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Praxeologizing street violence

An attempt to understand the teleological and normative-affective structure of violent situations[1]

Don Weenink

Introduction

Many studies of violence focus on factors – features of perpetrators and sometimes victims or neighbourhoods – to assess the likelihood for violence to occur. This work tends to overlook what is actually happening in violent incidents, and it has been noted that one way to advance social scientific insight in this domain is to put the situation centre stage (Collins, 2008; Katz, 1988; Athens, 1980/1997). Practice approaches, with their focus on the actual doings and sayings, might be well equipped to this task. However, it seems awkward to regard destructive acts of violence as a practice. Without denying that conflict, antagonism or opposition occur in all practices, most practice approaches depart from the idea that people work towards a common goal, mutually adjusting their doings and saying in the light of that aim. Also, most work in this tradition considers practices as routine, repetitive activities in everyday life. While the notion of violence is used to capture a great variety of human action, ranging from symbolic or structural violence to the intentional physical harm doing (Spierenburg, 2009), most notions of violence neither regard it as routine action nor as a form of mutual alignment toward a common goal. Nevertheless, practice approaches claim to offer an encompassing perspective on social life as a vast intermeshing of a great manifolds of doings and sayings (Nicolini, 2012; Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2010). Consequently, there is no good reason why the ugly and awful doings and sayings among them should be excluded from the domain of study.

This chapter aims to answer three questions. First, can violence be regarded as sets of doings and sayings in which people mutually attune their actions toward a shared goal and if so, how? Second, how are these teleological actions related to material arrangements, more specifically human bodies and weapons? Third, what can be learnt from approaching violence in this way? By attempting to answer these questions, the chapter also attempts to evaluate how a practice approach may contribute to the study of violence, in particular vis-à-vis interactionist (Luckenbill, 1977; Felson, 1982; Felson and Tedeschi, 1993) and microsociological (Collins, 2008) perspectives that also give analytical priority to the situation rather than to individuals.

To answer the above questions, this chapter offers a re-analysis of empirical data that were collected for a project on youth street violence (Weenink, 2014, 2015). The analysis follows Schatzki's (2002: 59–122) conceptualization of practices. More specifically, I will consider whether and how street violence can be regarded as integrated sets of doings and sayings. Furthermore, I will consider the role of weapons and the targeted. Schatzki outlines several elements that contribute to the integration of practices so that they are experienced as coherent sets of doings and saying by the participants. I concentrate on just one of these elements: the shared ends and normative emotions, which are part of what Schatzki calls the teleo-affective structure of practices. A full-blown analysis of violence that applies all of the four integrative elements which Schatzki outlines deserves and requires a book rather than a chapter. Moreover, some of these integrative elements require specific data in order to analyse them in full detail – while this chapter relies on textual information about the interactions only (see further below). Finally, given the importance that Schatzki (2010) gives to teleology in theories of action, it seems justified to consider the integrative element in which goal-orientedness is most explicitly conceptualized. Note that in the most narrow definitions of violence, goal-orientedness is also explicitly mentioned, in the form of intentional harm-doing.

The data originates from judicial files of Dutch juvenile courts. The average age of the attackers was 17 years at the time the violence was committed. The files comprise interrogation reports of witnesses, defendants, victims and reports of the courts and the public prosecutor. Based on these files, a textual database was set up, with cases containing detailed descriptions of the violent interaction. The sampling of case files was based on all sections of Dutch penal law considering violent offences: public bodily harm, battery or bodily harm, grievous bodily harm, (attempt to) manslaughter and (attempt to) murder. Case files were drawn from archives of four judicial districts. In sum, the sample consists of 159 violent interactions (more information concerning the sampling and the analytical procedures can be found in Weenink, 2014, 2015). In this chapter, I use only two cases of the data set. These two cases exemplify two of the most common forms of street violence in my dataset, together amounting to 84 per cent of all cases.

In this chapter, a distinction is made between instigators and victims. Instigators are persons who started the physical harm-doing and who often also dominate the interaction. This does not mean that instigators are necessarily the only ones bearing moral responsibility, even if they are seen as offenders by judicial institutions.

