

Commentary and Debate

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EMOTIONAL DYNAMICS AND EMOTIONAL DOMINATION DRIVE THE MICROTRAJECTORY OF MOMENTS OF COLLECTIVE CONTINGENCY: COMMENT ON ERMAKOFF¹

Ivan Ermakoff's "The Structure of Contingency" (*AJS* 121 [2015]: 64–125) is an impressive move to create an empirically researchable theory of contingency in contrast to abstract and polemical claims on this topic.

A key finding is that collective effervescence at a key turning point in the 1789 revolution follows a mood of collective indecisiveness; hence the outburst of mutual enthusiasm and shared altruism is consequence rather than cause, *explanandum* rather than *explanans*. Thus the empirical pattern of a moment of contingency, its phenomenology, is that indeterminacy is palpably experienced by a group that feels routine courses of action—institutions—no longer guide or impel them and that choices among multiple future pathways are open. Hence this new theory "calls into question the significance of emotions in collective action settings" (p. 69).

The following is a response from the point of view of interaction ritual (IR) theory (Collins 2004): *Ingredients* for an IR are assembly of persons in close immediate communication; mutual awareness of a shared focus of attention; and a shared emotion. The *intensification* process takes place by rhythmic entrainment of voices, bodily gestures, and adrenaline level feeding back into strengthening mutual awareness and common emotion and

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building to the state of excitement Durkheim called *collective effervescence*. Outcomes of this process are solidarity of the group, feelings of strength and energy, dedication to collective symbols (which set and guide goals), and standards of morality and righteous punishment.

Ermakoff's analysis of the meeting of the French National Assembly on August 4, 1789, indicates a prolonged gap in time between the initial conditions, and the turning point toward the buildup of collective effervescence, and the eventual outcomes of revolutionary consciousness and its project to implement a new social order. All the initial conditions are present, but they are not causally efficacious. Other processes—which Ermakoff's analysis details—are necessary before the intensification process takes off and leads to the historic outcome.

But to examine IR theory further: everything in the IR model is variable. The IR may succeed or fail, may be stronger or weaker in intensity. Failed IRs are caused by the failure of ingredients: the group may be prevented from assembling or members drift away, attention may be scattered or divided, emotions may be weak or diverse. Any of these failures tends to feed back into further weakening the other ingredients. Instead of an intensification process, there is a process experienced as lassitude or boredom, like a political speech that falls flat or a party where the guests soon leave.

I will return shortly to whether this is what happened at any point during August 4. For now, let us consider conflict situations as a particular kind of IR. In a conflict where antagonists are assembled, there is a strong mutual focus of attention on the object of conflict itself, and this tends to produce a shared emotion (in addition to whatever emotions individuals bring to the scene), including anger and fear. Elsewhere (Collins 2008) I provide evidence that as the conflict moves toward threatened violence, the predominant emotion is confrontational tension and fear—not just fear of injury but the tension of being locked into a mutual focus of attention but at cross purposes, opposing trajectories of action, each attempting to impose one's will upon the other. This emotion is endogenous to the conflict situation.

Violent conflicts could be regarded as contingent, as there are three general types of outcomes possible: side A could win, side B could win, or the conflict could end in a stalemate. Empirically, at least on the level of small groups and crowds, threatened violence most often does not come off; the mutual tension often fades (especially through boredom when nothing disturbs the equilibrium between the opponents), and the conflictual assembly drifts away or goes back to routine. (See evidence in Collins [2008] and in Nassauer [2012] on microturning points of protest demonstrations toward or away from violence.) In this sense, most conflicts have a moment of contingency. But microresearch, especially using videos and other close evidence, shows what micromoves lead to one or another of the three outcomes. The most important factor is what I have called “emotional domination,”

which occurs when one side seizes the initiative and sets the rhythm while the other side turns passive, at best responding to the rhythm set by the other.

Timing is important here. Being surprised by the other's moves is one of the things that produces emotional domination—that is, the surprised side tends to lose initiative and the surprise-making side sets the rhythm of violent and/or expressive action that prevails. (Surprise is one of six basic emotions that are recognized worldwide from standard facial expressions; see Ekman and Friesen 1978. The surprise face shows extreme passivity and disconnect from purposeful behavior; being surprised disrupts one's own line of action.)

