



A MOB OF TEENAGE GIRLS RUSH TO GREET AMERICAN SINGER JOHNNY RAY UPON HIS ARRIVAL FOR AN AUSTRALIAN CONCERT TOUR IN 1956
OPPOSITE: WELLWISHERS SURGE ALONG THE MALL IN LONDON AFTER THE WEDDING OF THE DUKE AND DUCHESS OF CAMBRIDGE IN 2011



THE LIVING CROWD

THEY DEFINE MANY OF SOCIETY'S KEY MOMENTS, BEARING WITNESS TO BOTH EPIC DISASTERS AND SWEEPING VICTORIES. YET UNTIL RECENTLY, LITTLE IN THE WAY OF SERIOUS RESEARCH WAS DONE INTO THE WAYS THAT CROWDS BEHAVE, **CHRIS WRIGHT** RECALLS BOTH THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF HISTORY'S MASS GATHERINGS — AND FINDS THAT WHEN CROWDS ARE GIVEN THE RESPECT THAT THEY DESERVE, THEY CAN BE FAR NICER PLACES TO BE

PHOTOS: CORBIS (OPPOSITE); AFP



It is May 2009 and *Discovery Channel Magazine* is at Anfield, the hallowed home ground of Liverpool Football Club, one of the most successful clubs in England. Liverpool has just gone up by three goals to nil, against an abject Newcastle side that's facing relegation under the management of its former best player, Alan Shearer — the man who has only recently left a lucrative job on TV, to try and help out his boyhood team.

A

ll of a sudden, a chant develops. "You should have stayed on the telly," the Liverpool fans sing, to the tune of the famous Cuban folk song "Guantanamera". "Stayed on the telllllll-y. You should have stayed on the telly." Granted, it is a bit cruel. But Shearer has the good grace to stand up and grin in deflated acknowledgement of the crowd's accurate barb.

But here's the thing. Where and how did that chant start? Around 40,000 people in the crowd, the Liverpool home fan contingent for a typical Anfield game, sang it in unison. But who started it? Who thought of it? And how, within a couple of repetitions, did a crowd as big as a small town's population all know what to sing and what tune to sing it to, without

any rehearsal or detailed instruction? How, in short, did this sea of people all come to speak with one voice?

CROWDED SELVES

For centuries, the behaviour of crowds has captivated and fascinated people who study human nature: anthropologists, sociologists, and in particular armies and police forces, who have to deal with the consequences of such large-scale collective action. The central baffling point is this: we somehow seem to behave differently in a crowd.

"When a certain number of individuals are gathered together in a crowd for the purposes of action, observation proves that, from the mere fact of their being assembled, there result certain new psychological characteristics," wrote Gustave Le Bon in *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, in 1895. Back then, Le Bon wrote, "The age we are about to enter will be the ERA OF CROWDS" (his capitals).

He didn't seem to think it a good thing, either. For generations, he argued, governments had managed the rabble in their best interests



LIVERPOOL FANS SHOW SUPPORT FOR THEIR TEAM DURING A PREMIER LEAGUE MATCH AGAINST MANCHESTER UNITED AT ANFIELD STADIUM. RIGHT: THE STORMING OF THE BASTILLE IN PARIS, 1789

without worrying too much about anybody's opinion. And now this was all set to change. "Today the claims of the masses are becoming more and more sharply defined, and amount to nothing less than a determination to utterly destroy society as it now exists, with a view to making it hark back to that primitive communism which was the normal condition of all human groups before the dawn of civilisation." He continued, ominously: "Their strength has become immense."
One could argue that the power of crowds had been in evidence long before Le Bon wrote, even in his native France. After all, what was the French Revolution, if not evidence of the power of a crowd? But 120 years on from his warning, was he in fact right? In some senses, the power of the crowd has



