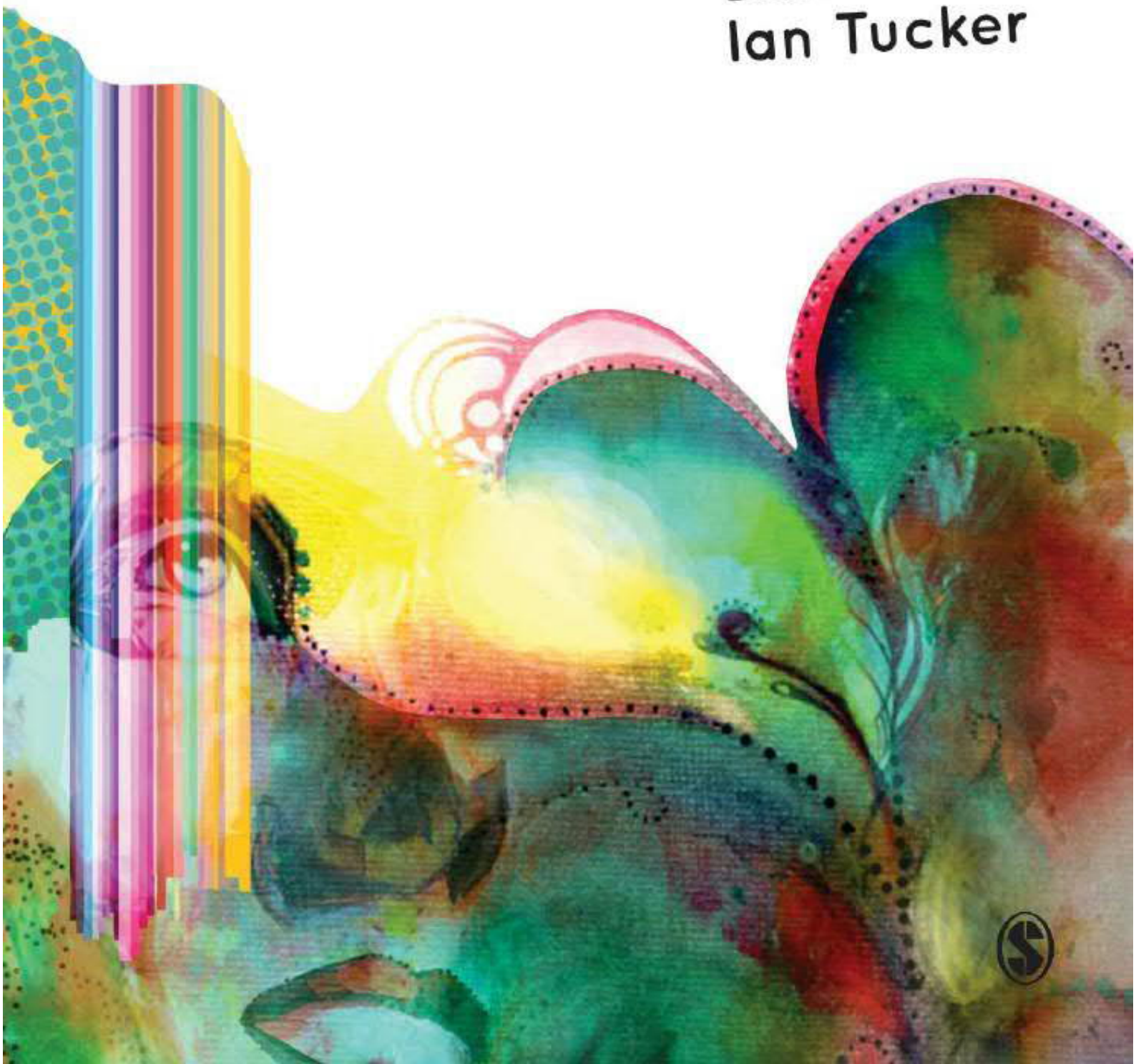


# Social Psychology of **Emotion**

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# 5

## Group Psychology and Emotion

### Key Aims

In this chapter we will critically discuss theorisations of emotion and the group. In doing so we will:

- Illustrate the development of the emotional contagion thesis and the crowd
- Discuss social identity theories of crowd activity
- Review some of the contemporary and post-Freudian theories of group processes and emotion

### Introduction

In this chapter we pick up on some of the group-mind theories of the previous chapter and look at how a variety of theorists have used and critiqued them. We see familiar discourses of emotion emerge in various guises that have run through the book; most particularly its relation to the irrational and the uncontrollable. Emotional contagion is of particular significance to this discourse, wherein emotion almost becomes disease-like, something that infects the mind and determines subsequent behaviour. A critique of the contagion thesis of group behaviour that we offer in this chapter is concerned with social identity. We start with a very brief overview of relevant aspects of Freud's psychoanalysis to situate his particular understanding of emotion. Here we see Freud draw on the influential crowd psychology of Gustav Le Bon, as well as McDougall whom we looked at in the previous chapter. Then, after discussing some of the social identity theories and their critique of the instinct conceptualisations of crowd psychology, we look at some contemporary views of emotional contagion. The chapter concludes with the post-Freudian group psychologies of Bion and Foulkes.

## Freud's Drive Theory

Freud does not dedicate particular sections of his works to specifically discussing what emotion is, but it plays a central role in his theories of the psyche. He rarely uses the term 'emotion', preferring the German psychological term '*Affekt*' (affect). Hillman points to several ideas which are significant in relation to psychoanalysis and Freud's conceptualisations of *Affect*. Freud notes the significance of the idea (representation) in relation to emotion; he looks at emotion as a kind of physiological quantum; he notes a double function of emotion – that it be felt in consciousness and that it internally alter the body (Hillman, 1992: 57). Hillman suggests that it is no easy task to summarise Freud's view of emotion. Indeed as we may know, Freud's concepts concerning psychoanalysis go through a vast number of adaptations as does his understanding of affect. In this section we will draw out some of the important aspects of Freud's concepts in relation to affect (although we will not have time to discuss them all in detail).

