

The Runaway Train—An Analysis of the Group Phenomenon in the Medium of Animated Short Films

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Abstract: In today's society, the study of group phenomenon is reflected in a wide range of fields. When people have the same psychological demands, it is possible to form a group, in which they display psychological characteristics that are not consistent with their individual behaviours. For example, once an individual enters a group, he or she will show psychological characteristics of reduced intelligence, impulsivity and multiplied self-confidence, which makes group behaviour unpredictable and strongly emotionally contagious. French sociologist Le Bon's classic work "The rabble" deeply analyses the psychological phenomenon of groups, which provides a strong theoretical basis for this paper to interpret the group behaviour presented in the animated short film "Runaway Train". Le Bon pointed out that individuals in a group will gradually lose the ability to think independently, increase simple-minded behaviours due to emotional impulses, and blindly imitate the behaviours of others in the group, which may lead to the impairment of individual rational thinking. The animated short film "Runaway Train" vividly illustrates this group phenomenon. The group of diverse group characters that appear on the train display unusual behaviour when faced with a crisis, such as the gentlemen inciting the commoners for their own survival, and the monetary interests that drive each of the commoners to sell their surplus value, which ultimately leads to the eventual destruction of the train due to the mistakes of the conductor and the blindness of the crowd of paupers on the train, as reflected in the film, which is closely related to group theory.

1. Introduction

Before Le Bon put forward the group theory, scholars studied the shining moments on the stage of history through individuals to analyse the impact of individual decisions on events or history, but very few people studied the group as a psychological entity in the event. In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the socio-political movements in various European countries made Le Bon aware of the rise of a new force, and after the publication of "The Psychology of the Groups and the Revolution", "The Ragamuffin After the publication of such works, Le Bon's study of groups gradually came into view, providing new perspectives for all kinds of research^[1].

The animated short film analysed in this paper is a step-by-step runaway train triggered by a group of people, which will finally face the destruction of the whole train. A small train maps a society, the capitalists and aristocrats for the control and oppression of the commoners, the

ignorance of the commoners and blindly follow the crowd, for the psychological analysis of group behaviour can better understand the deep metaphor implied by the animated short film. Understanding group psychology is like having a strong light that illuminates many historical and economic phenomena. Without it, these phenomena would be difficult to see. In this paper, we will use Le Bon's Uproar as the theoretical basis to analyse the satirical animated short film, and delve into the group behaviours of the different characters in the short film, as well as the group psychology behind the behaviours.

2. "Runaway" train - plot description

A cow was taking a step in the track, when a train known as the Society was speeding along, with a leading conductor and a hard-working coal stoker at the head of the train, who were in charge of the speed and direction, a group of well-dressed gentlemen capitalists and aristocratic ladies in the second car, a group of plebeians in the third, who were in time to enjoy themselves, and a group of do-nothings in the last car.

The conductor, who had been derailed from his post by the presence of the woman, left the driver's seat and did not see the crisis in front of him, and the train, which was in motion, struck a cow. Instantly, the entire train goes out of control. As it passes over a cliff, the last carriages are the first to be thrown off the track and fall into the abyss, and no one cares. After a couple of scary bumps, the train comes to an unscalable mountain, and despite the stoker's efforts to add coal to the train, the train stops dead in its tracks and even begins to fall back. At this point the gentleman in the first-class carriage unleashed the power of the vulgar carriage with his pecuniary interests, burning guitars and pigs, children and clothes^[2]. After draining all the value out of the commoners, the capitalists decisively abandoned the commoner carriages, and the train finally reached the top of the hill.

However, at the highest point, the train could not move forward, but fortunately, the disappearing conductor appeared at that moment and made the train move forward again. The conductor enjoys the applause of the capitalists, and the people cheer and rejoice, thinking that they are out of danger, and the crowd seems to be in a final frenzy. As the train speeds down the hill, the conductor can't support his own weight and falls into the train's coal burner, which causes the train to begin a mad dash down the hill, and the unstoppable train veers off the track and flies, eventually hitting the ground and destroying the train. At the end of the film, as the colours appear, only the burning wreckage of the train is left, along with a cow that keeps going, like the ever-turning wheels of history.

3. Characteristics of groups in society

3.1. The impulsiveness, volatility and irritability of the group

The rational mind that the group possesses cannot control the dominating power of sensibility displayed by the group's behaviour. All stimuli act as a dominant force on the group, its reactions are constantly changing, and the group does not think ahead. Whereas an isolated individual possesses the ability to control his own reflexes, a group lacks this ability.

