

Introduction

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Published online: 7 March 2013
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Violence is an everyday phenomenon that is characterized by its effectiveness. Violence creates comprehensive and profound effects on victims as well as on perpetrators. Its destructive power does not only lie in the immediate consequences of the direct effects of violent actions but also in, occasionally long-term, side effects. The great impact of violence shows itself in personal/individual and also in social/collective dimensions. Accordingly, Arendt (1970) describes violence as a counter pole to power, as something that makes communication, shaping one's life and politic action impossible. The effect and potency of violence are extraordinary, that much is clear. But even though effect and potency can certainly be regarded as extraordinary, its existence in the social sphere is far from that. Quite the opposite is the case, as Popitz emphasizes: "Violence in general (...) is not solely an occupational glitch of social relationships, a phenomenon only present on the fringes of social arrangements, merely an extreme case or an ultima ratio. (...) Violence undoubtedly is (...) an ever present option for human action" (Popitz 1992: 57; our translation). Thus, violence, as an ever present possibility and as an executed reality, must take on a central place in the analysis of social issues (Trotha 1997).

Violence is a manifold phenomenon: we encounter it directly in everyday life and also mediated, through stories, media reports, or cultural adaptations in literature and film; violence can be executed by a variety of individuals, groups, or countries, while their different potentials for carrying out violent acts must be considered—and naturally, these individuals, groups, and states can be victims of violence as

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well; violence can be legitimized or not, however, for and during its implementation, violence is not dependent on legitimization.

The manifoldness of the phenomenon reflects itself in the philosophical and socio-scientific discussion over what should be designated as violence. The suggested proposals vary from closely knit concepts, which exclusively consider direct damage to the body (challenging physical integrity), to concepts that include threats of violence in regard to psychological consequences, up to approaches that conceive violence as structural violence (Galtung 1969) and add socio-structural aspects and the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities as indirect forms of violence to the discussion (which allows not having to necessarily refer to actors). Without the desire or ability to promote one approach over another at this point, some aspects are clearly central in order to render a fruitful discussion of violence:

1. The principle openness of the concept for different phenomena: the various forms of violence are directly connected with its effectiveness. It does not seem advisable to prematurely narrow down the phenomenal domain, as this can lead to the danger of overlooking central aspects. Instead, we believe it is sensible to begin by conceiving violence as openly as possible in order to do justice to its historical manifoldness. This, however, does not mean that it might not later be necessary to limit the current definition and at least relate it to conterminous phenomena.
2. The question of the modalities of violence: following up on the principle openness of the various shapes of violence, a phenomenological discussion of violence must address the question of *how* violence presents itself, *how* it is perceived, and *how* it happens. It is essential to pay attention to the details, the nuances, and the manifold aspects of this phenomenon (Trotha 1997: 22).
3. The process character of violence: the modalities of violence are directly related to the observation that violence ought to be thought of not as a static but rather a highly dynamic and processual phenomenon. The question of *how* violence is realized as a *process* must always be considered. Only if this dynamic is analyzed, can we begin to understand the concatenations between effect and potency that characterize violence (Trotha 1997: 25).

Based on this open concept of violence, the articles in this special issue focus on violence from a number of different perspectives. *Burkhard Liebsch* asks if an internal relationship between language and violence exists and what the nature of this relationship might be. For this purpose he investigates what counts as violence and especially how it presents itself in the field of politics. Subsequently, he discusses to what extent a kind of responsive ethos can be tied into his analysis of the relation between language and violence. *James Mensch* deals with the question about the role violence plays for meaning and sense – is violence meaningless and does it destroy meaning altogether or is the opposite the case that violence establishes meaning? Thus, the author analyzes the creative aspects of violence, particularly with regard to the genesis of self-identity; and in doing so he utilizes various approaches, which evaluate the relation between violence and sense in different ways. *Michael Staudigl* argues in his article for a relational approach to violence that takes into account both the physical as well as the symbolic dimension of the phenomenon. Staudigl

combines these dimensions and conceives of violence specifically by focusing on vulnerability. He briefly sketches this twofold understanding of violence by using the example of slapping, which he interprets as an inter-corporeal and communicative action. *Lars Alberth* analyzes violence against children and their particular vulnerability and pursues the question of how violence is grounded in generational order. He examines this generational order by analyzing empirical data from the field of professional responses to child maltreatment and neglect and identifies three different sets of body techniques of vulnerability. *Martin Endreß* and *Andrea Pabst* deal with the connection between violence and trust. The authors discuss the sociological research on the concept of violence and argue that violence cannot be understood solely in the sense of physical violence, but also aspects of structural violence must be considered. Instead of contrasting the different understandings of violence, they advocate an understanding of violence as the “negation of sociality”. In this sense, they analyze violence *ex negativo*, by focusing on shattered basic (operating) trust. They clarify this position by showing the implications of traumatizing and traumatic experiences.

These contributions are followed by a special section on Frances Waksler’s book *The New Orleans Sniper* (2010). In her study, Waksler analyzes the processes of constituting and unconstituting the Other in the course of police investigations of a violent offence. As a prelude, *Frances Waksler* reports on the “lived process” of the creation of the book. In the following, *Tobias Roehl* and *Herbert Kalthoff* discuss the phenomenon of violence and argue for a relational concept of violence; within a detailed look at *The New Orleans Sniper*, they analyze the relation between intersubjectivity and violence. In the following contribution, *Thomas Eberle* approaches the book’s subject with the question of how phenomenology and a phenomenological sociology proceed and are discussed in the European (and especially German) as well as in the American context. Finally, *Chihaya Kusayanagi* ties in with Waksler’s question of the constitution of an Other by analyzing the case of an university entrance exam cheating scandal in Japan.

The volume closes with two reviews written by *James Aho*. In the first he discusses Randall Collins’ seminal work *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory*; in the second he focuses on the study by Michael Laffan and Max Weiss on *Facing Fear: The History of An Emotion in Global Perspective*.

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