Let us just remind ourselves of some of the central associated concepts that were put forward by Freud. Freud firstly developed a topographic model of mind in his notorious book 'The interpretation of dreams' (Freud, 1900) which consisted of the three systems: conscious, preconscious, and unconscious. These systems can be related to two general psychic processes. Firstly the unconscious system was related to 'primary processes' which are determined through the 'pleasure principle'. These are non-verbal mental processes which attempt to avoid unpleasure (*Unlust*) and gratify wishes. The preconscious and the conscious systems were related to 'secondary processes' which are mental processes related to delaying gratification, which are determined by the 'reality principle'. Each of these processes is concerned with the distribution of 'mental energy' which arises in the body. Conflict emerges between these two systems as one system operates to discharge the mental energy and the other to delay the discharge. Freud's theorisations of mental energy drew on a constancy principle. This principle stresses that the psychic apparatus work to keep stimulation to a minimum, as close to zero as possible. Thus quiescence (a low level of psychic activity) is pleasant and excitation (a high level of psychic activity) is unpleasant. The neural system was therefore conceived of as seeking to rid (discharge) itself of mental energy that causes tension.

Freud found that the topographic model did not sufficiently account for his clinical observations and other theoretical considerations (for example, the development of a social conscience), which led him to develop the structural model of mind. The id, ego, and superego divisions of the mind, represented in the structural model, were generally both determined by the mental energy of the body and external reality. It also harboured a more complex understanding of the drives (sometimes referred to as *instinct* or *trieb*, a discussion that we will not enter upon here (see Bettelheim, 1982) which now incorporated both life and death drives associated with love and aggression respectively. Each drive is seen by Freud to 'express itself in terms of affect and in terms of ideas' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988). The affect is seen as the qualitative expression of the quantity of

the drive's mental energy. Positive affects (associated with pleasure) accompany the gratification of the drives and negative affects (associated with displeasure) accompany the inhibition of the drives. However, it is not that simple, as of course Freud adds that when we act in accordance with the superego, by effectively channelling the id impulses in socially acceptable ways, we may also experience positive emotions and pleasure. When we violate social norms and act on the id impulse which was initially for pleasure, we then feel pain from the guilt and shame which may come directly from moral forces in the external world or from the internalisation of these moral forces in the superego.

## Affect and Idea

Above we mentioned a distinction between ideas and affect. Ideas for Freud are rather like memory traces that are attached to affect. Key to the notion of repression is that there is some form of separation between the idea and the affect. It is the job of psychoanalytic therapy to align the affect with the memory-trace (idea). Freud obviously was more concerned with early childhood experiences (mainly those of a traumatic nature) which were repressed. However, we often use such mechanisms of suppression and repression in everyday life. For example, we may find ourselves sexually attracted to somebody that we know we shouldn't be (a friend's partner for example). Because of the taboo associated with this affection, we are likely to feel anxious; this Freud called 'signal anxiety'. These anxiety signals are used by the ego as a signal to initiate defensive activity. For example, they facilitate the repression or suppression of the unwanted ideas and affects. However, we may find ourselves acting rather strangely around that person; this can be either more or less conscious. The signal anxiety also elicits the help of particular defence mechanisms, such as 'reaction formation'; that is, we may act-out opposite forms of behaviour. In the case of being sexually attracted to someone we ought not to be, using the reaction formation defence mechanism, expressions of dislike towards this person can manifest, for example by avoiding them in conversation etc. Over a period of time these defence mechanisms which try to manage the affects associated with unacceptable impulses can build up in intensity and feedback to further distort the individual's perception of reality.

Displacement and projection are also important processes in relation to repressed mental energy. The repressed mental energy continues to circulate in the mind. It often then finds a safe outlet through projecting this onto another person. For example, if one has repressed anger in relation to one's mother, this anger then could be projected onto another individual female who is neither the mother nor the self. One therefore sees the repressed anger in the character or behaviour of the other and one does not associate this with the self. Sublimation is also another means through which one can re-channel mental energy of an unacceptable impulse in creative ways. In Freud's models therefore the affects (emotions) that are usually repressed are predominantly anxiety and guilt;

however, these can be transmuted into different affective feelings and expressions through the ego defence mechanisms.

## Freud's Group Psychology

One particular area that Freud wrote about that is of interest to social psychology scholars of emotion, was his understanding of 'emotional contagion' detailed in his influential book entitled 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego'. Freud suggests in this book that the individual when in a group (or according to a footnote the term 'group' is used for the more complex German term *Masse* and Le Bon's term *foule* which translates more correctly to crowd (1919: 1, footnote 1)) he or she feels, thinks and acts in a manner which is quite different when in isolation, in other words they acquire the characteristic of 'a psychological group' (1919: 6). Freud asks three fundamental questions that he attempts to answer in this paper:

What is a 'group'? How does it acquire the capacity for exercising such a decisive influence over the mental life of the individual? And what is the nature of the mental change which it forces upon the individual? (1919: 6)

Freud begins this by looking at Gustav Le Bon's seminal work on what is termed 'the group mind'. Le Bon suggests that the psychological group is formed of heterogeneous elements which when combined create a new being with different characteristics: 'exactly as the cells which constitute a living body form by their reunion a new being which displays characteristics very different from those possessed by each cell singly' (Le Bon cited in Freud, 1919: 6). However, Freud notes that Le Bon does not go on to explain what it is that unites the people together. What Le Bon does suggest is that it is the *unconscious mind* which emerges as a motivating force of the individual in the group. However, the unconscious that Le Bon refers to is quite different to Freud's. Le Bon assumes that the characteristics of the unconscious mind are mainly inherited 'from generation to generation, which constitute the genius of race' (Le Bon cited in Freud, 1919: 6). Thus a form of racial unconscious emerges. However, more in step with Freud, he states that through the group mind the individual acquires 'a sentiment of invincible power' (Le Bon cited in Freud, 1919: 9) by yielding to instincts that would otherwise be kept under control. Because of the anonymity of the individual within the group, the sentiment of responsibility disappears. For Freud this process provides the conditions through which repressions are allowed to be thrown off, paving the way for the unconscious instincts to emerge; in other words, the superego (conscience) no longer constrains the id. Freud then turns to look at Le Bon's understanding of the enhanced *suggestibility* of individuals within the group that occur through *contagion*. Le Bon states that it is difficult to explain but easy to identify: '[I]t must be classed among