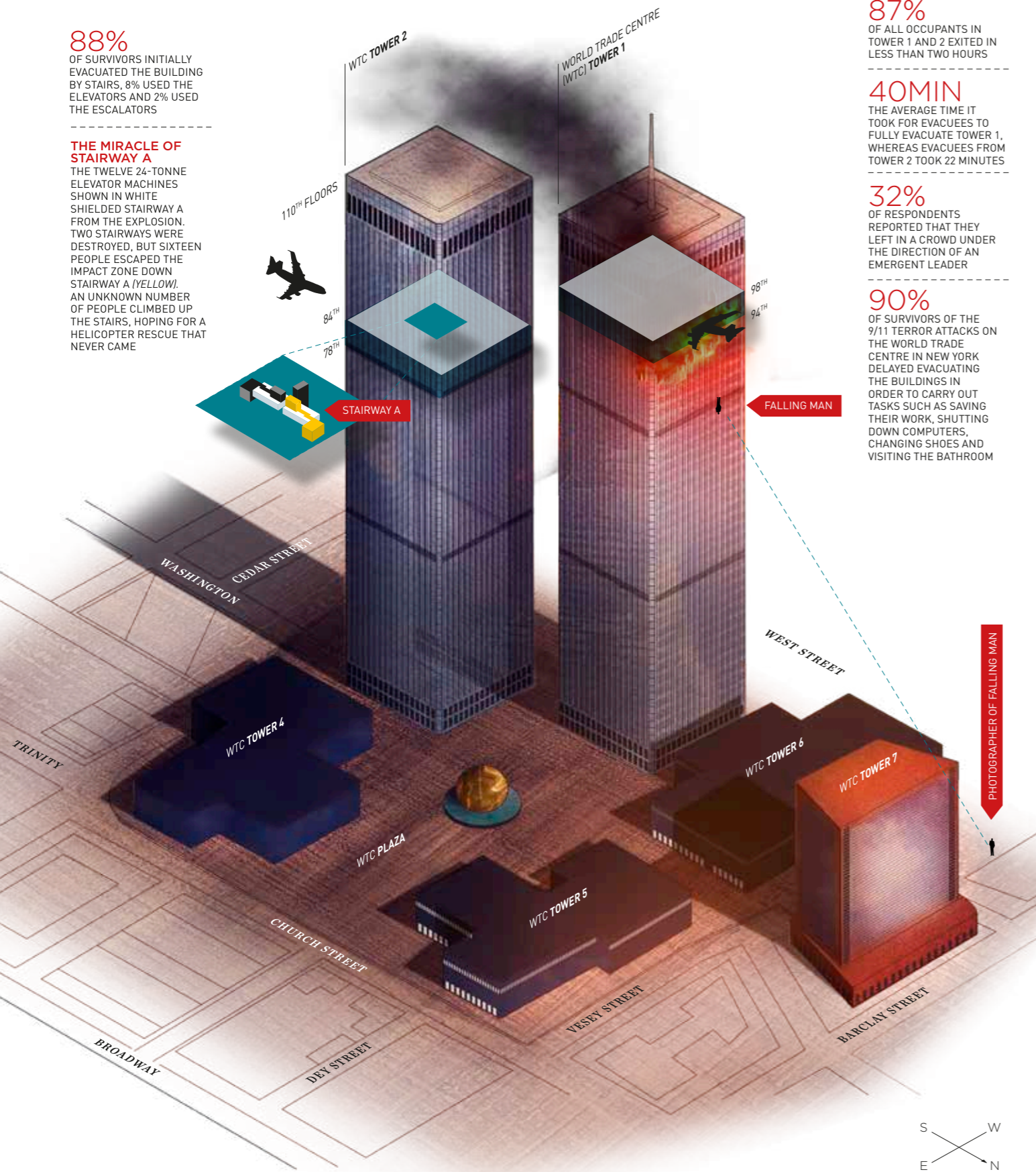
diminished since Le Bon's time. In most western countries, the power of trade unions to speak as a collective has faded over the years; while in many Asian countries, with South Korea a notable exception, the union movement never really took hold in the first place.
But as we look around today, you could equally argue that the power of the collective is stronger now than ever. Just look at what crowds can do now. They don't just urge on a football team or an Olympic sprinter. They don't just sing amusing songs at football matches. They depose governments, as happened time and again through the Arab Spring — the revolutionary wave of demonstrations, protests, riots and civil wars that swept through the Arab world from Tunisia to Egypt to Libya to Syria in a new, bodiless incarnation, crowds

CROWD BEHAVIOUR UNDER FIRE: SEPT 11, 2011

88% OF SURVIVORS INITIALLY EVACUATED THE BUILDING BY STAIRS, 8% USED THE ELEVATORS AND 2% USED THE ESCALATORS

THE MIRACLE OF STAIRWAY A

THE TWELVE 24-TONNE ELEVATOR MACHINES SHOWN IN WHITE SHIELDED STAIRWAY A FROM THE EXPLOSION. TWO STAIRWAYS WERE DESTROYED, BUT SIXTEEN PEOPLE ESCAPED THE IMPACT ZONE DOWN STAIRWAY A (YELLOW). AN UNKNOWN NUMBER OF PEOPLE CLIMBED UP THE STAIRS, HOPING FOR A HELICOPTER RESCUE THAT NEVER CAME



87% OF ALL OCCUPANTS IN TOWER 1 AND 2 EXITED IN LESS THAN TWO HOURS

40MIN THE AVERAGE TIME IT TOOK FOR EVACUEES TO FULLY EVACUATE TOWER 1, WHEREAS EVACUEES FROM TOWER 2 TOOK 22 MINUTES

32% OF RESPONDENTS REPORTED THAT THEY LEFT IN A CROWD UNDER THE DIRECTION OF AN EMERGENT LEADER

90% OF SURVIVORS OF THE 9/11 TERROR ATTACKS ON THE WORLD TRADE CENTRE IN NEW YORK DELAYED EVACUATING THE BUILDINGS IN ORDER TO CARRY OUT TASKS SUCH AS SAVING THEIR WORK, SHUTTING DOWN COMPUTERS, CHANGING SHOES AND VISITING THE BATHROOM

are changing commerce too: crowdfunding might not involve a thousand people shouting loudly in a public square, but it's collective action shaping the future, nonetheless.

