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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Lindemann, G., Barth, J., & Fröhlich, J. (2022). The Methodological Relevance of a Theory-of-Society Perspective for the Empirical Analysis of Violence. *Historical Social Research*, *47*(1), 268-288. https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.47.2022.12

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The Methodological Relevance of a Theory-of-Society Perspective for the Empirical Analysis of Violence

Gesa Lindemann, Jonas Barth & Johanna Fröhlich *

Abstract: *»Die methodische Relevanz einer gesellschaftstheoretischen Perspektive für die empirische Gewaltforschung«.* The methodology of video data analysis (VDA) places a clear focus on the depicted immediate violent event. Herewith VDA takes a position in the long-standing controversy within violence research over narrow versus broad concepts of violence. A broad concept of violence was prominently proposed by Galtung, who introduced the notion of structural and cultural violence, which has been criticized as being a political and ideological concept. VDA argues for a narrow understanding of violence that includes only physical violence. The claim is that this avoids politicization and considers only the facts. A closer look reveals, however, that the situationist approach fails in this regard. The narrow and broad concepts of violence have two important things in common. Both of them define violence from the observer's perspective and thus both prove to be politically and ideologically charged. In order to avoid these problems, we propose a reflexive conceptualization of violence, which brings together a socio-theoretical understanding of how violence is institutionalized with a theory-of-society perspective. Finally, we illustrate the consequences of a reflexive understanding of violence using the example of the events surrounding the 2007 G8 summit in Rostock/Heiligendamm.

Keywords: Violence, social movements, theory of society, social theory, reflexive understanding of violence, lived body, excentric positionality, Plessner.

* Gesa Lindemann, Carl von Ossietzky Universität, Institute for Social Sciences, Ammerländer Heerstr. 114-118, 26129 Oldenburg, Germany; gesa.lindemann@uni-oldenburg.de.
Jonas Barth, Carl von Ossietzky Universität, Institute for Social Sciences, Ammerländer Heerstr. 114-118, 26129 Oldenburg, Germany; jonas.barth@uni-oldenburg.de.
Johanna Fröhlich, Carl von Ossietzky Universität, Institute for Social Sciences, Ammerländer Heerstr. 114-118, 26129 Oldenburg, Germany; johanna.froehlich@uni-oldenburg.de.

Historical Social Research 47 (2022) 1, 268-288 │ published by GESIS
DOI: 10.12759/hsr.47.2022.12

1. Videos in Violence Research – Advantages and Pitfalls

The advantages of using video recordings for qualitative social research are often summarized using two catchwords: "density and permanence" (Grimshaw 1982, 122). "Density" refers to the fact that video recordings provide a richness of detail that would be invisible to the naked eye. A video recording makes it seem as if the event is coming into view as immediately as it occurred. It is possible to systematically capture non-verbal gestures and facial expressions in the sense of a "sociological microscopy" (Tuma, Schnettler, and Knoblauch 2013, 34). At the same time, the data is temporally permanent and can be examined in its original sequentiality (Knoblauch and Tuma 2019, 5). The possibility of slow motion and fast forward as well as repeatability constitute particularly significant advantages over simple participant observation. Furthermore, the data captured this way appear to be more validatable and transparent than, for example, transcriptions or observation protocols (Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff 2010, 7; Knoblauch and Tuma 2019, 5). The problems posed by using video recordings in violence research are thought to be primarily practical, e.g., the laboriousness and potential inconsistency of transcription, difficulties with presenting results appropriately, and privacy issues (see Moritz 2018).

Methodological reflections on the connection between precise research questions, their theoretical and politico-moral premises, and the ways in which video data is integrated into the analytical process have so far played only a marginal role in these discussions. We argue that it is necessary to include such methodological questions into the analysis of concrete social processes if we do not want violence research to turn into a moral indictment of phenomena deemed violent without a reflection on the moral foundations of the research itself. This is especially pressing with regard to video data analysis (VDA). While VDA has been recognized for its ability to sidestep many methodological pitfalls, we argue that its premises, based on situationist violence research, create conceptual difficulties. As we will show in the following, the narrow concept of violence used in VDA leads it to a moral evaluation of violence.