those phenomena of a hypnotic order' (Le Bon cited in Freud, 1919: 9). For example, in this state the individual is no longer in control of his or her own acts but is under the influence of suggestion, as someone who is hypnotised. Additionally the feelings of the group are 'very simple and very exaggerated' and give way to extremes; for example suspicion becomes certainty and antipathy to furious hatred (Le Bon cited in Freud, 1919: 9). Although Le Bon stresses that the individual within the group will succumb to 'cruel, brutal and destructive instincts', and the individual under the influence of suggestion is capable of high achievements, such as selflessness and devotion to an ideal. The group, like 'children', 'neurotics', and 'primitive people' is subject to the magical powers that are ascribed to names and words and give way to illusion over truth. Indeed, the picture that Freud paints of the group through the work of Le Bon, very much mirrors his own psychoanalytic account of the unconscious. Freud then looks elsewhere in the early twentieth century group psychology literature to substantiate his group psychology thesis. For example he extensively discusses McDougall's view of the group,

its [the group's] behaviour is like that of an unruly child or an untutored passionate savage in a strange situation, rather than like that of its average member: and in the worst cases it is like that of a wild beast, rather than like that of human beings. (McDougall, 1920: 45)

Emotional contagion is envisaged as occurring through the perception of the signs of an emotional state (1920: 45) which induces automatic processes essentially giving rise to the same emotion in the perceiver. In an earlier book of McDougall's (1908/1960), wherein his primary thoughts on emotion and the group mind can be found (*An Introduction to Social Psychology*, which we looked at in the previous chapter), he describes what later is understood as 'emotional contagion'. It was not called emotional contagion at this point, but defined as a form of human sympathy, similar to the form of sympathy that we looked at when discussing Hume and the sentimentalists (Chapter 3). McDougall states,

A merry face makes us feel brighter; a melancholy face may cast a gloom over a cheerful company; when we witness the painful emotion of others, we experience sympathetic pain. (1908/1960: 81)

McDougall then, in a footnote, gives an interesting example of sympathetic pain. He states:

Shortly after writing these lines I was holding a child in my arms, looking out of the window on a dark night. There came a blinding flash of lightning and, after some seconds, a crash of thunder. The child was pleased by the lightning, but at the first crack of thunder she screamed in terror; immediately upon hearing the scream, I experienced, during a

fraction of a second, a pang of fear that could not have been more horrible had I been threatened with all the terrors of hell. I am not at all disturbed by thunder when alone. This incident illustrates very well two points – first the sympathetic induction of emotion by immediate instinctive reaction to the expression of emotion of another; secondly, the specific character of loud noises as excitants of fear. Regarded as merely a sensory stimulus, the flash of lightning was far more violent than the thunder; yet it proved no fear in the child. (McDougall, 1908/1960: 81, f1)

Importantly, however, Freud makes the additional point: ‘The most remarkable and also the most important result of the formation of a group is the “exaltation or intensification of emotion” produced in every member of it’ (Freud, 1919: 24). Freud particularly notes McDougall’s point that there is an unreserved surrendering to the passions which is experienced by the individual as pleasurable.

This [crowd formation] is for most men an intensely pleasurable experience; they are, as they say, carried out of themselves, they feel themselves caught up in a great wave of emotion, and cease to be aware of their individuality and all its limitations; that isolation of the individual, which oppresses every one of us, though it may not be explicitly formulated in his consciousness, is for the time being abolished. (McDougall, 1920: 24)

Indeed, the greater the amount of people perceived to be experiencing the emotion, the stronger the automatic process of contagion. This mutual interaction is understood as forming a sort of feedback loop which intensifies the emotion of the group. However, why this is the case is not answered for Freud in both Le Bon and McDougall’s accounts. Freud thus goes on to ask the particular question of why do individuals imitate emotional activity in the group? Suggestibility in and of itself is not a good enough answer for Freud.

## Libidinal Ties

Freud then institutes one of his chief psychoanalytic concepts, the libido, as the driver of emotional contagion. ‘The libido,’ he states ‘is an expression taken from the theory of the emotions’ and of particular significance is that it constitutes ‘love’ and moreover ‘sexual love with sexual union as its aim’ as the essence of the group mind (Freud, 1919: 90). Thus the individual is understood as being particularly impressionable within the group as the person ‘feels the need to be in harmony with them rather than in opposition’ (Freud, 1919: 92).

To illustrate his theory Freud uses two case examples: the Catholic Church and an army. Here Freud emphasis another point: the central place of the leader. For the

Catholic Church this is Christ and in the army it is the Commander-in-Chief. The two heads are understood by Freud as creating the illusion that they love the individuals of the group equally; which again, binds the group with libidinal ties. Additionally the love that is shown to them by the leader, they are to show for each other; so they become both brothers (sisters) in Christ and an army of comrades. The psychoanalytic concept of 'identification' is key to Freud in the developing of libidinal ties of group members. Identification is the process whereby one person wishes to be like another person; for example, a young boy wishes to be like his father. This occurs through 'introjection': the person introjects the wished for person into his or her ego. Thus the common tie of the group is 'introjective identification'. Every member wishes to be like the leader; for example, members of the Catholic Church wish to be Christ-like and identify with what is perceived as the good aspects of Christ and thus develop an 'ego ideal' model of Christ to guide behaviour.

## The Pathologisation of the Crowd

Steve Reicher is one of the most prominent contemporary social psychologists writing extensively on crowd psychology. A lot of Reicher's work has focused on understanding crowd behaviour in particularly heated situations; such as the St Pauls 'riot' (1984) which occurred in Bristol in the South-west of the UK in 1980 and more recently the riots that occurred across England in the summer of 2011 (Reicher and Stott, 2011). In a chapter entitled *The Psychology of Crowd Dynamics*, Reicher (2001) works up an interesting critical review of former crowd theories and develops what he calls 'an elaborated social identity model of crowds'.