FOLLOW THE LEADER

One of the central themes of crowd behaviour theory is the idea of a loss of individual responsibility. Since everyone's doing the same thing, why wouldn't you do it too? One routinely sees this at Premier League football matches in England, where vile chants can take place at times, particularly directed at opposition players or the referee. Would most of the people joining in these chants say these things as an individual, to the person they're shouting at? Of course not. It would be unthinkable. But in a crowd, the unthinkable can momentarily become reality.

One thing we can do in a crowd is forget who we are. At its benign level, this is just a sort of pantomime, a collective belonging. It's all a bit of a game, is how it's regarded in the primal world of sporting support. At its worst though, people can do

terrible things when they feel they are somehow legitimised by the fact that many other people are simultaneously doing the same thing.

The rise of Adolf Hitler might be cited as an example of this.

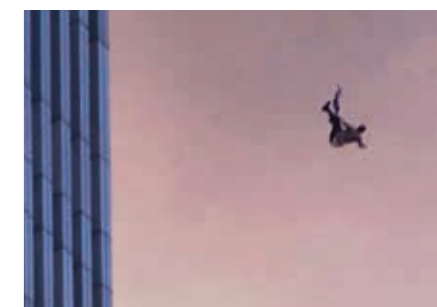
WOULD MOST OF THE PEOPLE JOINING IN THESE CHANTS SAY THESE THINGS AS AN INDIVIDUAL TO THE PERSON THEY ARE SHOUTING AT?

Hitler made his name by making impassioned, angry, mouth-foaming speeches in Munich beer halls, playing on the buried anger of many young Germans at the time, still paying for the sins of previous generations in World War I, and increasingly

bitterness about their treatment. The evolution from this point, to the rise of the Nazi party took many steps, most of them based on fear. By outlawing opposition and dissent in order to strengthen power structures, the sense of the mob mentality, of people stirred up by beer hall speeches, was a driver, at least in the early days.

Another horrible example was the rise of football hooliganism in the 1980s. Violence around football is probably as old as the game itself, but it gained a particular level of nastiness and organisation from the 1960s onwards. By the 1980s, this was characterised by informal organisations known as 'firms'. In England in particular, these groups were rife and feared: the Millwall Bushwhackers, the Chelsea Headhunters, the Leeds Service Crew.

These groups didn't care much about football, except in the sense that the matches provided a convenient platform for violence. So what was happening here? Surely these people wouldn't think it was normal to behave like this as individuals? One sociologist called this "ritualised male



PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES; CORBIS (BOTTOM RIGHT) ILLUSTRATION: QUENTIN GABRIEL, ICON: ZAHY ASA (MAN FROM THE NOUN PROJECT)

THE ATTACK ON THE WORLD TRADE CENTRE ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 SAW CROWDS SWARM OVER THE MANHATTAN BRIDGE TO ESCAPE THE CITY (RIGHT); OTHER CROWDS REMAINED (MIDDLE) WHILE SOME PEOPLE JUMPED TO THEIR DEATHS FROM THE BURNING TOWERS (TOP RIGHT)



violence”, a return to the primeval, the herd or the mob.

Equally though, crowds don't inherently have to be violent. Think of the Mahatma Gandhi-led salt tax marches in India in 1930. Or the sit-in protests and well-dressed marches of the US Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and '60s. Here was living proof that acting collectively could create a positive outcome without a threat. This was the power of numbers on a more peaceful scale: as a British trade union advertisement used to proclaim, if you want to be heard, speak together.

Sociologists divide crowds into the active (like mobs) and passive (such as audiences). Active crowds are divided further into aggressive, escapist, acquisitive or expressive. Aggressive mobs would include football hooligans, or the Los Angeles Riots in 1992; while acquisitive crowds would be competing for a scarce resource, be they bargains in a department store sale on New Year's Day, or looters seeking food and water after Hurricane Katrina. Expressive crowds might be those at a rock concert or religious festival.

But it is the escapist group that perhaps shows crowd behaviour at its most frightening. An escapist crowd wants only to survive a danger. And there is one terrible recent example that nobody involved in it will ever forget.

REMEMBER THE NAMES

Back at Anfield, the game is over. As the 45,000-strong crowd of people file out of the stadium with remarkable speed, the mosaic appearance of a sea of people is replaced with a uniform red and white of the seats. On their way out, many fans walk past a large brown marble obelisk within the stadium's grounds, an obelisk featuring a long, long list of people's names carved upon it — each with their ages, many of them terribly young, alongside it. This, as Anfield regulars will tell you with reverence and solemnity, is the Hillsborough memorial.