Situationist violence research uses a concept of violence that focuses on physical injury. This has far-reaching implications for the sampling of video data (and other types of data) as well as for the interpretative focus. The resulting limitations cannot be circumvented even by the most prudent methodological approach possible, e.g., triangulation, as developed by VDA, or by a reconstructive focus, such as that used in videography (Tuma, Schnettler, and Knoblauch 2013). Although the latter focus on reconstructing how actors make sense of their world, videography also considers it self-evident which

phenomena are to be counted as violence (Coenen and Tuma 2022, in this volume). What is required instead is a rethinking of the theoretical premises.

In summary, we suggest three methodological revisions to the narrow concept of violence used in VDA:

1) Current premise: It is up to the researcher to decide what violence is. Revision: We have to take into account how actors themselves experience an event and identify particular actions as violence.
2) Current premise: Violence comes into view as an illegitimate object per se. Revision: We have to analyze the intrinsic relationship between violence and morality.
3) Current premise: Violence is a type of action. Revision: Violence is an institutionalized fact that takes place in the frame of given procedural orders of violence.

The award-winning book *Situational Breakdowns* by Anne Nassauer serves as our starting point for showing that these revisions are necessary. Nassauer asks, "how do peaceful protests end in violent clashes? What prevents people from taking the step from aggression to violence?" (Nassauer 2019, xiii) and pursues these two questions following Collins's (2008) situationist approach to violence research: it is not motives, strategies, structures, or backgrounds that help us understand why violence occurs, but rather certain interactional dynamics that make violence more likely. These only occur in certain situations. In this way, violence is understood as an immediate phenomenon that is directly accessible to researchers.

In her analysis of political protests, Nassauer (2019, 23) proposes

> a narrow definition as physical interpersonal violence, i.e., actions in which one person causes physical harm or death to another. [...] [B]y defining violence as a physical action that is visible and observable, its beginning and end can be clearly identified and analyzed, which facilitates searching for causes of violent clashes.

Nassauer (2019, 22) thus attempts to give precision to the multifaceted concept of violence. She employs a substantive understanding of violence to define what is and what is not violence from an external observer's perspective. This narrow definition of violence is crucial for her sampling strategy, in that it guides her choice of which protests to be studied in the first place.

> I coded a protest as violent if I found visuals or accounts of actors injuring or killing another person by (1) throwing an object, (2) using harmful devices (e.g., tear gas or Taser), or (3) hitting or kicking another person. (Nassauer 2019, 197)

This strategy renders Nassauer's (2019) case selection and entire analysis unambiguous. However, injury sustained by human bodies is not enough to define a phenomenon as violence. Determining whether something is violent always requires a process of interpretation that includes a moral judgement of facts. Researchers also take part in this process of interpretation (if they do

not bracket it). Nassauer (2019) not only defines particular phenomena as violent but also regards them as morally problematic. When she describes phenomena as violent, she is identifying and morally evaluating them. It is only in light of this that we can make sense of the fact that Nassauer (2019) intends her findings to help prevent violence (Nassauer 2019, chap. 8) and of her criticism of state prevention measures as insufficient: “Findings suggest that most industrialised countries do not need severe security to prevent violence and crime, which not only costs public funds but also often entails curtailing civil and human rights” (Nassauer 2019, 188).

This makes it clear that what Nassauer (2019) defined in advance as violence she regards as illegitimate from the outset. Describing phenomena as violence is equal to a moral evaluation. This becomes evident in her source, Collins’s (2008) understanding of violence: Collins (2008) argues that the concept of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1977), for example,

> is a merely rhetorical usage, a way of dramatizing the argument that school achievement, cultural tastes, and ritual practices are part of a self-reproducing structure of stratification, which the author wants to impress upon his audience is morally illegitimate. (Collins 2008, 25)

Collins does not deny that labeling something as violence is a negative moral judgment, but he demands that the concept of violence should be restricted to “real violence” (Collins 2008, 26). So-called “broad” concepts of violence, such as Bourdieu’s, must appear as arbitrary in relation to such a narrow concept.