To begin with Reicher elaborates on Moscovici's understanding that the former theorisations of the crowd and the group mind (that we have discussed above) served not only as early social psychologisations, but went on to influence 'mass politics of the 20th century' (Reicher, 2001: 186). They (although Reicher focuses specifically on Le Bon) 'influenced a plethora of dictators and demagogues, most notoriously, Goebbels, Hitler, and Mussolini' (2001: 186). Reicher argues that since the nineteenth century the rise of industrialisation had brought about the destabilisation of traditional social hierarchies of village life and gave birth to 'mass society', the question of social control was of paramount importance to those in power. The perceived lack of order and rootlessness that mass society was supposed to give way to would culminate in anarchy as the crowd would thus be susceptible to unscrupulous agitators. Reicher argues that much of the early engagement with 'crowd psychology' was in relation to controlling (repressing) the working class and less about understanding the crowd. Additionally there was a fascination with the crowd, particularly of the energy that it brings about. For example, what power it would bring if one could harness this energy, which is exactly how Le Bon sold his psychology. Indeed Reicher states that,

The majority of his [Le Bon's] crowd text is, in fact, essentially a primer on how to take advantage of the crowd mentality, how to manipulate crowds, and how to recruit their enthusiasms to one's own end. (Reicher, 2001: 186)

However the power of the crowd was an aspect of Le Bon's theory that was hardly taken up by subsequent theorists. But the emphasis that came to influence social psychologies of the crowd were concerns with submergence and its derivative: deindividuation.

## Deindividuation

One of Reicher's main concerns with Le Bon's crowd psychology is that he does not take (social and cultural) context into consideration. For example, no sense of the grievances and the social conflicts are discussed in Le Bon's analysis of the angry demonstrations of working-class crowds of late nineteenth century France (Reicher, 2001: 186). Reicher argues that such events do not occur in isolation; Le Bon shows no concern for the social injustices that may lead to crowd activity. Le Bon, as discussed above, uses the term 'submergence' to denote the loss of self-consciousness (or conscience) within the crowd or what later scholars denote as deindividuation. For example, Le Bon suggested that under the conditions of deindividuation, antisocial behaviour is more likely. A number of other studies went on to develop the deindividuation hypotheses within social psychology, all relatively confirming the initial work of Le Bon, McDougall and Freud and the psychopathologisation of individuals' emotional activity within groups (Reicher, 2001).

## Social Norm Theory

The body of work that Reicher draws on to facilitate the development of his model of crowd dynamics is essentially to counter the pathologisation propositions. Firstly he draws on social norm theory – a theory deriving from symbolic interactionism in conjunction with psychological research – in order to identify the social coherence of collective action (Turner and Killian, 1987). The gist of the theory is that rather than tying crowd action to irrational, submersive and thus pathological behaviour, various norms emerge guiding collective behaviour. These arise not through a particular leader but through what is recognised as a primary stage of 'milling' (hanging around) before social action takes place. Individuals at this stage engage with others sharing accounts and listen to others. Various 'keynote' individuals propose action and resolve ambivalence within the crowd to facilitate unanimity. Reicher argues that this theory makes a welcomed break from earlier crowd psychologies, particularly as it stresses the 'sociality of

crowd action' (Reicher, 2001: 193). However, Reicher points out that emergent norm theory moves from the elite individual level of crowd shaping to an elite inter-individual level. In other words, it still relies on certain members of the group to shape the crowd activity and thus does not include 'larger-scale social factors' (2001: 194).

## Social Identity Theory

The social identity theory of crowd action concerns the distinction between what is personal to me – as identity – and what I share with others. The latter could be, for example, a religion, a football team I support, or the profession I work in. These are shared identities that may distinguish one group from another. By defining ourselves into a particular category, we partake in a form of self-stereotyping. In the crowd situation rather than look to specific members of the group to follow and lose one's personal identity (for example as submergence theory would have it), individuals shift to the relevant social identity and act according to the norms of that identity and those who are recognised as being part of the particular category in this context (creating prototypical group norms). Reicher argues that this theory does well to explain the linking of 'society to identity and identity to action' (2001: 197) in relation to crowd events. It also speaks for the energy and power of the crowd to undertake actions normally impossible for the individual. What it is less able to explain is how crowd action (in Reicher's opinion, which is supported in field research) leads to a transformatory potential through which individuals feel different after being part of the action of a crowd (particularly in relation to significant events such as riots) in other words, aspects of identity change.

Reicher suggests that field work has found that when individuals come together to form a crowd (particularly crowd events such as football matches, demonstrations and protests) a common dynamic is evident. Although the moderate element of the crowd will define themselves as law abiding and responsible citizens, those outside of the crowd distinguish the crowd as a danger to social order (particularly the police). The crowd's action is likely to be impeded and thus the moderate members come to see the impeters as an illegitimate opposition. This opposition further extends the ingroup category, solidarity and a willingness to challenge; thus a movement in identity occurs from moderate to oppositional.

Reicher notes the limitations of his elaborated social identity model of crowds by stating that it may not fit all configurations of crowds as some crowd events may be particularly routinised. Additionally it may not always lead to forms of radicalisation and empowerment. Moreover, and of interest to us, is that Reicher's account perhaps overplays the cognitive aspects of crowd phenomena and does not specifically analyse emotion activity. He readily suggests that research should look at such phenomena but, perhaps importantly, we should

not make the classic mistake of counterposing intellect and emotion and seeing the latter as usurping the former. He suggests that progress in crowd psychology depends on investigating how emotion relates to the self-understanding of crowd members. For example, there may be joy in being part of a crowd, in being fully recognised as a group member, and being able fully to express one's identity; there may be anger at outgroup attempts to impede such expression (Reicher, 2001: 203).

The dynamics of emotional contagion, however, it seems for Reicher, is at most a spin-off of the more important function of the dynamics of social identity. The contagion hypothesis seems too bound up in the submergence and deindividuation hypothesis to include. Indeed Reicher states that the theory of contagion (as Le Bon would have it) implies that individuals 'are unable to resist any passing idea or, more particularly and because the intellect is all but obliterated, any passing emotion' (2001: 186). Although, in a more recent book concerned with the 2011 English riots, Reicher and Stott (2011) concede that crowd members are likely to be influenced by others' facial expressions. Yet this point is only made as a way of counteracting the 'milling' hypothesis of the social norm theory. Ultimately, however, which should be of interest to the social psychology of emotion, Reicher makes a good case to counteract the early models of emotional contagion looked at above – although they bring the centrality of emotion activity within crowd (group) dynamics to the forefront, they tend to conjure-up dualistic and negative notions of emotion which we have extensively discussed throughout this book. Reicher instead emphasises how existing cultures and societies are central in shaping crowd activity (and, we might add, emotion activity) rather than the previous focus on the individual within the group as a unit of analysis without considering the wider context.