Let us turn now to the night of August 4. It is a conflict situation; the assembly is split among proponents of incompatible courses of action. As one side attempts to seize the initiative, the majority of the assembly expresses uneasiness. This is not just lack of enthusiasm and lack of unity; it is described as confusion, surprise, uncertainty. This widespread mood is already, in IR theory of conflict, an indicator that one side is emotionally weak; it is setting itself up to be emotionally dominated. Certainly this side is not carrying out a countermobilization of emotional energy among its faction that would enable it to stalemate or overawe the radicals.

Instead of continuing conflict, there comes a tipping point, a cascade of emotional flow toward aligning the conservative faction with the radical project. Ermakoff's microanalysis of how this comes about is revealing. The Duc de Châtelet breaks through the moment of indecision among his conservative fellows, making an impassioned speech of exemplary altruism. Is this course of action unpredictable? No; not only does it depend on the prior moves in which it is situated and to which it responds—as Ermakoff shows—it also follows a causal principle of IR theory (Collins 2004). The chief motivational principle is that individuals seek situations that raise their emotional energy (EE) and avoid situations that lower their EE. They are attracted to successful IRs and repelled by failed IRs.

IRs are chained together: in each new situation, participants come in with emotions and memories from previous IR events. The strongest emotional events (both negatively and positively) are strongest in memory.

Châtelet had been Colonel of the Gardes Françaises and thus the commander at previous events where authority was challenged by revolutionary crowds. His own troops had refused to fire on the National Assembly and had changed sides at the Bastille. After these upsets, Châtelet resigned his commission, avoiding an emotionally debilitating situation. A few weeks later, on August 4, he switches to join the group with the high-EE-producing successful IRs.

How do we know the revolutionaries' rituals were emotionally dominant? There had been three showdowns during the previous six weeks, all of which ended with the conservative forces backing down or being defeated. (The

following detail draws on Montague [1904], Carlyle [2002], and Doyle [2002].)

1. *June 20–23.*—Saturday, June 20, royal officials attempt to deflate the National Assembly by denying them their meeting hall in the Versailles palace; the approach is nonconfrontational, merely declaring that the hall must be prepared by workmen for an appearance by the king on Monday. Members of the elite Gardes Françaises regiment shut the doors on the delegates. The delegates mill around on the road outside until they find a meeting place at the Tennis Court, complete with seats for enthusiastic spectators. They generate solidarity and enthusiasm in swearing oaths of future resolve, joined by the crowd; they resolve to meet Monday before the king’s séance. In response, the king’s séance is postponed to Tuesday. On Monday, keeping up their momentum, the National Assembly/Third Estate meets in a church, where they are joined by liberal clergy who make a ritual procession of the occasion, and are greeted with enthusiasm. Tuesday the royal séance takes place; the king enters through a crowd described as “grim and silent,” and his speech, making some concessions but declaring the Estates will vote separately, is silently received. The National Assembly delegates refuse to leave when the king and his loyalists depart; they are described as standing silent and uncertain of what to do, until Count Mirabeau speaks loudly from the lectern and confronts the royal minister, who orders them to leave. Mirabeau denies his authority over them. The minister leaves and orders troops to disperse the delegates by force. But the Gardes Françaises refuse to act. Later this day the remaining clergy and 48 of the nobles go over to the National Assembly—joining the direction of the tipping point.
2. *June 24–26.*—The royal court shifts to direct threat, calling 30,000 troops to Versailles, parading them in front of the assembly hall and aiming cannon at it. But this is done half furtively, “without drum-music, without audible word of command” (Carlyle 2002, p. 142), omitting the usual ostentatious military ritual. The army’s sympathy shifts, and it becomes regarded as unreliable. The Gardes Françaises is confined to barracks, as unwilling to fire when ordered. The Garde makes a secret agreement (another oath-taking ritual of solidarity) not to act against the National Assembly. On June 26, the soldiers are released from the barracks and are embraced by a welcoming crowd. Simultaneously 11 ringleaders are put in prison; but the crowd breaks in and releases them at night. New forces are called from the provinces, but crowds “laid hold of their bridles”; weapons are lowered and soldiers sit immobile until they are brought liquor to drink toasts to King and Nation. (Drinking here operates as ritual fraternization, establishing

new lines of solidarity.) Royalists lose their nerve and withdraw troops.