On closer inspection, it turns out that Collins (2008) does not differ from Bourdieu (1977) regarding the normativity of his concept of violence. In Bourdieu’s work (1977), violence appears as the result of moral judgements that identify that which is called violence as something to be avoided. Collins (2008) and Nassauer (2019) follow the same line. When they describe phenomena as violence, they are performing a moral judgement: these phenomena should not have taken place. Thus, Nassauer (2019) ultimately constitutes her object and its moral evaluation herself, instead of interpreting how violence is identified in the field or how describing phenomena as violence is related to moral judgements.

In the following, we therefore make an attempt to propose an understanding of violence that both grasps the phenomenon as an immediate event that is defined by the “narrow” concept of violence as well as the institutional and symbolic mediation of the event that renders it violence in the first place.

2. A Formally Reflexive Understanding of Violence[1]

We follow a methodological perspective according to which empirical research is guided by socio-theoretical assumptions (Lindemann 2009). In order to preserve an openness to the subject matter required for qualitative research, it is necessary to keep the formulation of socio-theoretical premises as empirically insubstantial/trivial as possible (Kelle 2019, 86). Thus, qualitative methods always involve "theory/methods package[s]" (Clarke 2005, 2). In this sense, we understand an elaboration of a reflexive concept of violence as an explication of the socio-theoretical premises of empirical research on violence.

Helmuth Plessner's (2019) theory of excentric positionality serves as a starting point for developing our formally reflexive understanding of violence. Excentric positionality describes the structure of lived bodies' relationship to their environment and to other lived bodies. This relationship is immediate, but is also, nevertheless, mediated by symbols, institutions, and technology. We start with a brief sketch of excentric lived bodies' relationships to their environment and then describe the advantages of this approach for an analysis of violence.

When we say that lived bodies have an immediate relationship to their environment, we mean that embodied selves are lived bodies experiencing themselves here/now in relation to their environment in an immediate way. They perceive their environment and anticipate a future with concrete relevance for the current situation. This future is embedded in a broader future horizon. Embodied selves are less subjects perceiving their situation from a distance and more selves experiencing themselves here/now as affected by the events in their surroundings. At the same time, selves mediate between their perception of their surroundings, their experience of their own condition, and the expected future by relating their behavior and actions to their environment. Furthermore, embodied selves exist in relations of touch with other selves, i.e., they experience themselves as being touched by others and direct themselves to others by means of gestures, glances, and so forth.

When we say that the relationship of lived bodies to their environment is one of mediated immediacy, we mean that embodied selves do not only exist in immediate relations to their environment and to others, instead they "relate reflexively to these facts by taking the position of thirds" (Lindemann 2021, 106). Excentric positionality means that lived bodies exist within immediate relationships and relate reflexively to this state of affairs from the perspective of third parties – the structure of this reflexive relationship is triadic, and serves, for Plessner (2019), as the condition for the building of symbols, institutions, and technology. It follows that excentric lived bodies exist not

[1] Here we refer to Lindemann (2021, chap. 4).

only in an immediate relationship to their environment and to others, but that these relationships are also mediated by symbolic and institutional structures and/or technology.

Starting from the lived body means analyzing society as a situated, spatiotemporally structured execution of embodied relationships to the environment. It is not about individual actors acting and making decisions, but about how these actors are technologically and symbolically mediated and integrated into their situation, how they are affected by it, and how they act and impact on their environment and communicate with others accordingly.

As Berger and Luckmann ([1966] 1980) and others (Habermas 1985; Luhmann 2014; Simmel [1908] 1983) have shown, institutional orders are built by referring to third parties. With respect to triadic constellations, Plessner's (2019) approach lends itself to being combined with the theory of third parties underlying the emergence of social institutions. Considering third parties systematically not only in terms of their role in the formation but also in the stabilization and change of institutional orders (Lindemann 2021, section 3.3.8) leads to a four-sided understanding of order in terms of social theory: here we have the triadic constellation as well as the institutional order as the fourth element (Lindemann 2021, section 3.6).