The plan of the chapter is as follows. The next session discusses Schatzki's (2002) conceptualization of how practices are integrated, with specific attention given to their teleo-affective structure, and how these integrative elements relate to the targeted body parts and weapons. The empirical sections that follow aim to identify whether and how specific normative emotions and goal-orientedness appear in youth street violence. The chapter concludes by evaluating this attempt to praxeologize street violence in the light of the aim formulated above.

The integration of doings and sayings through teleo-affective structures

Before explicating the term teleo-affective structure, I will first shortly consider the other integrative elements of practices that bring about the 'hanging together' of sayings and doings, as outlined by Schatzki (2002: 59–122). The first element comprises practical understanding or action understanding. This is the embodied or visceral know-how to do things on the spot. This knowing how to perform an action most often proceeds automatically and unthinkingly. General understandings, the second element, are the sets of broader ideas and meanings that are attached to a practice, which allow participants to communicate to themselves and the other participants how the things that they are doing relate to the rest of their world. The third integrative element of practices mentioned by Schatzki are rules; these comprise explicit guidelines and instructions that specify what should be done at a certain moment. Finally, the fourth integrative element comprises the teleo-affective structure, a set of ends that participants should or may pursue. The teleological part seems to be of particular importance with regard to the integration of practices as it allows mutually adjusting series of actions that participants carry out as they work toward a shared goal. There are two aspects related to this teleological part. The first aspect concerns the purpose of the acting, or the shared idea of a future situation that the individuals aim to bring about. Individuals can be consciously aware of such future-in-the-making or not. They can think, feel, dream, fantasize, want, desire or imagine such future. Having a sense of the purpose of the acting gives coherence and meaning to sequences of little tasks or body (including mental) actions, that follow up on one another to bring about the thought, felt, dreamed, fantasized, wanted, desired or imagined etcetera end. Schatzki (1996: 122–123) calls these subsequent series of tasks 'signifying chains', in which each task is tied to the previous one, working toward the purpose. The second teleological aspect, 'practical intelligibility' follows from this. Practical intelligibility is the sense, conscious or not, to do something, to perform an action. Precisely what to do, or what action is signified by practical intelligibility, arises from what an individual experiences, believes, perceives, imagines etcetera to be as the 'state of affairs', given which it makes sense to perform an action for the sake of a desired, wanted, needed etcetera 'state of being' (2010: 114–115). In the course of pursuing body actions in a signifying chain, practical intelligibility provides individuals with a sense of what to do next given the purpose (Schatzki, 2002: 74–76; Schatzki, 2010: 114–115). For practices to be experienced as coherent and recognizable sets of doings and sayings by the participants, the purpose, the signifying chains and the practical intelligibility to bring the purpose about, must be shared, at least to a large extent, among the participants. This enables the mutual alignment of the actions of participants and the situational going-on in practices. The mutual alignment and the situational going-on are strengthened by the affective part of the teleo-affective structure. This is because the shared purpose, the signifying chains and the practical intelligibility are not neutral, they have some compelling or even

coercive force. In the words of Nicolini (2012: 166), the teleo-affective structure comprises 'direction and oughtness'. The 'oughtness' not just concerns the end that the participants should be pursuing, the manner in which they should do so, as well as the order in which the various tasks should be executed, but also the kind of emotions participants should experience as well as the manner in which they should express them. In Hochschild's (1979, 1983) terms, each practice brings its own set of 'feeling rules'. There is thus a normative-affective order in practices that buttresses the integrative tendency of the teleological part.

The teleology and normative-affective order may differ in various forms of violence. Relatedly, the role and the type of material arrangements in these doings and sayings may differ as well. Thus, I will consider whether the role of weapons and targeted body parts differs in relation to the end that is pursued in violent action.

At this point, the questions formulated above can be specified. First, the question whether and how violence can be regarded as a practice can now be more precisely put as: How do ends, signifying chains, practical intelligibility and the normative-affective order (feeling rules) appear in violent interactions? Second, how are these elements related to the use of weapons and targeted body parts? The third question is then: what can be learnt from analysing violence in these praxeological terms?