When individuals are in a group, the sense of pause makes thinking in solitude less acute and more inclined to go along with the group's thinking; they may be aroused by a succession of opposing emotions in the group and are always subject to a variety of stimuli, which makes the behaviour exhibited by the group fallible. The exclusive nature of the group can be intolerant, irritable and impulsive when voices different from theirs are heard. When a small number of people in the civilian group accept the lure of money given by the capitalists, the rest of the group will be

affected and their behaviour will become impulsive and irrational^[3].

3.2. The group is gullible and susceptible to suggestion

The group is gullible and easy to accept hints, because every individual in the group is incredibly eager for the group's sense of security and identity, which also leads to the group's psychological defences are lax, is unthinking to allow anything to go inside, is always ready to be hinted at, i.e., people are willing to believe in their own want to believe in something.

At the same time, the group exhibits exclusivity and extremism; individual ideas that do not agree with the group's ideas are assimilated, and ideas that cannot be assimilated are rejected. When their own value is linked to money, the civilian group will think that selling labour can become a way to get enough capital to become middle class, and once they accept this hint, the psychological defence of the civilian group will be slackened, and they are gullible to believe in the lies and exploitation of the capitalists, and they only want to believe in what is happening in front of them at the present time.

3.3. The exaggeration and simplicity of the group's emotions

Human knowledge is like a level, when the more you know, the fuller the water bottle, more knowledge, and in turn, the more knowledge blindness will be exposed to, will be the fuller the lower, and people's rage often comes from the lack of knowledge. Individuals staying inside a group are like frogs at the bottom of a well, blocked on all sides by the group to move forward, and every day they are bewildered by the false sense of identity, unwilling to jump out of this comfort zone.

When the commoner sells his value for money in constant exploitation, the emotions of all in the group become exaggerated and simple, the commoner sells his clothes, sells his guitar, sells his pig, and even sells his children, and even if there is a single person who is willing to step out of the comfort zone of the group and tries to get back the ability to think rationally, he will be stopped and affected by the group's crazy behaviour.

4. Train to Destruction in Short Film

For the first time, Le Bon elucidated some important issues in social psychology, examined the differences between group and racial characteristics, pointed out the nature of mass movements, and analysed the relationship between leaders and masses, democracy and dictatorship. And the train in the animated short film is like a complete mini-society, in which human nature is constantly reflected in the masses and leaders, use and betrayal, desire and destruction. Each character that appears in the film suggests a group class or historical event in reality - the ox that keeps moving on the track: nature, history, economic crisis, the moving train: the state, the captain: the ruler, the coal digger: the grassroots of the government, the beautiful woman: desire, the gentleman: the capitalist, the common man: the people.

4.1. Leader consciousness

The leader is a very special character in the group phenomenon, under whom the group carries out its actions. These leaders must be extraordinarily strong-willed; they possess the authority conferred by fame and are adept at using the power of authority to exert influence on group members. The means by which the leader mobilises the members of the group is by making assertive claims, repeating the assertion over and over again, and rallying the followers through strong emotional contagion^[4].

When the leader of the train is supported by the capitalist group in the process of taking charge of the direction and speed of the train, when the ruler (leader) is obsessed with the desire for wealth and power, he is not interested in guiding the direction and actions of the group.

Whereas when the train encounters a crisis and is unable to respond effectively, the crisis gets worse and worse, the capitalists in the second compartment do not see the uncontrollable factors that exist in the aftermath of the crisis even though they foresee a terrible crisis. And the ordinary people's group does not have anyone to lead them, resulting in the ordinary people's group attempting to muddle along until the danger is actually imminent, and then they remain muddled in their minds.

4.2. Unconscious behaviour of the group

The herd mentality of the group, the collective mentality, is the idea that the group is a temporary organisation of heterogeneous components that come together over a period of time to form a new organism with characteristics different from those of a single cell. The Indian philosopher Osho said in *Money and Work*: "Only when you are a human being can you create; when you are part of a mass mind you cannot create. The collective mind is the lowest mind in the world; the mass mind is not creative; it is dragging life along; it doesn't know joyful dancing, it doesn't know singing, it doesn't know joy; it is mechanical." When one is alone, in order to maintain one's sense of security, one puts oneself in a state of keen observation and analysis, rationally analysing the circumstances and problems in which one is currently placed, and is a more complete personality with a dominant position in oneself.

When the individual is in a group, in order to gain recognition and a sense of belonging, the individual mind is biased towards the collective mind and is influenced by it to behave in a way that he would never do when he is alone, and his own rational constraints are disintegrated and reshaped by the group's emotional forces, and the group is easily dominated by the emotions, which the individual in the group is not able to clearly recognise in such an environment.

4.3. "There is a lot of people."