Operating from the premise that symbols, institutions, and technology mediate the immediate relationships of embodied selves to others and to their environment allows for a fruitful approach to the analysis of violence. On the one hand, exerting violence as well as suffering pain and anxiety are immediate experiences. On the other, exerting and suffering violence is mediated by third parties and thereby by symbols, institutions, and technology. Our understanding of violence thus transcends the aspect of immediate embodied interaction, which is at the heart of VDA. Understanding violence as a mediated-immediate phenomenon takes into account the fact that violence, as part of a communicative institutional order, is often technically and symbolically mediated. Violence is not simply a form of interaction but should be grasped as an integral element of symbolically generalized forms of communication.

We develop this reflexive understanding of violence in three steps.

(2.1) As an immediate interaction, violence is performed by lived bodies and can almost completely absorb the attention of those involved. (2.2) As part of an institutional order, violence takes place within the moral realm and in the context of institutionalized courses of action. Embodied selves exerting violence insist that institutional expectations be held onto counter-factually. Anyone suffering violence either experiences this as the assertion of a normative claim and allows themselves to be forced into a corresponding institutional position, or as an act not justified normatively that must be delegitimized. The normative claim asserted by the violent act holds in a generalized way if it is legitimized by thirds. This allows for the procedural structuring of

violence. (2.3) Violence takes place in the social realm. It symbolically represents who is to be recognized in what way as a social actor: as a friend, an enemy, one subjugated. It also represents whether these social actors are referred to as individuals or as groups.

2.1 Violence as Embodied Antagonistic Interaction

Lived bodies are, on the one hand, directly related to the environment in the here/now and exposed to the situation in which they find themselves. In particular, embodied selves find themselves in relationships of touch to others. That is, they experience the fact that and the ways in which they touch others and are touched by them through gestures, gazes, words, and so forth.

With respect to the aspect of immediacy, a particularity of violence is that the involved parties are antagonistically related to each other in the sense of exerting and suffering, and that there is a strong tendency for the involved selves to be fully absorbed by their antagonistic interaction.[2] Collins calls this immediate experience the "tunnel of violence" (Collins 2008, 360). Within this tunnel, the attention of those involved is focused on each other; they are completely absorbed by the dynamic of the violent interaction. It is particularly those who suffer violence who are absorbed by the interaction. Here the experience of pain caused by violence or by the fear of suffering violence is central. According to the phenomenology of the lived body, fear and pain sharply accentuate the focus on the immediate here-and-now (Schmitz 1964, §§19-20), which, as Sofsky (1996, 65) emphasizes, is particularly significant for the suffering of violence.

2.2 The Mediatedness of the Violent Act and its Moral Nature

We understand violence not only as an immediate relational phenomenon, but also as an action that is or must be attributed to an actor or a group of actors in order to be understood as violence. Excentric selves are reflexively related to the fact that they exist here/now in a nexus of touch with others. This means that they experience not only what is happening immediately and how it is causing them suffering, but they also relate to this fact and transform it into an integral part of an ongoing communicative process. It is in this sense that our theoretical approach transcends the focus on the immediate occurrences of violence by including possible third parties' ex post perspectives. Thus, we combine a recursive understanding of action, similar to Luhmann's (1995, 193) understanding of communication, with the theory of triadic relations. Events occurring within immediate embodied relationships become an act only insofar as third parties communicatively identify them as such. This

[2] Popitz (2017, 26) analyzes violence in a similar way when he describes human beings as having an openness to being violated and a power to violate.

means that it is only through the (subsequent) communicative interpretation that a component of interactive occurrences is identified as an act of violence. Furthermore, according to the concept of mediated immediacy, there is no pure immediacy. Post hoc perspectives are also relevant to the ad hoc understanding of involved excentric selves in a given situation.