On April 15, 1989, a terrible disaster took place. Liverpool



AT THE HILLSBOROUGH STADIUM IN 1976, CROWDS SURGED FORWARD, CRUSHING FANS IN THE FRONT PENS. SOME PEOPLE WERE PULLED TO SAFETY ON TO THE UPPER TIER, (BELOW) FROM THE CRUSH THAT WAS HAPPENING BELOW. A TOTAL OF 96 PEOPLE WERE KILLED



PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

was playing Nottingham Forest in the semi-final of the FA Cup. Being a semi, it was held on neutral ground, in this case at the Sheffield Wednesday Football Club's stadium, Hillsborough. In those days, one end of the ground was commonly devoted to standing on the terraces. At Hillsborough, this meant that tens of thousands of people would be packed in together in a big standing area such as the Leppings Lane end — giving up the comfort of seat, yet gaining a greater sense of atmosphere and togetherness that standing allowed. In those days, because of football hooliganism in the 1980s, they were penned behind huge wire fences, with no way out onto the pitch.

Thanks to an entrenched police cover-up in the aftermath of the disaster, it has taken 25 years to get to the bottom of exactly what happened at Hillsborough. There is little point now in throwing mud, except to say that the fans were largely blameless, and in fact often heroic, on that day. The blame instead lay with a combination of factors, from the state of the ground to poor planning, bad policing decisions and widely-held preconceived ideas about football fan behavior.

All of which led to a situation where instead of being evenly dispersed among seven separate pens, far too many fans were

FAR TOO MANY FANS WERE FUNNELED THROUGH A TUNNEL AND INTO TWO TIGHT PENS BEHIND THE GOAL. THERE THEY WERE CRUSHED, WITH NO ESCAPE. NINETY-FIVE PEOPLE DIED, MANY OF THEM CHILDREN

funneled through a tunnel and into two tight pens behind the goal. There they were crushed, with no escape. Ninety-five people died, many of them children. Another died when his life-support machine was turned off years later, having never shown any sense of recovery. This is why Liverpool fans today often sign off their emails JF96, meaning "Justice For the 96". A further 766 people were injured.

DCM has talked with dozens of people who attended the game. What many of them describe was a terrible moment, when a crowd collectively realizes something is badly wrong. There is no escape, absolutely no way out, and it's quickly getting worse. Yet you, your neighbour, and the 10,000 people crammed into this tiny suffocating space, know you are all in danger. You realize it, almost simultaneously, as one. It's a sweat, a surge, a panic as the crush increases and the air in the lungs runs out, because there's no longer room for your chests to breathe in.

It's very hard to look at the photographs of Hillsborough. Many British newspapers were subsequently admonished for printing pictures of such suffering. Yet those pictures that were taken through the fence as the crush intensified do serve to show the desperate hopelessness of the trapped fans.

You focus on one face, crushed and helpless and almost resigned, because she is pinned not only from behind by weight of people, and in front by the unforgiving steel of the fence, but from above, trapped in piles, stacked and throttled, cascading upon one another in a frozen and immobile stampede. All you can see are misshapen arms — necks craned upwards towards the air. Fingers on the fencing as if clinging to life, which they were. The fence, solid metal, bulges outwards, pushed by dying faces.

In intense danger like this, we are utterly reduced. We cease to be individuals within the crowd, nor anything much other than animals, only caring about survival and that of any loved ones in

WHEN IT ALL GOES WRONG



For the United Kingdom, one of the landmark events in football and crowd management, was the Hillsborough stadium disaster; which for many, including British crowd psychologist Dr Clifford Stott, provided numerous examples of the severe

dangers of mismanaging crowds. Luke Clark asked Stott about calls to allow for "limited standing" in some British football grounds again, as happens in Germany. Was this a good idea, and under what circumstances?

Hillsborough was a very important historical event, in terms of exposing so many issues that our conversation has touched upon (see page 58). Hillsborough happened because of the way in which the police understood the crowd as a public order problem. So much so, that in their attempts to control the potential for disorder, they made the stadium fatally unsafe.

Even when people were dying, they still couldn't move away from the idea that this was an event that should be understood in terms of public disorder. So when people were climbing over the fences, the police were throwing them back in. Rather than recognise that, 'Hang on a minute, this is not a public order problem, this is a public safety issue', they couldn't move from that view. This whole approach to crowds as a problem, is part of the problem.

Where we see the responses to Hillsborough, those responses have very much been about trying to regulate crowds — trying to create an environment that's safe, but equally undermines the capacity for disorder. While the argument is that we have all-seated stadiums because they're safe, it is equally the case that to have a seat, you must have a ticket, which can be traced to a particular individual, who the CCTV cameras can help identify. That gives the police and the security services a greater degree of control, and they don't really want to give that up. So they're very reticent about moving to a situation where standing is allowed again.