3. *July 12–22.*—Sunday, July 12: official street placards in Paris tell the people to stay indoors and not to gather in crowds; large numbers of troops and artillery are in the city, including foreign Swiss Guards. Presumably the regime is prepared to head off trouble when news of Necker's dismissal gets around. A procession in favor of the reform ministry is attacked by German mercenary troops, who follow up by clearing out the fleeing crowd from the Tuileries. At the rumor that an off-duty member has been killed in the demonstration, the Gardes Françaises leave its barracks and attacks the German mercenaries. Royal soldiers melt away. Crowds overrun the Hôtel-de-Ville; the town councilors flee, displaced by the Paris electors, who create a municipal government and call on all districts of the city to create a Paris militia.

Monday, July 13.—the populace is called into widespread participation by several shared activities: forming militia groups, seeking arms, forging pikes. Women sew colored cockades as symbols of membership. The arming is not very militarily effective, but it is a collective ritual with high enthusiasm as well as sense of inescapable compulsion. The collective atmosphere is enhanced by a deliberate program of symbolically significant noise: tocsin bells (sounded in emergencies) are ordered rung continuously from all steeples; city criers with bells call all men to enroll in militias; new soldiers parade with drums beating; once gunpowder is procured, the city uses it not for fighting but to sound alarm cannon. At night, militia patrol with torches, while all windows are illuminated on city orders. (Illumination was a chief tactic in the 18th century repertoire of mass politics, designed to demonstrate unanimity [Tilly 2008].)

Attacks on prominent buildings begin a day before the attack on the Bastille, the last and most difficult royal stronghold. Crowds break into buildings looking for arms; finding or not finding arms, as well as finding stores of food, leads to looting and arson—more activities that give crowds something exciting and successful-feeling to do collectively. Crowds also find purposeful activity in taking over the city-wall barriers to stop the rich from departing. They build street barricades and prepare for street combat, which never comes.

In this omnipresent mood, soldiers desert individually to join the militia; they are heartily welcomed at enrollment sites. The Gardes Françaises regiment defects en masse, its organization still intact, giving the revolution some military proficiency. The military commander at the Champs de Mars finds his troops melting away; a council of officers is indecisive. This is one-sided indecisiveness, draining emotional energy from the official forces, at

the same time that the populace is emotionally galvanized by their participatory rituals.

Tuesday, July 14.—in the morning, following rumors that weapons are stored in the Hôtel des Invalides (army center), crowds descend on the building. The commander wants to parley rather than fight; crowds scale walls, with no shots fired by troops, and open the gates; large numbers of muskets are seized. The army has now split; the Gardes Françaises are the only intact unit in Paris.

The commander of the Bastille garrison is indecisive but unwilling to surrender. The fortress is very strong, with a series of moats, courts, and drawbridges. Once the siege begins in the afternoon, heroic action by individuals only manages to take the outermost court. Only one defender is killed in action, while the crowd has many more casualties. The casualty ratio does not determine emotional domination; after a four hour siege, individual soldiers start to offer to surrender; it becomes a cascade, surrenders are accepted, the inner drawbridges and gates are opened. The first wave of attackers embrace the surrendering soldiers—the typical ritual of side-switching; later waves of the crowd lynch prominent individuals in the excitement of victory.

Wednesday, July 15.—the king appears at the National Assembly, humbling himself without ceremonial escort, and is welcomed when he speaks of reconciliation and goodwill. A royal delegation is joyfully received in Paris at the Hôtel-de-Ville, the new center of attention.

Thursday–Friday, July 16–17.—hard-line conservative officials at Versailles flee for the border. But Friday, the king splits the conservative camp by visiting Paris in a conciliatory gesture, where he is received into the joyous celebrations—but on the crowd's terms.

Wednesday, July 22.—several former officials are discovered hiding; taken to the Hôtel-de-Ville for trial, but lynched by an impatient crowd, their heads paraded on pikes. Violent crowd rituals have now joined the repertoire of the victorious crowd.

Through this series of emotional events—large-scale IRs—royalists and conservatives find themselves repeatedly losing each confrontation, with emotional dominance going to the revolutionaries. It is not surprising that someone like Châtelet, who has been on the frontline of several of these crises, would feel an emotional pull away from the conservative side and toward the victorious side. And this is a general pattern in tipping point revolutions: the neutralization and fraternization of military forces with the insurgents and the shift of second-level military officers to the other side. (This was the pattern at Tahrir Square in January 2011, e.g.; see Ketchley 2014.) The key actors at tipping points avoid the EE-losing side and join the EE-gaining side, whereupon they are temporarily greeted as heroes.