Exerting violence includes the implicit or explicit claim that third parties will legitimate the violent act. (This is not to be understood psychologically.) Subsequent communication will interpret the actor as having made this claim to third parties and it will be rejected or confirmed in the ongoing processes of communication (Lindemann 2021, 241). In terms of time, we can say that actors who act violently do not exist in the present but will have existed when the communicative identification of an action as violence is provisionally complete. In this way, violence becomes a socially interpreted fact.

We thus understand the relationship between violence and institutions mediated by third parties as follows. The endurance of communication structures or social institutions is based on several elements. First: If the institutional order is taken for granted, the normative expectations guiding actors take the form of diffuse background expectations that are not explicated or identified as such. If normative expectations are nevertheless violated, this is either overlooked or remedied in reference to the particular problem. Everyday life continues more or less without much disturbance. Violence occurs when structures of expectation are called into question or need to be ritually affirmed. The violent act identifies normative expectations and asserts the claim a) that these expectations should be generally recognized and b) that the violent act represents the normative expectations in an appropriate way. If both of these claims are approved by third parties, exerting violence is legitimate.

Institutionalized processes of action, interpretation, and communication can take place more or less seamlessly. Embodied selves routinely refer to each other, using technical artifacts more or less intensively. As long as there is no disturbance, it is not necessary to explicitly distinguish between personal actors and other entities involved. However, if a crisis occurs that challenges the status of what is taken for granted, it becomes necessary to determine who or what is to be held responsible and in what way. Crises in the institutional process can now be dealt with in two ways we can distinguish in their ideal forms: either by stabilizing the institutional course of action or by changing it. It is in these two ways that violence may come into play in crisis management.[3]

[3] The examples given by Coenen and Tuma (2022, in this volume) show how closely violence and morality are linked. Due to the limited data, however, it is not possible to determine whether these are groups that are connected to each other in the sense of the procedural order of compensation and reciprocity or whether it is a case of spontaneously raised moral claims involving,

If violence is understood as a mediated immediate antagonistic interaction of doing and suffering in the context of a triadically structured occurrence, the latter's reflexive structure contains the potential for criticism of the violent act, for its justification in response to criticism, and thus rationalization in all aspects.[4] The validity of the norm expressed through violence can be criticized just as much as the appropriateness of the use of violence itself. Violence is not understood as an isolated irrational act taking the place of communication and rationalization. Rather, violence itself contains the potential for its rationalization. In order to be able to identify events as acts of violence, it is thus necessary to trace back the semantic structure of the communication taking place in the observed field. What violence is always also depends on speech or discourse about violence, which points to the connection between violence and the formation of legitimate ordering systems. We will show this in the third section using an example of political protest.

In summary: According to the principle of mediated immediacy, bodily interactions are mediated by institutions and symbols as well as by technology. There is thus also always a normative dimension in which a distinction is made between what ought to be and what ought not to be. Violence takes place within the realm of the normative. Exerting violence takes place within the framework of institutionalized courses of action. It is directed against an alter ego not fulfilling the expectations of her institutional position. Ego uses an act of violence to represent the fact that institutionalized expectations ought to be held on to counterfactually (Luhmann 2014, 83). Those suffering violence experience this either as a justified normative claim being raised and allow themselves to be pushed into a corresponding institutional position, or as a normatively unjustified act that must be delegitimized. In violent interactions, alter ego is pushed into an institutional position or is denied the possibility of claiming an institutional position. Violently raising a normative claim becomes valid only if it is legitimized by third parties (Lindemann 2021, 238-9).

In order to grasp the formal structure of violence from the perspective of social theory, we have shown the necessity of taking into account a four-sided understanding of order. This always requires third parties as well as a social order in reference to which the claim to legitimacy of the act of violence is negotiated. It is in this way that the existence of institutions or the validity of a normative order is generated, confirmed, or contested. This institutional order we describe as a procedural order of violence, which is also an order of interpretation (Lindemann 2021, chap. 4).