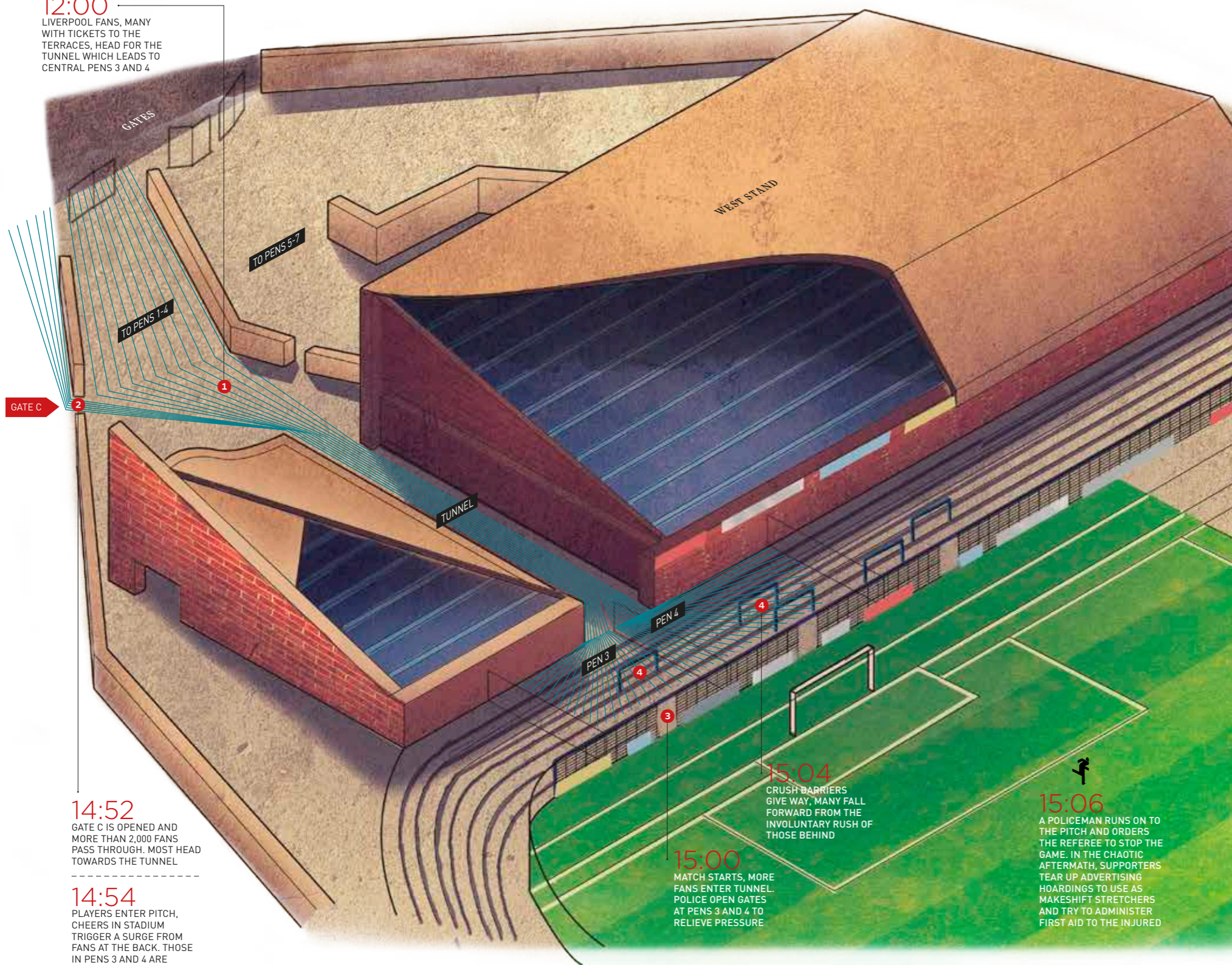
At the same time, the ability of stadia to host environments where people stand, safely, has been improved dramatically. It wasn't standing in stadiums that killed people at Hillsborough. It was a whole array of problems, around the way in which the entire safety system within the stadiums was regulated. There was no proper licensing or evaluation of stadium infrastructure. And there was fencing.

There were all sorts of issues that fed into why Hillsborough happened — which was essentially, a system failure. Now that these systems have been thoroughly revised, it's perfectly safe for us to move to an environment now where people can stand in stadiums. There's actually no reason we shouldn't do that. But in England, we're still not in a place where that is going to be made possible, at this stage.