To summarize the theoretical conclusion: the trajectory and outcome of conflicts are strongly determined by whether emotional domination is es-

tablished. Whether force is successfully used depends on whether the organization of force users holds together; if that organization is emotionally dominated, it loses. Virtually all conflictual confrontations have a moment of apparent contingency, since the outcome can go either way or remained stalemated. But causality is not exhausted here; micromechanisms that establish emotional domination are specified. In the case of political conflicts, where the issue is which coalition will prevail, the predictable pattern is that prominent individuals will lead the tipping point by the emotional mechanism of losing their attraction for EE-losing situations and shifting to join an EE-gaining situation.

How does this theoretical argument square with Ermakoff's analysis of contingency as an empirically experienced moment of uncertainty and indecisiveness? I agree empirically, while adding a chain of micromechanisms that determine what will happen. In that sense my argument is parallel to Ermakoff's, except that in IR theory emotion is central; in Ermakoff's theory, the cognitive processes in a series of communicative moves are central.

My argument remains in accord with Ermakoff's discussion of rival analyses of contingency. Especially clarifying are the points that (1) conjunctural causation is compatible with determinism (i.e., with definite and generalizable mechanisms; p. 71), (2) accidents are often endogenous to the action system they disrupt, or to a key confrontational situation (p. 74), (3) sheer coincidences are frequent but most are reabsorbed into the flow of social process (p. 75), and (4) personal ability varies in effort or strength of intentionality, and thus individual conduct can result from determinative processes; hence the agentic factor is not outside the social process but a part of it (p. 76).

Cognitions and emotions happen simultaneously in the flow of social interaction. All cognitions arise in particular situations, because they are marked by a degree of emotion that makes them come to persons' minds and tongues more readily than other cognitions. Our aim should be a theory of cognition and emotion working together. It is these combined processes at moments of confrontation and uncertainty, and their trajectory as people regroup around ideas-as-social-slogans, that we can analyze in moments of great contingent effects in structural change.

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EMOTIONS, COGNITION, AND COLLECTIVE ALIGNMENT: A RESPONSE TO COLLINS

Emotions acquire considerable phenomenological salience in times of challenge and high confrontation (Burstin et al. 2015, pp. 139–49). It is not difficult to understand why. These are times when interactions no longer become subsumed to predictable patterns. The practical relevance of institutional mediations crumbles. Evaluative responses, be they negative or positive, become less filtered or regulated by conventional practices. Actors who used to rely on routine scripts lose the sense of confidence that these provided, while actors eager to get rid of them feel elated and emboldened.

Acknowledging the salience of emotions in conflict situations, however, hardly tells us what emotions do in such conjunctures—in other words, their etiological status. Are they causes? Are they effects? Randall Collins's interaction ritual theory addresses both questions by systematizing the foundational claims of what could be called an emotional energetics (my term) as the basis of social dynamics (Collins 1981, p. 1009; 2004, p. 42). Emotional states become amplified in settings characterized by high physical density, clearly bounded relations, and mutual focus (Collins 1993, p. 206; 2004, p. 48). Interaction rituals that enhance emotional energy exert a force of attraction of their own (Collins 1993, p. 205). This emotional energy is a function of the "situational ingredients" that condition amplification. The emotional output thus produced activates or reactivates solidary commitments and feelings of morality (Collins 1981, p. 1001; 2001, p. 28; 2004, p. 108). It lasts when it gets vested in formal rituals and symbols (Collins 1993, p. 212; 2004, p. 107).

From this theoretical perspective, the night of August 4, 1789, in Versailles is a *prima facie* paradigmatic case. Durkheim (1995, p. 211) mentioned the event to illustrate his argument about group endeavors transcending individual and corporate egoisms. High physical density, boundaries to outsiders, and a shared focus were definitional features of the interactional setting at this event. Protagonists were impressed by the effervescence that took hold of the Assembly (Kessel 1969, p. 48). Acts of high public spiritedness fed and crowned the effervescence. Thus, the situational ingredients, the dynamic, and the outcome fit the interaction ritual theory's main claims. The case has all the trappings of a done deal.

