduct iCue Listening and iCue Cultural Audits to 'see' and hear' (envision) the gifts people freely give us. The key to learning how to envision is through knowing how to listen and understand culture. In the risk and safety industry there is simply nowhere in either the OHS curriculum or Body of Knowledge where one can find the development of skills to help envisioning.

I sometimes use the language of 'confession' and 'gift' to explain the way people communicate to us. What this means is that as we converse with others their unconscious gives us information (often unknown to the speaker) if we are attuned to listening. The information given is often not part of direct conscious articulation but rather heard in subtle use of language. To listen in such a way, and to do so intuitively takes extensive education and much unlearning of common patterns of exchange in the safety industry focused on 'telling'.

When most people from risk and safety start learning in SPoR they discover that the industry and their training has not prepared them to be listeners or observers. Not only can traditional safety not help with listening, it actually guides people to listen for things that are petty and unimportant. The fixation of safety on PPE is a classic example of a typical inhibition to listening.

Effective listening is also a gift of those who have the time to do it well. The common characteristic of safety as a 'telling' industry alienates workers and usually encourages workers to tell safety advisors, engineers and auditors what they want to hear. None of this involves learning.

Workers learn quickly when a good listener is about that the time spent in exchange is valuable and rewarding. Usually the exchange with auditors and safety policing is unrewarding and time spent in talking is viewed as a waste of time.

The more workers realize that they are being listened to, the more they are willing to gift both their time and their confessions. There is nothing attractive or motivating about being policed about PPE, petty risk and 'safety as telling'.

Giving of time and listening is equal to the gift of confession and 'being heard'. In this way, the reciprocation of gifting adds enormous value to the culture of risk in the workplace such that the gesture of listening/confession in itself helps do away with many of the policing measures/paperwork Safety is obsessed with that don't work.

The kind of gifting SPoR develops enables symbolic, representational and emotional power to conversational dynamics in tackling risk. This is sometimes assisted by the iCue Engagement Board process. You can read about how this works in our latest book: *It Works, A New Approach to Risk and Safety* <https://www.humandymensions.com/product/it-works-a-new-approach-to-risk-and-safety/>

The next free online Introduction to SPoR will be offered in September. You can register your interest in the module here:

<https://cllr.com.au/product/an-introduction-to-the-social-psychology-of-risk-unit-1-free-online-module/>

Free Download

Envisioning Risk, Seeing, Vision and Meaning in Risk

Dr Long is pleased to announce the free download of his ninth book in the series in the Social Psychology of Risk (SPoR).

You can download the complete book here:

<https://www.humandymensions.com/product/envisioning-risk-seeing-vision-and-meaning-in-risk/>

If you are interested in vision, perception and envisioning then this book is for you.

OTHER FREEBIES AND DOWNLOADS

Don't forget there are free downloads of books by Dr Long here:

Five free books to download

<https://www.humandymensions.com/shop/>

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<https://spor.com.au/downloads/posters/>

Blogs

<https://safetyrisk.net/robert-long/>

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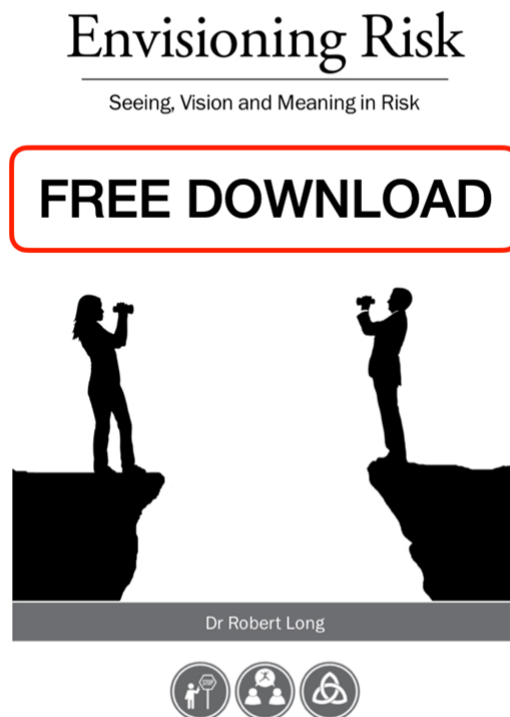
<https://vimeo.com/humandymensions>

The Law and Due Diligence

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/3938199>

Videos against zero ideology

<https://vimeo.com/230093823>



<https://vimeo.com/172195306>

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Book Competition – Find the Cat



As per usual, we have a perception competition.

