

Crowds

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In his 1895 classic, *Psychologie des foules*, the French social scientist Gustave Le Bon wrote that “the age we are about to enter will in truth be *the era of crowds*.” Le Bon’s formulation may be apocalyptic, but it has continued to prove central to definitions of modernity. “While all our ancient beliefs are tottering and disappearing, while the old pillars of society are giving way one by one,” Le Bon affirmed, “the power of the crowd is the only force that nothing menaces, and of which the prestige is continually on the increase.” Premodern multitudes had long been imagined as elemental hordes to be shaped and subjugated from on high; modern multitudes were the volatile protagonists of a volatile era, leaders themselves as well as breeding grounds for new forms of leadership and individualism. Nothing menaced their *power* because of an inherent heterogeneity and instability: they were the result of the promiscuous intermingling and physical massing of social classes, age groups, races, nationalities and genders along the great boulevards of the industrial metropolis. Their *prestige* was continually on the increase because everything modern was potentially at their beck and call: political authority, the state, commerce, communications, culture, economic production.

Le Bon’s apocalypticism may be overdone, but there is little doubt that multitudes played and continue to play a defining role in the political, economic and cultural life of the industrial/post-industrial era. The phenomenon is at once obvious and invisible, because ubiquitous. It has typically been addressed in mono-disciplinary studies: studies focusing on social scientific work pertaining to crowd psychology, examining the image of the crowd in the French 19th century realist novel, tracing the demographic rise of industrial cities, analyzing group portraiture as practiced by this or that modern artist, charting the emergence of mass revivalist movements or mass entertainment forms. But, to date, there has been no comprehensive study of the cultural or historical importance of crowds and crowding, not to mention a study that brings together humanities and social science perspectives. The publication proposed here will assume the form of a “crowded” book, made up of a rich array of overlapping historical, interpretive and documentary layers. It approaches the topic of the link between multitudes and modernity from a wide variety of disciplinary angles and in an innovative format, combining full-scale essays, side-bar elements, testimonial mini-essays and a digital reference tool/support.

The *Crowds* book is one of several interconnected “outputs” generated by a team of scholars from Stanford and UC Berkeley working within the framework of the Stanford Humanities Laboratory (SHL) since early 2000. Linked to an exhibition project on the

iconography of multitudes in Western art, it represents a true instance of collaborative work inasmuch as it is the product of sustained dialogue between the main contributors. The volume is thus sure to achieve an overarching coherence that is unusual in volumes of this scope and complexity.

I) *Essays*

The backbone of the book will be formed by essays that analyze various aspects of the cultural importance of crowds, from representations of crowds in the plastic arts and cinema to the role of crowd behavior in market operations. The following is the preliminary list of authors and titles (with the precise order yet to be determined):

Joy Connolly, *Populus/turba/multitudo: The Roman Crowd and the Roman State*
Susanna Elm, *Crowds Captured: Gladiators, Martyrs and Popular Media*
Jobst Welge, *Far from the Madding Crowd: Individuation and the 'Masses' in the Western Imagination*
Charles Tilly, *WUNC*
Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *The Art of the Crowd*
Stefan Jonsson, *Inventing the Crowd: Ideas of the Masses from the French Revolution to the Paris Commune*
William Egginton, *A Face in the Crowd: Intimacy and Anonymity in the Rise of the Audience*
Allen Guttman, *Sports Crowds*
Urs Stäheli, *Market Crowds*
Haun Saussy, *Crowds and Passivity in Asia: Four Moments of a Topos*
Richard Sennett, *Crowding and Urban Design*
Matthew Tiew, *Contagious Crowds*
Judith Dolkart, *Dressing the Part: Costume, the Crowd and the French Revolution*
Andrew Uroskie, *The Man of the Crowd and the Cinematic City*
Juan Ramon Resina, *The masses in Spain*
Cherise Smith, *The Crowd in Civil Rights Photography*
Christine Poggi *Reflections on Elias Canetti: Crowd and Pack in the Work of Joseph Beuys and John Baldessari*
Jessica Burstein, *Agoraphobia—A User's Guide*
John Plotz, *Dot Crowd? Inertial Masses and Modern Mediations*

II) *Sidebars*

The above essays will be accompanied by three categories of elements, set off typographically from the essays so as to enrich the graphic texture of the work and to place the essays in dialogue with a wider cultural-historical context.

The categories in question are:

- 1) What we are calling “Crystals” (after Elias Canetti’s *Crowds and Power*). In other words, highly synthetic reflections on key themes, metaphors or formal conventions, such as, for instance,

The View: birds-eye, orthogonal, horizontal

Emblematic vs. Oceanic Crowds

The Face of the Crowd / Faces in the Crowd (Anonymity and Hyper-individuation)

Frames (the bleed, the void, the public stage, the podium/auditorium, the streets, the square)

The Man of the Crowd (leaders, followers, the random pedestrian)

Organized Crowds (military crowds, athletic crowds, theatrical crowds, religious crowds)

Mob Mobility

- 2) “Fact boxes” conveying information about phenomena related to crowding, which will highlight the changing history of the crowd in different parts of the world. For example, information regarding the

Ten most populous cities (every 50 years)

Ten most attended events of a given decade

Ten largest stadiums

Attendance at X events

Deaths in battlefields (Napoleonic wars, WWI, WWII, etc.)

- 3) “Semantic Histories” in the form of concise essays tracing the meaning and uses over time of the key words for crowds in various languages. The history of the terms “mass,” “foule,” “Menge,” for example, would be sketched out with an eye toward the connotations they accumulated over the years and to semantic shifts conditioned by historical events.

III) *Testimonies*

One of the key questions sustaining the research that has gone into the *Crowds* volume is not just the rise of the crowd and its organized political counterpart, the mass, as the protagonists of the era of progress and industry, but also their apparent decline. Clearly, the modern era is one in which traditional forms of social organization, privilege, and identity formation were giving way to new forms founded upon notions of popular sovereignty, labor and consumption; an era in which, accordingly, the normative form assumed by political action was the mass rally, the mass march or the mass mobilization. But to what degree is our own era still an “era of crowds,” particularly in the wake of the various media and information revolutions that have granted ever greater importance to virtual forms of assembly? And, if physical massing is no longer the “language” of political action, then what are the consequences for democracy of this new post-crowds order? Rather than trying to provide a simple answer, the volume will conclude with an array of mini-essays (1-3 pp.), shaped around a questionnaire formulated by the editors,

in which a number of writers, artists, scholars, and witnesses to key moments in the post-World War II history of multitudes reflect upon the events in question and on the impact that they have had upon their lives.

IV) *The Bibliothèque des Foules*

The final component of the *Crowds* book will be a digital reference tool (currently being developed within SHL) assuming the form of a searchable database in CD-ROM form. It will make available to contemporary readers the major social science writings on crowds from 1850-1925 in England, France, Germany, the US and Italy. Much of this material is rare or difficult to locate, and having it readily available in a searchable format will be a tremendous boon both to the readers of *Crowds* and to future generations of scholars.

The digital portion of the *Crowds* book will most likely also include the book's illustrations and film clips, cross-referenced to the print publication. The illustrations to the book, in other words, will be stored in digital form so as to reduce production costs and to make available much more visual material than would be possible in a printed format.

A publication date of 2006 is currently envisaged, timed to coincide with the *Crowds* exhibition. Many of the above materials are already assembled on a demonstration website located at <http://www.stanford.edu/group/shl/Crowds/>.