Praxeologizing street violence: an analysis of teleological and normative-affective structures

In this section, I will describe two cases of youth street violence. These cases each represent two forms of street violence, which I called 'contesting dominance', 'performing badness' elsewhere (Weenink, 2015). After each case, I will indicate how the teleological and affective aspects appear empirically.

Contesting dominance

This case revolves around two groups of boys. The group of Johan played football when the group of Anton appeared. Johan and Anton were the main antagonists, who engaged in a contest of daring looks.

JOHAN: When we were playing football, I saw four boys walking up to us. We looked at them, to know who they were or whether we knew them. One of those boys [Anton] started shouting: 'What are you looking at?'. Then we went on playing football. I was a bit annoyed because they were loud-mouthed. Then those boys sat down on the stairs at the dike and watched us playing. Again one of them said: 'Don't you look that way'. I did not respond to that. I saw they wanted to walk away and I followed them with my eyes. Again, they told us we should not look at them. Then the two largest boys came down, up to me.

ANTON: While we passed these boys, I saw one of them [Johan] looking con-
   spicuously at me. When I looked back at him and asked what they were
   looking at, I heard him saying: 'Have I got something of yours on me?'
   [translated literally from Dutch, meaning: what do you want from me?]. We
   then walked to the dike and sat down. The other boys started to play soccer
   again. Suddenly, the ball was kicked in my direction. The boy whom I had
   spoken to went into my direction to get the ball. Again he was looking at me
   conspicuously. I said to him: 'Look just a bit longer!'. He was annoying me.
   After I had told him that, that boy put the ball on the ground and kept on
   looking at me. Then he picked up the ball and turned back to his game. I
   walked down to him and started to unfold my knife, and Machiel jumped on
   him to kick him in his back. The contest of challenges was extended even
   when attacker Anton showed his knife to Johan, who did not seem to be
   impressed and tried to get a hold on the knife. This resulted in getting his
   tendon cut by the knife. His hand now bleeding heavily, he finally gave up
   and ran away.

I will first point out the central features of contesting dominance as they are
exemplified in the above case. In the fragment, Johan's looking at Anton was
readily taken as a provocation by Anton's group. They perceived his looks as a
challenge that required a response: 'What are you looking at?' In turn, Johan
responded defiantly by asking what they wanted from him. Prolonging the
sequence of provocations now set into motion, Anton's group positioned itself at
the dike to watch the others play. Johan's defiant attitude resulted in their sub-
sequent command 'Don't you look that way'. However, Johan did not give in to
this claim for dominance – as one of the members of Johan's group reported:
'He will not give in, he is strong and is never afraid'. When Anton challenged
Johan 'to look just a bit longer', the latter did not back up and the confronta-
tional tension increased. To conclude: in dominance contests, both parties perse-
vere in a quest for situational dominance and as they do so, they create an arena
in which the focus of attention is on the mutual exchange of threats, insults,
provocations and challenges.

   Is it possible to identify a teleo-affective structure, practical intelligibility and
signifying chains in this form of violence? First, the goal of these sets of doings
and sayings is to establish situational dominance at the cost of the opponent, and
this end is attained through an aggressive contest, a competitive struggle in
which antagonistic tension is being build up. Note that the end of attaining situ-
ational dominance at the cost of the other party is shared among the participants,
as both parties engage in sequences of provocations, of moves and counter-
moves, claims and counterclaims to the superordinate role. Contesting domi-
nance thus requires some form of 'working agreement' (see also Polk, 1994,
1999; Copes *et al.*, 2013; Jackson-Jacobs, 2014) between both parties to con-
tinue the confrontation. Part of the working agreement is that one should not
back up a bit or leave the scene in a situation of increasing tension. Such

working agreement is not entirely voluntarily, given the emotional costs of acting against masculine honor. Especially in the presence of peers, opponents may try to exploit the other's fear of displaying passivity or pusillanimity (Polk, 1994, 1999; Copes *et al.*, 2013; Spierenburg, 1998; Winlow and Hall, 2009).