CROWD BEHAVIOUR UNDER FIRE: HILLSBOROUGH

12:00

LIVERPOOL FANS, MANY WITH TICKETS TO THE TERRACES, HEAD FOR THE TUNNEL WHICH LEADS TO CENTRAL PENS 3 AND 4



GATE C

14:52

GATE C IS OPENED AND MORE THAN 2,000 FANS PASS THROUGH. MOST HEAD TOWARDS THE TUNNEL

14:54

PLAYERS ENTER PITCH, CHEERS IN STADIUM TRIGGER A SURGE FROM FANS AT THE BACK. THOSE IN PENS 3 AND 4 ARE PRESSED AGAINST FENCE AND CRUSH BARRIERS

15:04

CRUSH BARRIERS GIVE WAY, MANY FALL FORWARD FROM THE INVOLUNTARY RUSH OF THOSE BEHIND

15:00

MATCH STARTS, MORE FANS ENTER TUNNEL. POLICE OPEN GATES AT PENS 3 AND 4 TO RELIEVE PRESSURE

15:06

A POLICEMAN RUNS ON TO THE PITCH AND ORDERS THE REFEREE TO STOP THE GAME. IN THE CHAOTIC AFTERMATH, SUPPORTERS TEAR UP ADVERTISING HOARDINGS TO USE AS MAKESHIFT STRETCHERS AND TRY TO ADMINISTER FIRST AID TO THE INJURED



ALAN HANSEN
LIVERPOOL DEFENDER

"The first I knew of the trouble was when two fans came on to the pitch. As they ran past me, I told them, 'Get off, you'll get us into trouble'."

"One of them shouted, 'There are people dying back there, Al'. I could see some people trying to get over the fence but, because I was concentrating on the game, his comment did not really register with me"

FIREFIGHTERS WITH CUTTING GEAR HAD DIFFICULTY GETTING INTO THE GROUND, AND ALTHOUGH DOZENS OF AMBULANCES WERE DISPATCHED, ACCESS TO THE PITCH WAS DELAYED BECAUSE POLICE WERE REPORTING "CROWD TROUBLE"

ALTHOUGH THERE WERE 44 AMBULANCES AT THE GROUND, POLICE ONLY ALLOWED ONE OF THEM TO CROSS THE PITCH AND ATTEND TO THE INJURED AND DYING FANS

OF THE 96 PEOPLE WHO DIED, ONLY 14 WERE EVER ADMITTED TO HOSPITAL

MOST VICTIMS DIED OF TRAUMATIC ASPHYXIA — THEY WERE PENNED IN SO TIGHTLY THAT THEY COULD NOT BREATHE

ILLUSTRATION: GUENTHER GABRIEL PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

CROWDS

there with us. It would be the same for people trying to escape a fire, or a crashed airliner, or one of the crushes that have occasionally blighted mass gatherings of religious pilgrims. A panicked and endangered crowd is a truly terrifying force. This is what sociologists mean by an escapist crowd. It must be among the most frightening things in the world.

MASS FELLOWSHIP

Yet even those who survived Hillsborough clearly remember, as they fought for their own lives, they tried to help others around them. As they felt themselves go under and tried to reach the surface of this horrible, surging swamp of bodies, they tried to pull others up with them. And this is another important point about crowds: while classical theory may tell you that it reduces human individuality, the evidence suggests that in times of extreme stress, it actually does not remove people of their humanity. Modern thinkers now try to consider crowds in a different way.

Accompanying this article, Luke Clark interviews Dr Clifford Stott, a visiting professor at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. An expert on crowd psychology, he has been trying to inject more verifiable research into our understanding of crowd behaviour. Asked what myth about crowds that he would like to debunk, Stott is clear. "It would have to be the idea that crowds are 'mad, bad and dangerous to know'. It's this idea of mob mentality — the notion that where an individual becomes a part of the crowd, they lose the rational conscious control of their behavior. And that as a consequence, crowds are volatile, they're unpredictable, and are places where irrationality occurs."

Stott says that both his studies, and those by others like him, indicate that these notions are incorrect. He argues that crowds, however angry they are, often have legitimate reasons for their anger. Secondly, studies show that crowds often don't panic in emergencies. Thirdly, and this was a crucial lesson of Hillsborough, it is often us thinking in this way that totally

impedes a sensible police response to a crowd-related problem. Or more accurately, the crowd itself is often not the problem — but our reaction to it is.

"Hillsborough happened because of the way in which the police understood the crowd as a public order problem," Stott says. "So much so, in their attempts to control the potential for disorder, they made the stadium fatally unsafe. And even when people were dying, they still couldn't move away from the idea that this was an event that should be understood in terms of public disorder. So when people were climbing over the fences, the police were throwing them back in," he says.

YET EVEN THOSE WHO SURVIVED HILLSBOROUGH CLEARLY REMEMBER AS THEY FOUGHT FOR THEIR OWN LIVES, THEY TRIED TO HELP OTHERS AROUND THEM

Still, generally one has to have some sympathy with authorities too, because understanding a crowd is often not easy. A crowd has no membership. You don't have to do ask permission to be a part of it. You just become it. And in that respect, crowds can grow and spread very quickly. The British Government once commissioned a study on crowd behaviour from the University of Leeds. It revealed some interesting findings. One was that it took only five percent of a crowd to change that entire crowd's direction, meaning 95 percent of a crowd simply follow without realising what's going on. This turned out to be true in non-human crowds too, such as birds and fish.