On closer examination, as we magnify the focus and, even more importantly, investigate the event from a sequential perspective, the diagnosis ap-

pears far less straightforward. Expressions of hostility and equivocation on the part of the delegates from the aristocracy preceded effusion. The collective dynamics were not made of the same emotional cloth. They did not rest on a single emotion—fear, joy, or anger—gaining in amplitude as a result of shared focus and dense and bounded interactions. Rather, the dynamic was marked by heterogeneity and emotional reversal. This simple observation problematizes the notion of a *sui generis* emotional flow following its own course (Ermakoff 2015, p. 99).

In his comment, Collins deals with the issue by invoking emotional weakness. As a result of the political defeats they had experienced in the previous weeks, the news about peasants' rebellions and the surprise generated by the call for tax equality set forth by two of their own (the viscount de Noailles and the duke d'Aiguillon), the aristocratic delegates were on the defensive. Their equivocation was a symptom thereof. Situations of emotional weakness, Collins explains, pull people toward the winning side. Châtelet's own move can be explained in these terms. Colonel of the Gardes Françaises, he had lost control of his troops when these decided to join the rebellion on July 14, 1789.

Collins's pinpointed remarks provide the opportunity to probe claims about the etiological status of emotions in conflict situations further. Drawing on the basic observation that groups on the defensive as a result of successive defeats can opt for resistance, I first contrast a linear and an interactional understanding of the emotional weakness argument. In a second step, I pursue an interactional approach in light of a combinatorial analysis of mechanisms of collective alignment. Finally, I draw on the implication of these observations for the analysis of the interplay between cognitive and affectual states.

EMOTIONAL WEAKNESS

How do we assess "emotional domination"? Collins's comment points to two lines of argument. One refers to the general context of a confrontation. We identify which side in a confrontation is emotionally dominated by considering who has undergone defeats or setbacks. This line of argument motivates the diagnosis about the aristocratic delegates in early August 1789. "Through this series of emotional events—large-scale [interaction rituals]—royalists and conservatives find themselves repeatedly losing a confrontation, with emotional dominance going to the revolutionaries" (p. xx).

A second line of argument takes into account interactional dynamics: "emotional domination" designates a situation "where one side seizes the initiative, setting the rhythm while the other side turns passive, at best responding to the rhythm set by the other" (p. x). Groups "set themselves up to be emotionally dominated" depending on their ability to "carry out a counter-

mobilization of emotional energy” (p. x). The dynamics hinges on who “seizes the initiative” and who “sets the rhythm” (p. x). “Being surprised by the other’s moves is one of the things that produces emotional domination—that is, the surprised side tends to lose initiative and the surprise-making side sets the rhythm of violent and/or expressive action that prevails” (p. x).

Three observations are in order regarding these lines of argument. First, they rest on different modalities of causality. The contextual analysis, which identifies emotional differentials in light of the outcomes of past confrontations, applies to groups apprehended as units of analysis. Thereby it assumes that defeat (or success) operates as a causal force emotionally moving the members of the defeated group in the same way. Causality is linear. The focus on interactions, quite differently, portrays emotional weakness (or dominance) as an emergent feature. Causal factors take shape through interactions as they unfold in time. Causality is interactional (Ermakoff 2015, pp. 111–12).

Second, these two lines of argument yield opposite conclusions regarding contingency. A contextual assessment of emotional energy differentials views behavioral outcomes as fully predictable. “The trajectory and outcome of conflicts are *strongly determined* by whether emotional domination is established” (p. 10; my emphasis). The outcomes of large-scale confrontations, which amount to large-scale interaction rituals, impose their emotional logics on the groups involved. The interactional approach, by contrast, acknowledges indeterminacy. Mutual tension is “endogenous to the conflict situation.” As the study of “microturning points of protest demonstrations” indicates, “most conflicts have a moment of contingency” (p. 3).

Thus, portraying Châtelet as emotionally dominated does not call into question the gist of the argument about the indeterminacy inherent to situations of mutual uncertainty: the situation is such that single individual moves can generate vastly divergent alignment processes and, down the line, different collective outcomes. Had Châtelet been preceded by a great noble restating status considerations or advocating a law-and-order stance, had a commoner reiterated a public condemnation of aristocratic abuses, a cleavage along status lines would have been *at this point* likely (Ermakoff 2015, pp. 94–95). The underlying logic of this counterfactual analysis rests on the theoretical and empirical analyses I spelled out regarding processes of collective alignments (Ermakoff 2008, chap. 6, app. B).