As they share a purpose, the antagonists also share practical intelligibility. While the data does not allow to offer an accurate description of how the participants perceive the current state of affairs (for instance participants may feel their peers are evaluating their worth or perhaps they may feel angry about something that happened before). However, at the very least it can be said that the antagonists mutually experience the presence of another party that offers an opportunity to engage in a contest. And they also at least share a desired, urged, felt, needed, sensed etcetera state of becoming to dominate the other. Given these situational state of affairs and state of becoming alone, it makes sense for them to throw insults, reproaches, degradations, challenges etcetera to the other party, to stare at the other impudently and to move daringly toward the other's direction, also in response to what the other party is doing. To engage in a dominance contest, the following series of subsequent body actions that make up a signifying chain need to be performed (the list is far from complete, but it indicates that work must be done to set the dominance contest in motion): finding an opponent, launching impudent provocations like staring or scolding or bumping at the other, and then persevering in series of provocations and challenges.

Note that emotional dominance precedes violence, it is not a result of it (Collins, 2008). Situational asymmetry plays and important role in Randal Collins's micro-sociological theory of violence. In the theory, attaining emotional dominance is crucial for violence to occur because it offers a way to overcome the barrier of confrontational tension that normally keeps people from using violence. Two important pathways that circumvent that barrier of confrontational tension are supportive groups and the weakness of the victims.[2] As I have demonstrated elsewhere (Weenink, 2014, 2015), instigators start the actual violence when they feel that ultimate dominance is within reach, either because their supportive group is larger than that of the other party, they outnumber the victim, they carry a knife or because the victims attain a vulnerable position, and most importantly, when they show signs of emotional submission.

The normative emotions involved with contesting dominance are indignation, anger, and self-righteousness rage. These emotions are associated with a moral claim, that enables the opponents to arouse these emotions. Even though many of the contests in my data are actually fabricated, contrived or sought for, just for the sake of engaging in aggressive competition — for the sake of seeking dominance — instigators claim to be affronted, abused, offended, aggrieved etcetera by the other party. In so doing, they express the feeling rules that are attached to contesting dominance. All in all, this form of violence exhibits the important integrative elements that make for a set of doings and sayings that is perceived as coherent and recognizable for the participants, even though they are antagonists.

Finally, let us consider the use of weapons and human body parts. In the fragment, Anton produces a knife, because he considers Johan too large to take on with his fists only. This means that the weapon is used to gain dominance. Weapon and body parts are teleological material as they contribute to the attainment of the end. This is less obvious than it seems, as most youth report they carry a weapon for the sake of self-defense rather than to attain dominance. If weapons can be regarded as objects that sustain the specific teleology in dominance contests, it is not surprising that weapons are used much more often in contesting dominance as compared to the case of performing badness: in 21 out of 86 cases (24.4%) versus 2 out of 48 cases, a significant difference (one-sided chi square test $p=0.002$). With regard to the targeted body parts, the fragment demonstrates that eyes play a central role in the building up of provocations. In addition, the provocative staring is highlighted by verbal provocations that revolve around the impudent looks of the other. In other cases of contesting dominance, eyes and tongues play an equally important role in the building up of the tension. As with the use of weapons, the face is used teleologically. In fact, eyes and tongues are perhaps the most important means to attain dominance at the cost of the other. Thus, in older Goffmanian interactionist work (Felson, 1993; Luckenbill, 1977; Polk, 1994, 1999; Felson, 1982), street violence is often seen as 'saving face' (Goffman, 1967/2005: 5–46). These are 'character contests' (Goffman, 1967/2005: 39–58, 217–218), confrontations between opponents who stand steady, as they try to save face at the other's expense in sequences of provocations and challenges (Felson and Tedeschi, 1993: 109). For this reason, it is understandable that the face of the opponent becomes an important target, because it is the source of the antagonists' attempts to claim dominance. Thus, compared with performing badness, in 42 of the 82 (51.2 per cent) cases of contesting dominance, the head was the only body part targeted, while this was 15 of 48 (31.3 per cent) cases in performing badness.[3] This difference is statistically significant (one-sided chi square test $p=0.021$). As the face and notably the eyes are probably the most important markers of personhood in a human body (see Katz, 1999, Chapter 3 on the importance of seeing to be seen), it seems plausible that attacks against the person of the opponent aim at the face more often in contesting dominance.