This is something that those in crowd security try very hard to

understand. *Why* does a crowd decide to do something? This decision might include anything ranging from home footy fans making up a song about Alan Shearer, to a group going from chanting, to storming a building. And indeed, there is an industry in this now. In the US, one well-known member of it is a man called Paul Wertheimer, the owner of Crowd Management Strategies, whose first exposure to crowds was as chief of staff of the task force assigned to investigate the notorious crush outside a concert by English rock band The Who, at Riverfront Coliseum in Cincinnati, in December 1979.

The Who had begun a sound check. People queuing outside believed the show was starting and pushed forward to get in. The staff, believing people were trying to enter without paying, kept a lot of the doors shut. And as a result, 11 people died in the ripples and waves of people that flooded through the mass of people.

A man who wrote to Wertheimer's task force as an eyewitness, observed: "The pound of the waves was endless. If a wave came and

"A WAVE SWEEPED ME TO THE LEFT AND WHEN I REGAINED A STANCE, I FELT I WAS STANDING ON SOMEONE. I COULDN'T MOVE. I COULD ONLY SCREAM"

you were being stood upon with your feet pinned to the ground, you would very likely lose your shoes or your balance and fall." And people did. "They began to fall, unnoticed by all but those immediately surrounding them. People in the crowd 10 feet (3 metres) back from them didn't know it was happening. Their cries were



impossible to hear above the roar of the crowd."

She continued, "If the person in front of you went down, then you would follow, for there was no one to lean against. A wave swept me to the left and when I regained a stance, I felt I was standing on someone. The helplessness and frustration of the moment sent a wave of panic through me. I screamed with all my strength that I was standing on someone. I couldn't move. I could only scream."

Haunted by testimony like this, Wertheimer began advising venue operators and public safety officials on how to avoid tragedies like the one at The

Who concert. He and his team suggested banning festival seating for large indoor events, and that organisers should file a crowd management plan, just like a fire safety plan, only with a focus on getting in as much as getting out.

National standards were not adopted as he had hoped, so Wertheimer set about documenting incidents and dispersing the information. He would go into potentially dangerous crowds and make note of what he saw. In particular, as the 1990s arrived, and grunge rock music with it, he would go into the so-called mosh pits. "Mosh pits are good



MUSIC CONCERTS DRAW LARGE CROWDS AND EXHIBIT ALL TYPES OF BEHAVIOUR, INCLUDING CROWDSURFING (BOTTOM)

PHOTOS: CORBIS (MAIN); AFP (CROWD SURFER); PTA (TRAIN COMMUTERS IN PERTH)

places to study crowd dynamics, because they reproduce in miniature the shock waves of large-scale crowd disasters," as he told a profile writer from *The New Yorker*.

Working out ways to stay out of trouble, he published a moshpit survival guide, and also has a website called Crowd Safe, within which thousands of reports on crowds can be found.

So one way or another, through psychologists like Stott and those who seek practical experience like Wertheimer, crowds are better understood today, and better handled. And like everything, they're evolving too.

ROLLING FUNDER

Crowds don't actually have to be in one place to have an impact either. Thanks to the internet and mobile telephony, crowds can be anywhere, even when they're dispersed. Consider crowdfunding. The interesting thing about crowdfunding is that it doesn't need any two people involved ever to have been in the same room. This is a crowd in the vague, digital sense. And in a most wonderful form: strangers acting together to make something happen, just because they believe that it should.

There are at least 450 crowdfunding platforms now,

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE EXTREMELY ODD



THE GOOD

The 'mother gains super-strength to lift car off of her trapped child' story is a well-known one. But large numbers of people can perform feats that are just as selflessly impressive, like lifting an entire train off a trapped victim. That happened twice in August 2014, at opposite ends of the planet. In Perth, Western Australia, morning commuters (pictured above) shoved a 43-tonne train off a man who was trapped between platform and track. Some weeks later, in Ireland, several commuters did the same when a schoolgirl's leg was crushed by a tram.

THE BAD

It's not just protestors that are affected by group behaviour. Researchers from the University of California in Los Angeles found that men who walk with others in synchronised movements see "a purported criminal as less physically formidable than did men who engaged in this task without synchronising." The study, which came out during the recent Ferguson riots in the USA, was particularly relevant to the time, said the UCLA in a release. "What if the simple act of marching in unison — as riot police routinely do — increases the likelihood that law enforcement will use excessive force in policing protests?"

THE ODD

If you were a first-time visitor to a Gillingham Football Club game in the late '90s, you would no doubt walk away with many a question. *Why would hundreds of fans in the Kent town turn up to matches with celery hidden in their trousers? And why would they then throw those sticks of celery onto the field, mid-play? The fans, it turns out, were not aiming for rival teams. They were aiming for their own goalie, the rather chunky Jim Stannard. He weighed in at 104 kilograms, a figure his fans clearly decided was rather high for professional sport. The celery sticks were their unsubtle suggestion that Stannard go on a diet. Celery was quickly banned from Gillingham games, with police frisking fans' trousers for the offending vegetable.*

and probably many more. They evolved from some unlikely genes: one of the first examples was for the British prog-rock band Marillion, in which US\$60,000 was raised by fans on the internet, to fund a US tour in 1997. The band had no involvement in the idea, but it was sufficiently impressed by it to fund the recording and marketing of several albums in this way too.