## Primitive Emotional Contagion

Hatfield, Cacioppo and Rapson are quite possibly the only authors to explicitly dedicate a book to the subject of emotional contagion<sup>1</sup>. Rather than focus on the forms of highly charged gatherings that are mainly discussed above, they tend to focus on commonly occurring forms of emotional contagion; for example, through simply being exposed to another person's emotional activity. Their theory on 'primitive emotional contagion' discusses the ways that emotional mimicry and synchrony occur through facial, vocal and postural feedback. They claim that emotional contagion 'is best conceptualized as a multiply determined family of psychophysiological, behavioural, and social phenomena' (1994: 4). Although they do well in discussing some of the micro interactional activity that plausibly induces this thing called 'emotional contagion' and thus include social (interpersonal) dimensions, they are less concerned with Reicher's focus on socio-cultural contextual factors and macro structural features.

Emotion, they suggest, can be ‘caught’ in a number of ways; which they specify as: cognitive conscious processes, conditioned and unconditioned emotional responses, and mimicry/feedback. Emotional contagion through cognitive conscious processes is understood to occur through thinking about what others feel, through, for example, imagining and analysing what appears to be their feelings and thoughts. This is rather like a cognitive version of Hume’s sympathy that we looked at in Chapter 3. Conditioned and unconditioned emotional responses are considered as reflecting emotional contagion processes; this is a bit more puzzling because they suggest that the emotions caught do not have to be of the same kind. So far, the emotional contagion theories we have looked at tend to suggest that the form of emotion that is caught is the same kind of emotion that was in some way perceived; for example, the anger of one person causes anger for another, happiness causes happiness and so forth. Yet Hatfield et al. state that conditioned (learnt) responses – for example being conditioned at a young age to fear or become anxious in response to a father’s habitual anger – can in turn become a conditioned response to anger in other situations (even when, for instance, anger was not the primary emotion to be caught). Perhaps the concept of emotional contagion becomes a bit blurred here as it seems to concern any emotion that one may feel in response to another’s emotion. However, there does not seem to be a precise definition of emotional contagion in relation to whether the form of emotion that one contracts is indeed of the same form that the other experiences.

## Primitive Emotion

Although Hatfield et al. do not explicitly explain why they use the term ‘primitive’ in their concept of emotional contagion (i.e. ‘primitive emotional contagion’), it seems that it relates to their focus on how mimicry and synchronisation are understood as central determinants. Primitive emotional contagion is understood by them as

The tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person’s and, consequently, to converge emotionally. (Hatfield et al., 1994: 5)

It seems that they equate ‘primitive’ functions to those that are ‘automatic’ and perhaps non-conscious. In a later paper Hatfield, Rapson and Le (2009) discuss a variety of empirical research to substantiate their views on mimicry. For example, according to Lundqvist’s (1995) EMG response pattern research on facial mimicry (mimicking the facial expressions of others) is seen as swift and subtle, producing no observable change in facial expressions. When participants were shown various emotional facial expressions, the observers evoked different

EMG responses which are seen to be associated with each particular facial expression. For instance, when shown happy facial expressions there was increased muscular activity over the cheek region (the zygomaticus muscular region). Then they discuss research concerning interspeaker influence as evidence for vocal mimicry as an aspect of primitive emotional contagion. Interspeaker influence, as it suggests, concerns the speaker influencing the speech rates, utterance durations and latencies of responses. Lastly they look at postural mimicry which suggests that people mimic and synchronise the postures and movement of others unconsciously. Subsequently the mimicking of facial expressions, vocal expressions, posture and movement behaviours are understood to create in the mimicker feelings that are a pale reflection of others' emotions that result in people tending to catch one another's emotions (Hatfield et al., 2009).

## Asocial Theory

As mentioned, although Hatfield et al.'s work does well to emphasise the micro-interactional elements of this thing called 'emotional contagion' there is a dearth of field work and much of the evidence cited comes from laboratory forms of experimental psychology and neuroscience. These forms of studies are often understood by some social psychologists (for example Reicher) as particularly problematic when looking at this type of interactivity as it tends to play down the importance of context and lacks ecological validity. Consequently the important role that social factors may play are not sufficiently accounted for. In an edited book on emotional expression and group dynamics, Hess and Philippot (2010) emphasise the way that social phenomena, such as gender, ethnicity and status influence emotional expression and their interpretation in relation to social rules and norms. Although they concede that the neo-Darwinian framework of emotional facial expressions – that is, the innate signals that have evolved phylogenetically – has paved the way for the understanding of their important role in social coordination (which Hatfield et al.'s 'primitive emotional contagion' emphasises), they also suggest that there is evidence that these innate signals can be modulated by social conventions. Of course the neo-Darwinian perspective has dominated psychology over the last few decades, whereas sociologists have developed understandings of emotional social communication which are rarely drawn upon by (social) psychologists; Hess, Philippot and colleagues are an exception. Additionally, and importantly for contemporary social psychology, Hatfield et al. conclude their book by stating,

With the expansion and increased power of new communications, should we attend more carefully to the way this phenomenon functions? What is the effect on social bonds and relations of technologies (i.e., personal computers, electronic mail) that facilitate the transmission but diminish the parallel transmission of emotional communication? (Hatfield et al., 1994: 205)

## Virality and Contagion

We look at some of the contemporary responses to these questions in the final chapter. But to somewhat answer this question in the ‘contagion’ context, we turn to a publication entitled *Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks*, through which Sampson develops a theory of ‘how discourse is intimately interwoven with a prediscursive flow of contagious affect, feelings and emotions’ (2012: 3). Sampson is particularly concerned to respond to a growing fear that there is ‘too much connectivity’ in today’s rapidly developing systems of digital networks. For example, these connectivities are often understood to bring about ‘increased chances of infection from wide-ranging social, cultural, political and economic contagions’ (2012: 1). Thus the term *virality*, which denotes the spread of a biological disease, and of course we now use the term not simply as a metaphor but to connote the spread of, for example, computer viruses. ‘Going viral’ today, like the spread of a biological virus, means the rapid spread of a piece of internet content. He contends that digital networks can be used to enable a discursive mobilisation of negative emotions through fear, panic, terror and fright and also positive affects are transmitted through the ‘intoxication of hope, belief, joy, and even love’ (2012: 5). However, there is another sense of virality that Sampson draws attention to, a rather more accidental one. Indeed he looks at how at times small events which are unpredictable can spin out, or are ‘nudged’ into becoming ‘big, monstrous contagions without a guiding hand’ (2012: 6).