Performing badness

In the following case, two girls, Chantal and Esther had agreed to 'get someone', and readily found a victim in Monica, because Chantal thought she had heard Monica scolding Chantal's mother one year before. Esther however had never met Monica before. After a first round of slapping Monica's face, a group gathered and started to cheer and yell.

Lars, friend of attacker Chantal: After they had slapped her, they let Monica run away, went after her and hit her again. She was crying and saying sorry. Esther said: 'Come on, let's beat her up, 'cause I enjoy it. I just get the hang for it now, so let's get her again'. I heard the group yelling: 'Let her crawl, let her crawl!'.

MONICA: They got closer and overtook me. Chantal pulled my hair so hard that my head turned the other way. Chantal asked me whether that hurt. I said she had hurt me. I heard her friend [Esther] saying: 'Ah, really did that hurt you?'. Right after that she punched me in the face.

According to both the witnesses, attackers and the victim, the group made a lot of noise, shouting 'Beat her up, beat her up!' all the time. Various suggestions to degrade and humiliate were yelled and actually performed. Monica had to kneel down, her hair was burned, and her coat was robbed from her.

Let us first consider the key features of performing badness, which this fragment exemplifies. First, this form of violence is one-sided: the instigators launch their attacks against lonely or otherwise vulnerable or weaker victims. This is sometimes called 'opportunistic' violence in earlier studies to denote situations in which a larger group is deliberately seeking a suitable, vulnerable victim (Homel, Tomsen and Thommeny, 1992; Tomsen, 1997). In the fragment, the two instigators take Monica by surprise. Moreover, they bring a supportive group with them, who stir up the instigators by yelling and shouting. In this respect, performing badness is clearly different from contesting dominance: in the latter form of violence, attaining dominance is the stake of a struggle whereas in performing badness, dominance is already secured from the start. Second, the instigators display meanness, they toy with the victims, humiliate and denigrate them. For instance, in the fragment above, Esther and Chantal hit Monica, let her go and then chased her, caught her and then hit her again. This is a typical feature of performing badness: the instigators hit or kick the victims once, let them go, then the group chases after them, hunt them down to hurt them once more. Other forms of cruelty appear in the above fragment as well. For instance, Esther asked Monica ominously whether she had hurt her, just to punch her again shortly after that. Third, and contrary to contesting dominance, victims often apologize while being beaten up, thus contributing to the emotional dominance of the instigators, as Monica did in the fragment. But apologizing is not a meaningful reaction for the instigators, or at least they do not take saying sorry as an apology, as their attack is not a punishment to undo some prior wrongdoing by the victim. In some cases, saying sorry even results into additional, inexplicable and cruel violence. Similarly, victims often exclaim: 'Act normal!' but the point is that the instigators' whims rule rather than a moral logic. Finally, the instigators seem to enjoy violent action in some cases, as Esther had said that 'she got the hang for it'. In other cases, instigators reported experiencing joy or excitement rather than anger, as they reported they gave the victims 'a good kicking' or they indicated that they 'went for the thrill of it'. The combination of one sided attacks targeted at weaker victims, the cruel meanness and the inexplicable, sometimes joyous humiliation games that attackers play, capture the key features of this form of violence, which revolves around the demonstration of total uncontested dominance, or what Katz (1988) called 'badness' (see also Wilkinson and Fagan [2001: 186] who describe how youth purposively create

opportunities for predatory and one-sided violence, which serves to display their tough or bad reputations).

