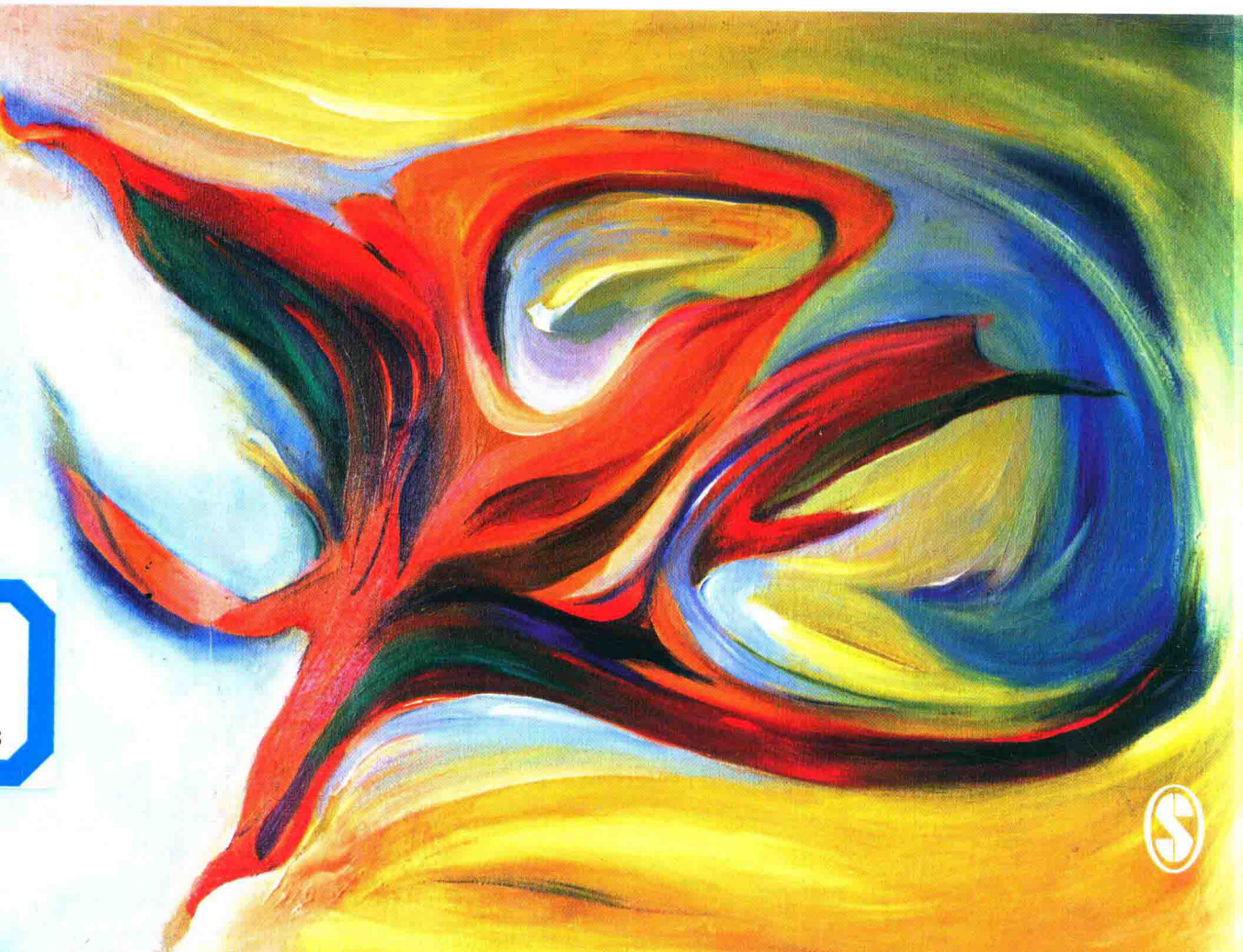


Social Cognition

AN INTEGRATED INTRODUCTION

3RD EDITION

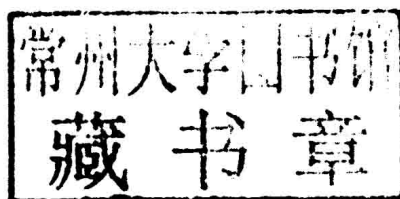
MARTHA **AUGOUSTINOS**, IAIN **WALKER** & NGAIRE **DONAGHUE**



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Social Cognition

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Preface

Social psychology is a fascinating, enticing, frustrating field of intellectual endeavour. It has ensnared the three of us for our whole working lives. Our aim in writing the first edition of this book was to tackle some of the main sources of our intellectual frustration with social psychology, without ruining the fascination. The second edition of the book was similarly to tackle those same issues, but also to provide a fuller, more adequate, more convincing attempt at developing an integrative *social* psychology. This third edition offers an updated version of that integration.