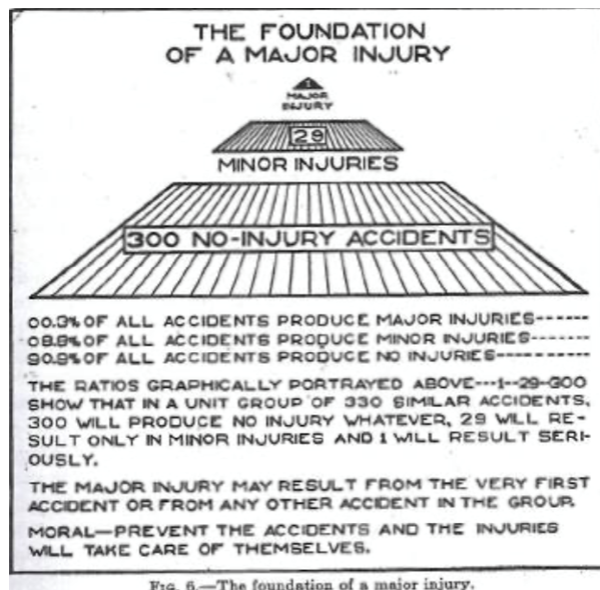
To get your hands on a free copy of the latest book in the Social Psychology of Risk series by Brian Darlington and Dr Rob Long – **It Works, A New Approach to Risk and Safety**.

<https://www.humandymensions.com/product/it-works-a-new-approach-to-risk-and-safety/>

Simply tell us where the cat is in the following graphic and if you are in the first 10 entries, the book is yours. When you send in your entry please include your snail mail address.

Most books are snapped up within the first 30 minutes of the posting of this newsletter.

Symbolic Gesture in Risk



People live by metaphor, symbols, gesture and related structure, all providing comfort and certainty in an uncertain world. For example, humans indulge in symbolic rituals (gestures) of making wishes at ceremonial times like: blowing out candles on a cake, New Years Eve, break glass at a wedding, throwing a bouquet of flowers or making a wish with a wish bone of a chicken. These ritualistic gestures in culture provide a conformance to accepted norms and therefore a feeling that things will work out well.

Most of this is just magical thinking (<https://neurosciencenews.com/new-year-magical-thinking-17516/>) but does generate

feelings of confidence. I'm not sure breaking eggs or glass at weddings is any assurance of a successful marriage, but we do these gestures anyway. We do many similar gestures and rituals in risk and safety with about the same effect.

Many of the gestures developed in risk and safety give a similar assurance that everything is under control, when it is not. The gestures/rituals of risk assessments and the many of the models of measurement in risk (swiss-cheese, matrix boxes, pyramids, bow-tie etc) provide a false consciousness that everything is under control. We see this in the attribution made between safety and injury rates when there is no correlation, all meaning is attributed. Such is the semiotic burden of Heinrich!

Helpful Research on Gesture

Telling Stories Using Rhythmic Gesture Helps Children Improve Oral Skills

<https://neurosciencenews.com/rhythmic-stories-oral-skills-10582/>

How Do Babies Coordinate Gestures and Vocalization?

<https://neurosciencenews.com/baby-vocalization-gestures-6533/>

Babies' First Gesture is a Key Sign of How They Will Talk

<https://neurosciencenews.com/communication-baby-gesture-5395/>

Gesture Types for Functions

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED573247.pdf>

16 Gestures by 16 months

<https://www.interveningearly.org/downloads/16x16-handout.pdf>

Gesture as Suicidal Indicators

https://psychiatryonline.org/pb/assets/raw/sitewide/practice_guidelines/guidelines/suicide.pdf

Gesture and Ritual

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286457863_Gestures_and_rituals_the_archaeological_evidence

Ritual Gesture on OT Literature

https://www.marquette.edu/library/theses/already_uploaded_to_IR/kaib_m_1964.pdf

Gesture in Public Ceremonies

<https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783110696899-007/pdf>

Gesture and Mimetics

https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3758376

A Cultural History of Gesture

<https://pure.rug.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/3346050/BremmerH9.pdf>

The Psychology of Rituals: An Integrative Review and Process-Based Framework.

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/88p7357w>

Centre For Leadership and Learning in Risk Courses

Did you know you can undertake one-on-one or small group courses with Dr Long for you and your organisation?

You can see the curriculum available here:

<https://cllr.com.au/register-to-study/>

Simply email Dr Long at: rob@cllr.com.au and ask about your options

The two most popular courses are:

SEEK

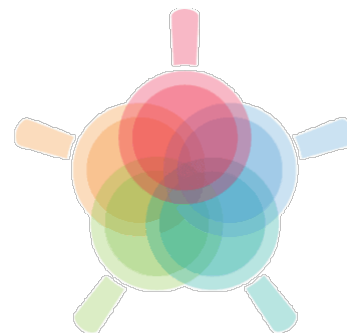
<https://cllr.com.au/product/seek-the-social-psychology-of-event-investigations-unit-2/Semiotics>

Semiotics

<https://cllr.com.au/product/semoiotics-and-the-social-psychology-of-risk-unit-3/>

Dr Long is happy to discuss a program specifically tailored for your needs.

The next free module on an Introduction to SPoR will be offered in September, you can register [here](https://cllr.com.au/product/ansintroduction-to-the-social-psychology-of-risk-unit-1-free-online-module/): <https://cllr.com.au/product/ansintroduction-to-the-social-psychology-of-risk-unit-1-free-online-module/>



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