How do the teleo-affective structure, practical intelligibility and signifying chains appear in this form of violence? Starting with the end, the aim of these interactions is again to demonstrate dominance. However, while attaining dominance in contesting dominance is quasi-honorable as it is bound by a 'working agreement' of turn-taking dynamics, attaining dominance in performing badness is not about honour at all. It is a form of dominance that purposively desecrates honour codes, for instance by attacking clearly weaker or vulnerable victims. Thus, attackers work toward a situation that displays that they can do whatever they want, just because they want to do it like that – the why is their will. Another important difference between performing badness and contesting dominance appears when the role of practical intelligibility is considered. In performing badness, attackers create a situation in which victims cannot rely on practical intelligibility. The actions of the attackers must be unpredictable and inexplicable, leaving the victims in doubt what will come next. In Katz's terminology, this element of performing badness is about creating a sense of 'alien-ness'. The attackers must raise a barrier to the others' understanding of the badass's own moral and emotional existence. Even when you try to 'maintain respectful comportment' (Katz, 1988: 99) there is no sure way to predict, let alone avoid, the badass's sudden unleashing of violent chaos.

While the relationship between attackers and victims in performing badness is far from a 'working agreement', it should be noted here that the weakness of the victims is not a given. This is something that must be accomplished by the attackers, and experienced fighters might have developed a sense for targets who give in easily and are likely to submit to their provocations and humiliations. Following Collins (2008), the weakness of the victim is primarily depending on the emotional dynamics in situations of antagonism. While physical appearance and the display and use of weapons may contribute to the shifting of emotional balances, the process revolves around the attainment of emotional dominance itself. As noted above, one of the pathways to attain the emotional dominance that is required to circumvent the barrier of confrontational tension and fear are weak victims. But what makes a victim weak? Weakness appears when victims give in to the rhythm that the instigators want to impose on them and when they demonstrate submissiveness and give up confronting and opposing the other party (Collins, 2008: 39–82).

Returning to practical intelligibility we might ask what it would look like from the viewpoint of the attackers? Again, the data does not allow providing an accurate description of the state of affairs that is experienced by the attackers. There is mention of Monica scolding Chantal's mother, but this could be contrived, since perhaps both instigators were humiliated by an overwhelming power themselves. However, given the desired state of becoming – to express a supreme form of domination – it makes sense to target weak victims, to play cruel humiliation games with them and to do away with all possible empathy. The signifying chain

of actions that works toward this goal comprises, among others, the following tasks. First, often one or two participants take the lead in warming up the group for the project. This kind of violence is often arranged and prepared ('let's beat someone up', 'we will give someone a trashing'). Second, vulnerable victims must be found, actively sought for and the group must agree to target them. Third, emotional dominance must be secured from the start – by outnumbering the victim, bringing a large supportive group – rather than attained in aggressive competition. Fourth, participants must act in such a way that the victims are left guessing what will happen next, not knowing what to do or to expect. This requires that attackers are always one step ahead of the victims, perhaps also surprising themselves while acting out their mean impulses.

With regard to the normative emotions, it seems that this kind of violence is not so much related to anger but to feelings of superiority and sometimes even cruel joy. Moreover, attackers must not show mercy or pity. Any identification with the victims must be shut off, in order to display cruelty. In the words of Katz (1988: 80) the performance of badness requires 'toughness': tough persons do not care about the existence of the moral and emotional perspectives of others, they are 'not being morally malleable'.

To conclude the praxeological approach of this form of violence, I consider the use of weapons and the targeted body parts. Above, it was already noted that the use of weapons is much lower in performing badness. This makes sense, because in performing badness, dominance is already secured from the start. Weapons, therefore, are not needed. Furthermore, it was noted above that in performing badness, it was less likely that the head was the only body part that was targeted. This finding corresponds to the idea that performing badness is not about a personal confrontation. Instead, victims are turned into objects of humiliation, whoever they are does not matter much, as long as they can be toyed with. In line with this, it is noteworthy that in 34 out of 48 cases (70.8 per cent), the victims were strangers to the attackers, while this was 47.1 per cent, or 40 out of 85 cases in contesting dominance. This difference is statistically significant (one-sided chi square tests, $p < 0.001$).