## Tarde

Underlying many of Sampson’s notions of contagious virality is the work of Gabriel Tarde, a French social theorist who produced a number of influential papers around the turn of the twentieth century. Tarde went on to influence such figures as Bruno Latour (particularly actor network theory) and Gilles Deleuze (whom we will be looking at in Chapter 9). However, it is only relatively recently that his unique philosophical theories on society have started to gain favour with social theorists. Unlike Tarde’s contemporaries (and particularly Emile Durkheim), his social theory was interested, not so much in the individual person or collective representation, but rather in the networks or *relational flows* that spin out in at times unpredictable ways and form multiple connections with other networks and flows. Without getting into the complex detail of Tarde’s process philosophy, we will mention an aspect of the Tardean approach which will be more familiar to readers at this point. Tarde was particularly interested in the ways that desires determine human interactivity. Like a number of the early theorists of emotion that we looked at in the historical sections of this book, Tarde understood the soul to possess powers. Two of these powers were belief and desire which importantly were dynamically interconnected. However, unlike LeBon, McDougall and Freud he did not see them as arising simply through

biological processes, and unlike Durkheim, he did not see them as arising simply through societal processes. Instead, Sampson suggests, Tarde theorises a process 'whereby the first [biology] becomes translated into the second [society], which can, when encountered and copied, take on a vital and contaminating role of its own' (2012: 12). Thus the first kind of desires are akin to the needs of organic life; such as the desire to drink, eat and protect the body from harm. The second kind of desires are social and are of a special kind. They seek 'satisfaction, new sensations, ambitious or amorous fevers, intoxications, and ecstatic joy' among other things. These desires are periodically satisfied and are again reborn in an indefinite cycle of repetition. The distinctive trait of the second form, however, is that they are not simply everyday desires but begin as fantasies, only to later be consolidated into habits. Thus Sampson states that these processes are helpful in understanding one of the central mechanisms of capitalism: 'the reproduction of desire' (2012: 12).

## Somnambulism

Tarde, much like many of his contemporaries that we discussed above, suggests that contagion occurs through imitation and suggestibility which happens mostly unconsciously. Thus the individual for Tarde was what he called a somnambulist. That is individuals almost sleep-walk through everyday life being hypnotically absorbed by the contagions of others and 'mesmerized and contaminated by the fascinations of their social environment' (Sampson, 2012: 13). Sampson argues that although the concept of 'an agentless, half-awake subjectivity, nudged along by the force of relational encounter with contaminating events, is unsettling' he suggests there is contemporary evidence for this. For example, he cites the theories of the automatic processes that people engage in due to so called 'mirror neurons' (which we will look at in the following chapter). Sampson states that the somnambulist theory of Tarde is particularly relevant 'in an age when subjectivity is increasingly embedded in technological network relations' and prefigures 'an increasingly inseparable and exploitable intersection between what is experienced biologically and what is encountered socially and culturally in a network' (2012: 13).

Sampson's book is complex and one cannot do justice to it here, it really is worth a read. Of relevance in the context of this chapter is that Sampson, through the theorisation of Tarde, is able to demonstrate some of the ways contagion may occur in not just groups or crowds but through wider global networks. Moreover, he attempts to develop this theory by looking at the dynamic interplay between biologies, societies and cultures. Yet, and Sampson admits this, one is left feeling a bit uneasy with the somnambulist theory of human subjectivity. We are left again, as Reicher might argue, with another deindividuation theory and perhaps another pathologisation of emotional contagion. It must be added, however, that Sampson does end with a note of hope. Following

Tarde, it is stated that educating the senses can lead to resisting somnambulism. Educating the senses will enable states of *antipatheia*: ‘antifeelings that may fend off the contaminations of unwanted and mostly unconscious epidemics...’ (2012: 192). According to Tarde, Sampson argues, this requires a form of ‘pure antipathy’ through ‘nonimitation’ which entails a conscious and cognizant ‘refusal ... to copy the dress, customs, language, industry and arts which make up the civilization of [this or that] neighborhood’ (Tarde cited in Sampson 2012: 190). This is the way through which the truly new emerges and thus inserts itself as a unique type of virus, which of course is caught by others through affective transmissions.

## Post-Freudian Groups

As we started this chapter on Freud’s drive theory of groups and emotion, it would not be complete without some mention of the development of psychoanalytically informed understandings of emotion and groups. Bion’s theory of groups is probably the most widely known psychoanalytic understanding of groups which was developed through both Freud’s theories and the later object relations (psychoanalytic) theory. Theorists in the object relations traditions are often critical of some of Freud’s concepts as his drive theory draws heavily, in a quite unsubstantiated way, on biological understandings of psychological functioning. Freud’s drive theory can be understood at times as an unspecified quasi-physiological quantity. To this end it is suggested that psychoanalysis should not proceed as if it is a biological science but it is rather an interpretive science (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983). Object-relations theories tend to focus instead on the vicissitudes of the object that one is in relation to. Melanie Klein, for example, ‘regarded stimulation of the body as giving rise to the primary mental events which were subjective interpretations of bodily stimuli as provoked by an object’ (Hinshelwood, 1991: 326–7). Generally object-relations theory tends to be thought of as doing away with Freud’s drive theory concerning the pleasure-seeking nature of individuals, to emphasise what they tend to see as the individual as fundamentally object-seeking. It can be argued that psychoanalytic object relations theories give a more central place to the concepts of emotion compared to Freud’s drive theory. This is because the focus is much more on the communicative exchange between the self and the other, particularly in early development between the infant and the primary-carer. There is a focus on the exchange of expressions (especially facial). For example, Klein was interested in what she saw as the extreme nature of the young infant’s emotions. In what she termed the ‘paranoid-schizoid position’, the infant directs love and hate onto partial objects of the primary-carer (this was usually denoted as the mother). The infant essentially splits the mother between good and bad parts. The classic example is that of the breasts of the mother are split between a good breast (that arrives and gives milk when the infant is hungry) and a bad breast (that doesn’t arrive when hungry).