We thank the editorial and production team at SAGE, especially Michael Carmichael and Keri Dickens, who have been patient and badgering, encouraging and demanding, in the right proportions. Peta Callaghan at the University of Adelaide has been wonderful in her work behind the scenes.

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Introduction

1

Michael Leunig's cartoon, *The Understandascope*, captures the essence of something profound and, in this case, paradoxical. We see a sole figure, peering through a telescope-like device at a mass of people interacting below. In the background there is a city of buildings, with a plane flying by. Although the cartoon pre-dates September 11, 2001, it is hard to avoid seeing the plane as though it is flying toward one of the skyscrapers. The people in the foreground are all interacting with one another, presumably arguing, telling jokes, chatting up, deciding whether to go to a lecture or what to have for dinner, and all the other things people do in everyday life. High on the hill, the sole figure peering through the Understandascope observes all this and, aided by the wonderful contraption, understands it all. If only it were so easy.

The aim of social psychology is to understand the social nature of being human. Social cognition is an area of social psychology, with the narrower aim of understanding how



Figure 1.1 The Understandascope by Michael Leunig

humans come to understand the social world and their position in it. In many ways, the social psychologist is the solitary figure in Leunig's cartoon, trying and hoping to understand humanity with the aid of some theoretical and methodological contraptions. Unfortunately, that endeavour and hope are thwarted by the paradox within Leunig's cartoon.

The solitary figure is separated from the mass below, set apart as though unafflicted by being human and unaffiliated with anything human. In peering through the Understandascope, the figure fails to recognize that he (and the figure does seem to be drawn as 'he', and that only highlights the point we are making here) is inseparable from those below, and indeed that any understanding that comes through the Understandascope is not given to him as if divinely, but rather depends on his interpretation of the information provided. His understanding is the joint product of the Understandascope and himself. Furthermore, if the Understandascope genuinely does provide understanding of what it is to be human, it ought to provide that understanding regardless of which group of humans it is focused on, and even – perhaps especially – when it is focused backward on the viewer.

In all these ways, Leunig's cartoon neatly captures the nature of social psychology as an intellectual discipline, and says something about social psychologists as well. The technology of social psychology, impressively built up over more than a century, is like the Understandascope – capable of providing insightful information, but not insight itself. Unfortunately, social psychology over the past century has focused its technology almost solely on just one group of humans, the ubiquitous psychology undergraduate student, as though such people can represent all of humanity. Even more unfortunately, social psychology has rarely put itself and its practitioners in front of the Understandascope. It has proceeded on the 'God Trick' assumption that we social psychologists can, by standing on a distant hill and observing from a distance, remove ourselves from the realm of what it is we are trying to understand. This is clearly absurd.

The solitary figure in Leunig's cartoon seems dismayed. It is not clear, though, whether that dismay is because of what he sees through the Understandascope (a sea of mostly angry-looking people) or because of his understanding of what those mostly angry-looking people are angry about. Is it the anger itself, or the understanding that there is little or no alternative to the anger, that is dismaying? Once again, Leunig's cartoon captures nicely a common characteristic of social psychology and social psychologists. The index of any standard social psychology textbook is replete with references to the nasty, brutish aspects of humans. There is, in stark contrast, little about the upbeat, the stuff that might put a smile on the face of the solitary figure. The same is true of this book. That is not to say that the upbeat is less important. Rather, it is more a reflection of the urgency of understanding humans' propensity to be nasty to one another. But lurking quietly in the background of social psychology is an often tacit assumption that by understanding the nasty and the brutish, we can better go about producing social change for the better. We share this view, and wish that social psychology more explicitly wrestled with an agenda for social change rather than being content with trying to understand.

In this book, we set out to examine what we see are the primary ways in which social psychologists have gone about building a systematic understanding of how humans come