Through my praxeological analyses it is demonstrated that violent situations unfold in patterned ways and that they have distinct teleologies and normative emotions to be worked upon. Moreover, the two teleo-affective structures in the cases are shown to be differently related to the use of weapons and the targeted body parts. Nevertheless, the two teleologies and normative-affective structures share a similar transformative capacity. How then does youth street violence change the participants and their worlds? We observed that both forms of violence create or recreate the social hierarchy. With this transformation, the instigators try to attain a dominant status, even if it is ephemeral and situational only. While many studies perceive violence as a reaction to some perceived wrongdoing (Felson, 1982; Felson and Tedeschi, 1993) or as a form of self-defence (Winlow and Hall, 2009) this praxeology shows that the teleology of street violence is about attaining dominance for the sake of dominance.

Conclusion

It is now time to provide an answer to the third research question formulated in the introduction: what can be learnt from analysing violence in praxeological terms? Two points are important in this respect.

First, a practice oriented perspective enables researchers to move away from the prevalent focus on individual perpetrators in both mainstream criminological research and in lay and policy perceptions. One disadvantage of thinking in terms of individual perpetrators is that it hides the variety of forms of violence from view. Moreover, such a perspective neglects the fact that instigators, even in their most impulsive violent actions, follow a teleological and normative-affective structure. Street violence is often portrayed as 'senseless' in public discourse. Blok (2001: 103–114) has explained that the use of such a label runs the risk that violence is perceived as something that cannot be reasonably or sensibly explained or understood. At the same time, he argues that emphasizing the senselessness of violence is a way to keep the phenomenon of violence at an emotional and mental distance, especially in relatively pacified societies where violence invokes strong feelings of abhorrence, disgust and fear. Whatever the reason for calling violence senseless, it is clear from this praxeology that violence has discernible teleologies and therefore cannot be senseless, at least from the perspective of the instigators. Instead of being senseless this chapter shows that street violence consists of structured sets of doings and saying, in which weapons and the targeted body parts are integrated to transform the social hierarchy, at least for a moment.

Second, praxeologies of violence contribute as well to existing approaches to violence that give analytical priority to situations rather than individuals. Both interactionist (Felson and Tedeschi, 1993) and micro-sociological (Collins, 2008) approaches so far have not conceptualized the material arrangements of violence. While this chapter only considered weapons and targeted body parts in a limited way, violent action is clearly intermeshed with materialities in various ways. Consider for instance types of physical space such as schoolyards, clubs, streets, etcetera, each bringing their own affordances (bringing a large supportive group, escape routes etcetera); the use and abuse of various body parts and their meanings (fighting skills, special techniques such as a flying kick high at the back of an opponent, or the symbolic cutting or even burning of hair as a trophy among girls); and also the prepared and ad-hoc creation of weapons of various kinds (ranging from guns to crown caps tied in shoe laces for more painful kicking). Future praxeologies could lay bare the importance of materiality in violence in much more elaborated and detailed ways. Next to emphasizing materialities, our praxeology suggests giving the cultural dimension more analytical weight. Although existing interactonist and micro-sociological approaches have pointed to the importance of the situation to understand violence, they do not give much attention to the role of the culture. For interactionists, the meanings of violence are a property of rationally acting individuals, as they claim that violence is instrumental, mostly a reaction to

perceived intentional attacks (Felson and Tedeschi, 1993). In micro-sociological theory, the emotional dynamics are the prime focus of analysis, rather than what is being said or thought. However, the praxeological account offered in this chapter shows the importance of culture, in the form of a teleological structure with its practical intelligibility and signifying chains, in bringing about a shared sense of violent actions as a set of coherent and goal oriented doings and sayings. While it remains awkward to consider such awful and abhorrent actions as a practice, this chapter demonstrates that a praxeology of violence opens up new questions with regard to violence.

Notes

1 This chapter is an adapted and rewritten version of an article that appeared earlier in *Sociological Forum* (Weenink, 2015).
2 For more on confrontational tension and fear and the pathways to circumvent it see Collins (2008: 39–82; 2013).
3 In sum the number of contesting dominance cases is 86, however, in four cases it was not clear exactly which body part was targeted.

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