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978-1-107-00973-8 - The Politics of Crowds: An Alternative History of Sociology

Christian Borch

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## The Politics of Crowds

*An Alternative History of Sociology*

When sociology emerged as a discipline in the late nineteenth century, the problem of crowds constituted one of its key concerns. It was argued that crowds shook the foundations of society and led individuals into all sorts of irrational behaviour. Yet crowds were not just something to be fought in the street; they also formed a battleground over how sociology should be demarcated from related disciplines, most notably psychology. In *The Politics of Crowds*, Christian Borch traces sociological debates on crowds and masses from the birth of sociology until today, with a particular focus on the developments in France, Germany and the USA. The book is a refreshing alternative history of sociology and modern society, observed through society's other, the crowd. Borch shows that the problem of crowds is not just of historical interest: even today the politics of sociology is intertwined with the politics of crowds.

CHRISTIAN BORCH is Associate Professor at the Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark. His Ph.D. was on the history of modern crime semantics, in which he studied how notions of crime and criminals evolved in the twentieth century and what responses were adopted to deal with crime. In his more recent research Borch has focused on crowds, architecture and urban theory. He has published widely on these issues as well as on key social theorists such as Gabriel Tarde, Niklas Luhmann and Peter Sloterdijk. He is co-founder and editor-in-chief of *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory*.

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## Acknowledgements

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The book draws on some of my previous articles on the history and analytical potentials of crowd theory. These articles include: 'Urban Imitations: Tarde's Sociology Revisited', *Theory, Culture & Society* 22(3) (2005), 81–100; 'The Exclusion of the Crowd: The Destiny of a Sociological Figure of the Irrational', *European Journal of Social Theory* 9(1) (2006), 83–102; 'Crowds and Pathos: Theodor Geiger on Revolutionary Action', *Acta Sociologica* 49(1) (2006), 5–18; 'Crowds and Total Democracy: Hermann Broch's Political Theory', *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory* 13 (2006), 99–120; 'Crowds and Economic Life: Bringing an Old Figure Back in', *Economy and Society* 36(4) (2007), 549–73; 'Market Crowds between Imitation and Control', *Theory, Culture & Society* 24(7–8) (2007), 164–80 (co-authored with Jakob Arnoldi); 'Modern Mass Aberration: Hermann Broch and the Problem of Irrationality', *History of the Human Sciences* 21(2) (2008), 63–83; 'Body to Body: On the Political Anatomy of Crowds', *Sociological Theory* 27(3) (2009), 271–90; and 'Between Destructiveness and Vitalism: Simmel's Sociology of Crowds', *Conserveries mémorielles* 8 (2010). While none of these articles reappear here in the form of separate book chapters, some of the ideas they present have been incorporated in discussions throughout the book. Since the present book also adds substantial amounts of new material, the whole is much more than the sum of the above-mentioned parts.