Third, interactional dynamics can subvert or reverse the effects that would be expected from a linear assessment. Suffice to mention the German Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, or SPD) parliamentary delegates’ unanimous decision to vote *against* Hitler’s enabling bill (March 23, 1933) at a time when the Nazis were riding the crest of their “national revolution” (Ermakoff 2008, pp. 71–72). For the Social Democrats, the conjuncture was dire. Their party had been electorally defeated at the

March 5 parliamentary elections. Nazi thugs were targeting SPD members. Cadres were defecting. The momentum was in the Nazi camp. In Collins's analytical language, the Nazis, not the Social Democrats, had been stacking high-energy interaction rituals.

The contextual legacy of past confrontations should therefore be viewed as behaviorally significant conditional on in-group dynamics. To put it otherwise, the context created by successive defeats produces its expected emotional and behavioral effects from a linear perspective as long as group interactions give these effects free rein. We cannot therefore base our conclusions only on considerations of differentials in emotional energy assessed across groups. Intragroup dynamics can trump the logic of intergroup emotional domination. In broader analytical terms, intragroup dynamics condition intergroup relations (Ermakoff 1997, p. 418; 2010, p. 546).

If indeed interactional dynamics can subvert, or reverse, the logic of emotional dominance understood in linear terms as the outcome of a context of repeated setbacks, then the conditions under which these interactions can have such effects should retain our attention. This is the whole point of spelling out the empirical content of moments of collective indeterminacy. At junctures marked by collective equivocation, interactional processes and, by way of consequence, their emotional content, are open to question. Herein lies the causal significance of these moments: they bracket determinations that had been unfolding up to that point (Ermakoff 2008, pp. 303–304). We can gauge alternative behavioral scenarios in light of a theory of collective alignments (chaps. 8, 9).

PROCESSES OF ALIGNMENT

From an interactional standpoint, the night of August 4, 1789, is a stunning case of collective alignment. Actors who had been at loggerheads because of wide divergences grounded in material and status-based interests aligned their stances with one another. The process took place within and across groups. The aristocratic delegates aligned themselves with the proposal to abolish feudal rights. The representatives of the clergy came up with their own renunciations. Finally, the commoners renounced corporate privileges and stipends of various kinds.

In *Ruling Oneself Out*, I have argued that we lose a great deal of explanatory power when we subsume collective alignment to the generic (and metaphorical) category of contagion (Ermakoff 2008, pp. 211–13). Moving away from a metaphorical understanding requires specifying different alignment processes. These can be conceptualized in light of two dimensions. One describes how individuals experience the situation—their experiential mode. Do they for instance react to immediate observations and external stimuli in a way that is primarily unreflective? Do they reflect on what may happen

and, to this end, project themselves in a foreseeable future? The second dimension pertains to the temporality of the process. Does alignment take place sequentially? Does it revolve on simultaneous actions?

“Emotional entrainment” (Collins 2004, pp. xi–xii), which undergirds a typical interaction ritual when it is successful, is unreflective and sequential. The actor lets himself be carried away by others’ affectual commitment (worshipping, dancing, demonstrating, or engaging in violence). Cognition is on the back seat. Bodily contacts and rhythms drive interpersonal emulation.¹ This is not to say that individuals are equally susceptible to being “entrained.” More plausibly, we can presume that they are more or less likely to be carried away depending on the number of those around them who are already expressing a given emotional state. In other words, emotional alignment is amenable to a threshold analysis (Granovetter 1978).² This point highlights the sequential and wave-like character of this type of alignment: as individuals with higher emotional thresholds let themselves be entrained, the emotion gets amplified.

“Tacit alignment,” by contrast, is reflective and nonsequential: the members of a group seek to align their behavioral stance with one another’s by tacitly coordinating their expectations about themselves. The process implies a reflective mode of experience: actors try to assess the future knowing that this assessment will be inconsequential if it is at odds with the other group members’ expectations. Coordination takes place through this inference process. Alignment, as a result, operates in a discrete fashion. Actors adjust their beliefs and expectations in light of information they assume to be known by all. A public event conveys this information to the extent that group members can interpret the event as shedding light on their own future collective behavior. Underlying the theory of collective alignments is a theory of impacts (Ermakoff 2008, pp. 203–9; 2015, pp. 76–80).