This creates a split in the ego of the infant inducing affects such as anxiety, envy, hate and aggression directed towards the bad part-object and love towards the good. Later when the infant achieves the 'depressive-position' (wherein the other is recognised as an integrated whole object), feelings of guilt and grief for the negative feelings of the paranoid schizoid position emerge and thus the capacity for empathy.

## Bion's Basic Assumptions

In Bion's (1961) book entitled *Experiences in Groups*, he writes about the affective states that bind individuals together in a group (group dynamics). These dynamic affective states are what Bion called basic assumptions of the group. The basic assumptions of the group tend to characterise the function of the group in unconscious ways and these are threefold: 'a fight or flight group' (BaF), 'a dependent group' (BaD) or 'a pairing group' (BaP). The mechanism of the basic assumptions is characterised by the paranoid-schizoid position evoked through the (pre-Oedipal) internalised primitive fears (phantasies) about the contents of the mother's body. These internalised psychic mechanisms, to a greater or lesser extent, persist throughout the life of an individual, but are especially revealed in the context of the group according to Bion.

The adult must establish contact with the emotional life of the group in which he lives; this task would appear to be as formidable to the adult as the relationship with the breast appears to the infant, and the failure to meet the demands of this task is revealed in his regression. (Bion, 1961: 142)

This *failure* and subsequent *regression*, following Freud, leads to the loss of individual distinctiveness (Bion, 1961: 142) or what has come to be known as deindividuation.

In BaF, the anxiety within the group leads to a desire to either fight or run away from a perceived external threat. This basic assumption is fuelled by hate; Bion states the release of hate 'finds an outlet either in destructive attacks on a supposed enemy or flight from the hatred of the object' (Bion, 1961: 163). In BaD, the group comes to depend upon a leader and not give the other members a hearing as they will then be seen to be rivals to the leader's position, which is based on guilt and depression (Bion, 1961: 166). And in BaP, there is a pairing within the group which is characterised through *hope* and *expectation*. For example, the hope that the pairing will (of course this is psychoanalytically related to sexual union) produce a 'Messiah' (a Messianic hope: 'be it person, idea or utopia' (Bion, 1961: 152)) which will solve its problems. Thus the leader of this group is as yet unborn. Bion states,

It usually finds expression verbally in ideas that marriage would put an end to neurotic disabilities; the group therapy would revolutionize society when it had spread sufficiently; that the coming season, spring, summer, autumn, or winter, as the case may be, will be more agreeable; that some new kind of community – an improved group – should be developed, and so on. ... The feelings thus associated with the pairing group are at the opposite pole to feelings of hatred, destructiveness, and despair. (Bion, 1961: 151)

These group dynamics therefore do not address the group's problems and tasks and so are considered to be psychopathological, regressive, primitive and thus 'basic'. He states that the affects related to the basic assumptions (described by terms such as anxiety, fear, hate and so forth) may have different qualities in the various basic assumption contexts. For example, he states 'anxiety in the dependent group has a different quality from anxiety evident in the pairing group' (Bion, 1961: 154–5). Importantly, however, unlike his predecessors such as Le Bon, McDougall and Freud, the 'basic assumptions' are not the only mechanisms present within the group. In contention is the 'work group mentality', wherein individuals cooperate together and are able to focus on the given task for which they came together. The work group is always in evidence with one of the basic assumptions and although its function may remain present and unaltered, the basic assumption may change from one to the other over time (Bion, 1961: 154). This dual mechanism enables the group to be understood as apparently stable and organised and yet simultaneously quite 'mad'. Brennan (2004) uses the example of the Heaven's Gate cult as an extreme or a university department that might seem to function well most of the time, but may have additional irrational persecutory tendencies.

## Foulkes' Psychosocial Theorisation

Siegfried Heinrich Foulkes (1898–1976), psychoanalyst and group analyst, developed an interesting perspective of groups that was influenced by the psycho-social ideas from the Frankfurt school, Gestalt psychology and the social psychology of Norbert Elias. He was particularly interested in how the individual was determined by their social surroundings; for example the community and the group of which they are a part. However, he attempts to do away with 'the old juxtaposition of an inside and outside world, constitution and environment, individual and society, phantasy and reality, body and mind and so on' (Foulkes, 1948: 10). He is much more concerned with the interconnection of phenomena rather than abstracting out the elements. Although he suggests that the latter may be a useful logical device for commentary, it is important to bear in mind that these abstractions have no real meaning and existence on their own (see Dalal, 1998). Thus Foulkes suggests that the (psycho)analysis of the

individual should be concerned not just with the individual but that '[T]he group, the community, is the ultimate primary unit of consideration, and the so-called inner processes in the individual are internalizations of the forces operating in the group to which he belongs' (Foulkes, 1971: 212).

Foulkes' emphasis is not on the instinctual nature of humans as Freud envisaged but on what he determines as the 'social instinct'. His theory of a 'social instinct' is based, Dalal (1998) argues, on the mistaken Freudian notion of 'recapitulation': ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. In other words, our biological, instinctual inner nature has evolved from genetically inherited behaviours. This of course constitutes what is known as a 'Lamarckian heresy'. Behaviours that are learnt within a life-span are not genetically inherited (to one's progeny) but nature selects genes to inherit. However, Foulkes suggests that groups are more fundamental than individuals because individuality arose from the groups that constituted the primal horde of antiquity (prehistoric human social organisation, theorised in Freud's paper *Totem and Taboo* (1922)). Thus our social nature relates to our primitive past, so accordingly the group is more 'primitive' than the individual. Hence in typical Freudian fashion, Foulkes argues that the social instinct (similar to Freud's instinct theories of them influencing primitive behaviours) seeks to get back to this primitive group-state of being: to rekindle a lost era. Dalal argues that this implies that 'people do not group in present because of contemporary needs and desires, but to fulfil a desire from a lost prehistoric time – the time of ancient tribal feelings' (1998: 42). Thus we are left again with a version of group behaviour as inducing or recapitulating basic and primitive feelings and emotions.