Films have been crowdfunded too. Mark Tapio Kines financed his feature film *Foreign Correspondents* in this way, raising US\$125,000. An early twist in the idea saw Electric Eel Shock, a Japanese rock band, raise money from fans in exchange for lifetime membership on the band's guest list. It is believed that the highest funding yet achieved by a crowdfunding approach is US\$40 million for online video game, *Star Citizen*. Famous recent examples of crowd fundraisers include the actor Zach Braff (US\$3.1 million from 46,250 people to make *Wish I Was Here*), and director Spike Lee.



These days, technology is also instrumental in the assembly of crowds. Think of the flashmob: we've all seen the videos in a public space, where suddenly people all seem to start dancing in exact synchronicity, when moments earlier they appeared to be merely bystanders. The camera will cut to people who are not in on the joke, wandering around bewildered at what is happening around them. Each participant will have arranged where to meet, and what to do, through the internet: an example of technology creating the crowd.

This now has considerable social and political power. In the Arab Spring, ordinary people used YouTube videos to challenge official versions of



ABOVE: HUNDREDS OF PROTESTERS MARK AND MOURN THE DEATH OF KHALED SAID AS THEY STAND ON KASR EL NILE BRIDGE IN ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT, IN 2010
FAR LEFT: THE ONLINE VIDEO GAME, *STAR CITIZEN*, ACHIEVED A RECORD US\$40 MILLION FROM CROWDFUNDING
LEFT: A FLASHMOB GATHERS IN FRONT OF BERLIN'S BRANDENBURG GATE FOR ONE MASSIVE PILLOW FIGHT
RIGHT: HEAVY TRAFFIC CAN VACILLATE BETWEEN FUNCTIONING CHAOS AND JUST PLAIN CHAOS

PHOTOS: CORBIS (MAIN, TEHRAN TRAFFIC); GETTY IMAGES (PILLOW FIGHT)



events, using Twitter to spread the word and to agree where to meet, then Facebook to share their experiences. According to researcher Emma Hall, Facebook users in Egypt rose from 450,000 to three million in six months through the revolution, and now stands at five million.

One Facebook page which drew attention was entitled

IN THE ARAB SPRING, ORDINARY PEOPLE USED YOUTUBE VIDEOS TO CHALLENGE OFFICIAL VERSIONS OF EVENTS, USING TWITTER TO SPREAD THE WORD

"We Are All Khaled Said", in reference to a young Egyptian man who died under unclear circumstances after being arrested in Alexandria in June 2010. Author Richard Lindsey says the page is "credited with aiding youth movements in organising and facilitating messaging and outreach to other populations, including the 18-day occupation of Tahrir Square," he writes, in his study "What the Arab Spring tells us about the Future of Social Media in Revolutionary Movements". That gathering in Tahrir Square provides a demonstration of the power of the crowd, and came about in large part because of the power of the digital crowd as a spur.

ANTICIPATE THE FLOW

In the midst of researching this article, *DCM* visits Tehran, the bustling and traffic-clogged capital city of Iran. Heavy traffic is hardly unusual in Asia and the Middle East, and one finds functioning chaos on the roads in Jakarta, in Shanghai, in Mumbai or in Cairo. Yet Tehran

really is something else. Cars barrel out of side roads, straight across eight-line highways jammed with buses, trucks and boxy grey Iran Khodro family cars. They don't slow down: nobody slows down, instead piling straight into the traffic at right angles, even though on the highway the cars flit abreast in twice as big a number as there are lanes to accommodate them.

Despite it all, nobody so much as glances a wing mirror. It somehow just works. The traffic keeps flowing. And this is one of the hardest elements of crowd behaviour to understand — we somehow manage to anticipate and adapt to what everybody else is doing. It's like a flock of birds, a swarm of bees, or even people navigating a busy and narrow Hong Kong pavement. In huge numbers, somehow we're able to predict quite accurately what other people will do next.

Maybe this also helps us understand our ability to speak together, which we discovered at Alan Shearer's expense at Anfield. How did that example start? One guy in the crowd thought it was funny and started singing. He only got the first few words out, before everyone around him — through force of habit, and with the same anticipation as those drivers in Tehran showed — knew exactly the structure and tune he was using, and where it should go to next.

By the second line, there were 50 people singing it; their neighbours heard, and by the third clause, there were a couple of hundred. Now, half a stand could hear it, so by its second repetition, there were a thousand, before eventually it was the rest of the stadium, a shared joke spreading out through music. It went far and wide like spilled liquid until everyone got bored. As quickly as it was there, the song faded and drained away, soon replaced by many more.

It wasn't such a warm moment for Shearer, but it was impressive, in its way. A reminder of the fact that, no matter how unique and individual we all think we are, we can be far stronger when we think and act as one. ●