A theoretical framework centered on the analytics of processes of alignment yields two types of insights relevant for the study of collective behaviors and events. First, such a framework helps theorize conditional and conducive factors. Consider the “situational ingredients” of emotional entrainment: dense physical contacts, well-defined group boundaries, mutual focus, and a

¹ See, e.g., Collins’s (2004) analysis of the “New Year celebrations that work”: in these happenings, interaction “has no cognitive content” (p. 52). More broadly, “as we operate through an emotional magnetism toward and repulsion from particular thoughts and situations in the flow of every life, . . . we are seldom reflective about this, and are often grossly inaccurate in our assessment when we are reflective” (p. 97).

² For a given emotion, an individual’s emotional threshold can be conceptualized as the number or proportion of people expressing the emotion that tips this individual over from a lack of expression to a state of outward expressive endorsement. This definition adapts Granovetter’s (1978, p. 1422) conceptualization of action threshold. A higher emotional threshold means a lower individual propensity to become emotionally influenced.

shared emotion. The interaction ritual theory describes how specific ecological and situational factors *amplify* an already-shared emotion. A threshold analysis qualifies this assessment: for amplification to take place, the commonality of an emotional state is not necessary. Diffusion takes place when the threshold distribution lends itself to a chain reaction given the initial proportion, or number, of individuals expressing the emotion

Tacit alignment, for its part, is likely to have phenomenological relevance in situations in which a set of individuals becomes cognizant of a collective decisional challenge that motivates them to make their action conditional on one another's. The higher the risks involved, the greater the incentives to reflect on possible consequences and, to this end, to project oneself into the future. Since unexpected challenges by definition undercut the ability to fall back on standard or scripted procedures, these challenges generate cognitive and behavioral uncertainty: cognitive because group members have imperfect information about consequences, and behavioral insofar as group members oscillate between different lines of conduct (Ermakoff 2008, p. 357; 2015, p. 100). This uncertainty has its own emotional markers: insecurity and ambivalence.

Second, the analytics of collective alignment furthers a combinatorial understanding of processes and their effects. On the night of August 4, 1789, the shift in perception following Châtelet's public renunciation of his feudal rights contributed to an incipient commonality of mood among aristocratic and commoner deputies. In more analytical terms, tacit alignment set the ground for emotional entrainment. In parallel, two additional processes reinforced the logic at play: the gratifications conveyed by public expressions of approval (Ermakoff 2015, p. 99) and a game of retaliatory tit-for-tat involving delegates calling for the abolition of privileges that were not their own (Elster 2007, pp. 89–90). The transformative scope of the event then becomes understandable as the outcome of multiple mechanisms combining their effects and, through this combination, amplifying one another. This point has broad relevance for the sociology of events and their impact.

COGNITION AND EMOTIONS

What do we learn from this exchange regarding the etiological status of emotional states in conflict situations? Two observations are worth underscoring. First, in interactional settings, the emotional states expressed by other group members—aggressiveness, jubilation, insecurity, ambivalence—inform on the strategic configuration taking shape. This point is of particular phenomenological relevance in situations of mutual uncertainty. Group members tacitly realize that they share an interest in devising a collective way out of the challenge when they mutually observe insecurity and equivocation among themselves. Cognition is indeed “crucially entwined with emotion”

(Collins 1993, p. 225) either as “antecedent beliefs about events or states” (Elster 1999, p. 250), or as inferences derived from observing particular emotional states.

Second, shifts in collective perceptions make the members of a group liable to new emotional states. On the night of August 4, 1789, as they reassessed where as a group they stood on the issue of feudal and seigniorial privileges, deputies of the aristocracy allowed themselves to be affected by the emulation of enthusiasm. This observation is consistent with the depiction of interactional dynamics as the crucible of emotional states. The knowledge of an acute threat does not necessarily translate into generalized fear.³ Conversely, fear can become pervasive even though tangible signs of a threat are lacking (Ermakoff 2008, chap. 3). Interactional dynamics within groups condition the dynamic of affects between groups.

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³ See, e.g., Goodwin’s and Pfaff’s (2001, pp. 287–93) diagnosis about the role played by “intimate support networks” and the “dynamics of mass meetings” in mitigating fear among the participants of the U.S. and East German civil rights movement.

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