"Once a person is in a group, their IQ is severely lowered, and in order to gain acceptance, individuals are willing to abandon right and wrong and trade their IQ for that sense of belonging that makes them feel so secure." Blindly following the herd, when the capitalists, the elites used their way to save the runaway train, from the few who started to use money to enslave the civilian population to produce results, all of the capitalist elite group started to constantly make the civilian population sell their labour and their own value, but could not see that the current initiative is like holding a paycheck to put out a fire.

While the trajectory on the plains is smooth and safe, it is downhill to the top of the mountain, back to the original initial state, and on to the dangers. Every shape and form in the elite group does not contemplate this unknown danger. The ordinary civilian population, on the other hand, is chaotic, with mechanical exchanges between civilians who can only see the fleeting wealth before them, but not the real crisis.

In a group, the characteristics and intelligence of each individual are smoothed out to create an average that is disabling to judgement. The IQ of the group is not the sum of the IQs of the individuals alone, and the group may be able to achieve results that are smaller than the individual superposition, or it may produce greater creativity and achieve results that would be difficult to achieve with the individual superposition. What is absolutely impossible for one person to say or do on calm reflection is very likely to be true in a group. Perhaps the greatest difference between people is their intelligence, but once integrated into a group, the differences between people

immediately disappear, especially when it comes to beliefs, political views, moral judgement, personal love and hate, all become purely emotional expression, even the most outstanding people will be wrapped up by the strong will of the group, the loss of independent judgement and the ability to think.

Psychologically speaking, this is our unconscious. Eventually, all people will be assimilated and swallowed up in an unconsciousness of the group, and the wisdom of this group will form the wisdom of all people, and the quality of the group will determine the common quality of all people.

4.4. Suggestion and Reinforcement

Reason resonates much harder in comparison to sensibility, and when the preaching of reason fails to suggest, infect and reinforce the human mind, the direct brutality of sensibility becomes a simple and effective means of acceptance. Suggestion dictates that the individual in a group will sometimes take on characteristics that are the exact opposite of what he would have in solitude.

The suggestion made by the capitalists to the common people as to the benefits to be gained is that the plebeian group can become middle class by selling labour to the capitalists. In one way or another, this suggestion is equally seductive to everyone in the plebeian community^[5].

Once the weaker minded people in the plebeian group get past similar hints from the capitalists, they are easily tempted by capital and sell cheap labour to it. Because the group of capitalists will take advantage of the emotional weaknesses of these people to suggest to the civilian population what evils will result if they go against the wishes of the group. And as the chain of the group passes on, a very powerful binding ideology is formed and the individual freedom of the civilian population is completely lost^[6].

The emotional exaggeration of the civilian population is continually reinforced by the facts that emerge, when a feeling emerges, this feeling is spread rapidly through suggestion and communication, in the process the emotion is continually exaggerated, reinforced and continually affirmed, this allows the emotion to strengthen and control the civilian population in the group, irrationally insane, and at the end of the day deceived by the lies of the capitalist group, only interested in the immediate benefits, and exploited until the loss of money, children and even lives.

5. Conclusions

Guided by the basis of Le Bon's group psychology theory, this paper provides an in-depth analysis and discussion of the behaviour of various groups in the animated short film Runaway Train. Through the perspective of group psychology, it deeply recognises the universal laws and psychological characteristics embedded in group behaviours, and how these group characteristics are manifested in real life and the virtual world.

As Le Bon's theory points out, the behaviour of individuals in groups tends to be characterised by diminished intelligence, impulsivity and contagiousness, which is vividly demonstrated in Runaway Train.

As we can see from the short film, individuals in groups often lose their ability to think rationally when faced with challenges, while emotions and impulses become important factors that dominate individual behaviour. This kind of behaviour is not only seen in the animated film, but also in reality, such as political movements, cyber-violence, Netflix places and so on. With the help of Le Pen's theory, we can better understand the psychological reasons behind these phenomena, so that we can better cope with and understand these group behaviours, and avoid unconsciously placing ourselves into the irrational impulsive behaviours of any group.

In conclusion, Le Bon's Uproar is one of the seminal works in the field of social psychological research, and through these theoretical analyses, we gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon

of group behaviour presented in the animated short film Runaway Train. The impulsive, contagious, psychologically suggestive and reinforcing, and individually diminished responsibility characteristics of groups are clearly mapped in the short film. At the same time, we are in groups all the time, which reminds us to keep a clear mind in real life, maintain rationality to the greatest extent possible, insist on independent thinking, integrate into the group while avoiding being swayed by the irrational mentality of the group, and contribute to the harmony and progress of the society.

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