One of the things that is not very clear in Foulkes' writings is how this social instinct is 'inherited', indeed he at times uses the term 'transmitted' instead of 'inherited' here. Dalal argues that although he attempts to move away from dualistic notions as described above, we often find his writings quite contradictory, for example many of his arguments focus on the nature/nurture dichotomisation. In Foulkes' defence, Dalal goes on to suppose that we may apply the Gestalt notion of figure and ground to Foulkes' writings. For example, at times the group is at the forefront of analysis with the individual in the background and at times the individual is at the forefront and the group in the background.

What is perhaps more important about Foulkes' understanding of the group in relation to emotion studies and groups, is that he suggests we fundamentally 'desire' to 'belong' to a group. This implies, Dalal states, that we have an 'emotional need to belong' to a group. Foulkes would have this need as stemming from the social instinct, but he also considers that this comes about through his theory of the 'social unconscious'. The social unconscious differs from the Freudian unconscious in that it has not solely come about by repression, but rather through our ways of being that we have unconsciously adopted, essentially from our primary group – the family – that we are now unaware of.

He states

... the way of expressing oneself, of breathing, of sleeping, of waking, of being amused, of speaking, the individual's total behaviour has been decisively shaped by the original family group. The individual is unconscious of this in that he is normally convinced that his way ... is the natural right one. (Foulkes, 1971: 231)

Hence, in some ways, Foulkes manages to turn the direction of analysis of groups and emotion around. Rather than thinking about the individual within a group and the emotions that flow from the experience of being in a group, Foulkes is stating that 'the individual mind' is essentially 'a group mind' and it is in some ways pointless attempting to separate the two within analysis. On this account, emotion, to some extent, is that which is formed through group phenomena and always relates to the group. Nonetheless, this understanding still tends to follow the thesis that emotion is something that is primitive and basic even though wholly social.

## Conclusion

With some notable exceptions the group psychologies discussed above tend to draw on the notion that emotion is that which almost drives people mad in groups. When we are within a group emotion is expressed as primitive, basic, infantile, unintelligent and irrational at best and dangerous at worst. It is almost as if emotion within the group setting is dangerously contagious, it is bound in some way to infect us and make us ill and indeed make us lose our own self! Of course this is an extreme characterisation of the general thesis of emotional contagion, but there is no doubt that elements of these extremes exist in the theories discussed above. Again we see the dichotomous discourses prevail in these theories and not just those emanating from the first half of the twentieth century but even the recent research we have looked at subtly uses terms such as 'primitive' in relation to emotion. It is interesting that in Hatfield and her colleagues' work that this term is not discussed or defined, but it is almost given as self-evident as to what it implies. Reicher begins to denote the possibilities of reframing the forms of emotion that may be in evidence in particularly highly charged group gatherings in a more positive light, but only in a passing statement that some field work along these lines may be of use. In an article concerned with the philosopher Ernst Bloch (Ellis and Tucker, 2011), we looked at Bloch's understanding of hope. The article uses the example of the student demonstrations against cuts to higher education and increased student fees that occurred in London in the winter of 2010. Here we focused on the forms of hope that seemed to be an important element of the demonstration and how it dynamically transmuted throughout the day and into the evening. Indeed we related the affects of the event not to irrational processes (although they were likely in some ways to incur forms of transmission) but to the more rational affect that Bloch

refers to as ‘educated hope’; indeed the demonstration was about the ‘hopes for education’. However, the demonstration went on to be portrayed by the media as a sort of ‘mad mob’ episode by choosing to focus their attention on a small minority of student activists who were pictured and filmed inflicting various forms of criminal damage. These activities and affects were not typical of the demonstration, to the contrary most people appeared to be engaged with conversation, debate, dance, song and music making. In the conversation and debate that we witnessed, people spoke about their hopes and indeed fears for the future of higher education. These perhaps more rational and positive affects appeared to be much more prevalent, even in the face of the anger and frustration that many felt towards the government. Maybe Foulkes does have something to offer here. Perhaps there was some ‘desire to belong’ at play as well as other desires. The point is, however, that these, as far as we can tell, were not irrational but perhaps as Descartes would have it, they were expressions of the passions that spring from ‘intelligent emotion’, or what Augustine, Aquinas and Spinoza might call *affectus*.

## Note

- 1 Although Brennan’s (2004) book is very much concerned with emotional contagion it is reframed under the title *The Transmission of Affect*.

## FURTHER READING

Freud, S. (1922). *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*.

Hopefully anybody studying the social sciences will at some point read a text written by Freud. As I (Darren Ellis) lecture in Psychosocial Studies, I invite my students to a ‘Freud Reading Group’ wherein we read and discuss a text by Freud. Freud’s ‘Group Psychology’ is a very accessible and dare I say entertaining read. It is twelve quite short chapters where many of Freud’s pivotal ideas are conveyed, particularly those related to the social psychology of emotion.

Reicher, S. (2001). ‘The Psychology of Crowd Dynamics’, in M. Hogg and S. Tindale (eds) *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Group Processes*. Oxford: Blackwell. pp. 182–208.

Steve Reicher is a pivotal figure in the social psychology of crowd psychology, as I have discussed in this chapter, he is more concerned with social identity than he is with emotion. However, Reicher produces some excellent critiques of the emotional contagion thesis and has conducted some very relevant field studies.

Sampson, T. (2012). *Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

This is an excellent book which offers an unusual contemporary theorisation of the transmission of affect through contemporary forms of networking. As discussed in this chapter Sampson draws on the early sociological theory of Tarde (who has been very influential

to Gilles Deleuze) to think about how metaphors and discourses 'go viral' to affect, inflect and infect the social.

Bion, W. (1961). *Experiences in Groups and Other Papers*. New York: Tavistock Publications Limited.

Anyone remotely interested in how emotions work in group settings should at least know of Bion's psychoanalytically formed understanding of the 'basic assumptions' in groups. *Experiences in Groups* is the classic text where Bion writes about his ideas. It isn't the easiest and most compelling of texts, but it has of course been extremely influential.

Foulkes, S. (1948). *Introduction to Group Analytic Psychotherapy*. München: Heinemann.

As hopefully we have made clear, Foulkes, although one needs to read particularly critically, offers some very interesting truly psychosocial thinking to group psychology. Dalal (1998), in his book *Taking the Group Seriously. Towards a Post-Foulkesian Group Analytic Theory*, offers some good critique of some of the more contentious aspects of Foulkes' theory and extends it.