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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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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,  
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by  
Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107009738](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107009738)

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First published 2012

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Borch, Christian.

The politics of crowds: an alternative history of sociology / Christian Borch.  
p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-107-00973-8 (Hardback)

1. Crowds. 2. Crowds—History. I. Title.

HM871.B67 2012

302.33—dc23

2011043657

ISBN 978-1-107-00973-8 Hardback

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## Acknowledgements

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Just as the behaviour of crowds cannot be reduced to the act of a single person, so this book would not have come about without the generous help and support of a number of people and institutions. First of all, the research behind the book was made possible by a four-year grant from the Carlsberg Foundation, one of the central bastions when it comes to ensuring basic research in Denmark. I truly appreciate the Foundation's interest in and commitment to the project which allowed me to excavate the more or less forgotten sociological tradition of crowds and masses.

During the process of writing the book I have benefited from discussions with colleagues first at the Department of Sociology, University of Copenhagen, and subsequently at the Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark. Friends and colleagues from these and other departments who have followed and encouraged the research include Henning Bech, Margareta Bertilsson, Ole Hammerslev, Uffe Lind, Frederik Thuesen and Sébastien Tutenges. I am particularly grateful to Bjørn Schiermer Andersen and Marius Gudmand-Høyer for several stimulating reflections on the project. I also owe a special thanks for ongoing discussions on crowds to Urs Stäheli who introduced me to the field of crowds when I was an exchange student at the University of Bielefeld, Germany, quite some years ago. Urs' original work continues to be a rich source of inspiration.

Some of the ideas presented in this book have previously been vented at lectures and seminars at the European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder), Goldsmiths, Oxford University, Stockholm University, the Technical University of Darmstadt, University of Basel, University of Copenhagen, University of Hamburg, University of Westminster and Yale University. I am grateful to the various audiences for their valuable comments.

I am highly indebted to Tiina Arppe and Carl-Göran Heidegren who read and commented on select chapters. Their thoughtful suggestions generated significant improvements of the argument. The same applies to two anonymous Cambridge University Press readers who offered

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## Acknowledgements

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constructive criticism and several extremely valuable suggestions. It goes without saying that none of these scholars are to blame for any remaining shortcomings. I would also like to express my gratitude to Martin Barr for careful copy-editing.

Last but certainly not least I owe the greatest thanks possible to my wife Susanne for her persistent encouragement and incredible patience, year after year after year. The book is dedicated to her.

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.