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for example, the honor of one of the women involved. Was it violent to behave disrespectfully toward a woman, did this violence have to be met with violence, etc.? Quote from the video: "She deserves an apology"; "You don't go disrespecting women where I'm from" (Figure 1a/b).

[4] Here we follow Habermas's (1985, 35) theory of rational critique in triadic constellations.

So far, we have described the mediated immediacy of violence, integrating the aspects of immediacy articulated by Collins (2018) and found in video analysis, as well as the aspects of mediatedness that have been put forward in violence research with respect to norms and morality by Black (1983) and Cooney (1998) and with respect to the crucial relevance of third parties for an appropriate understanding of violence by Reemtsma (2012) and Koloma Beck (2011). Plessner's (2019) theory of mediated immediacy allowed us to integrate these three strands of violence research. We now turn to a consideration of how violence research can be related to an analysis of the borders of the social world.

2.3 Violence and the Borders of the Social World

Luckmann's (1970) analysis of the borders of the social world shows that these borders also delimit the borders of the circle of those who count as morally responsible actors. This insight is crucial for an analysis of violence. According to a reflexive understanding of violence, only those who count as morally responsible actors can exert or suffer violence. Only morally responsible actors involved in immediate relationships with others can claim to violently represent valid normative expectations supported by third parties. Combining the question of who can exert violence against whom with the question of the borders of the social world (Descola 2014; Lindemann 2019, 2021; Luckmann 1970) makes clear the radicality of a reflexive concept of violence, for which it is an open question who belongs to the circle of morally responsible actors able to exert and suffer violence. What has until now been taken for granted in the research on violence is no longer determined in advance: we no longer assume from the outset that only human beings belong to the circle of those who are morally responsible.

The modern understanding of violence is driven by an anthropological bias: only human beings can exert and suffer violence. Violence against objects only exists if they have a relationship to human actors and if the latter are the actual target of the act of violence. Until now, violence research has adopted the modern understanding of violence instead of analyzing it as a feature of modern sociation.

When empirical research understands violence anthropologically, it restricts from the outset and from an observer's perspective the circle of social actors to all human beings. Instead, we should be paying attention to how the actors in the field define the circle of morally responsible actors. Only then can we examine the particular meaning of what violence is for which circle of social actors in an observed field. In order to break with the modern assumptions that have been taken for granted, we refer to the "social undecidedness relation" (Lindemann 2019; 2021, 94, 98). First, it is undecided what kinds of entities belong to the circle of those whose relations of touch are such

that they are to be recognized as morally responsible beings. Second, addressing beings as morally relevant actors requires a societal decision as to whether they should be addressed as groups or as individuals. This double undecidedness is fixed by establishing an institutional order, which is built by lived bodies operating in triadic constellations and thereby accomplishing a binding order for those involved. We describe such an institutional order as a procedural order of violence.

Exerting violence represents who is a social actor in a practically valid way for the involved participants. From this perspective, a branch falling from a tree and hitting a human being could be an act of violence as well. There are societal contexts in which such an event would be interpreted as a revenge of the tree, for violations of its own normative expectations. This example shows that violence can communicate the borders of the social world in different ways. Human beings may be involved, but they do not have to be. Trees, animals, or ghostly beings could be included, but they do not have to be (examples in Lindemann 2021, chap. 4). We interpret violence as the symbolic communication by means of which the boundaries of the circle of responsible personal actors are or could be defined in an impressive and immediately obvious way for all participants.

2.4 Summary of the Theory: The Necessity of a Theory of Society

Explicating the reflexive concept of violence has shown that violence cannot be understood as an isolated event. Instead, we understand violence as an integral part of a social context. Nor can violence be understood as a purely immediate phenomenon, because it always includes participants identifying an occurrence as violence; this is precisely what makes up its social character. Therefore, violence has to be understood as an event indexically related to institutional orders, which we describe as procedural orders of violence. These interpretive or procedural orders of violence determine

1) who can exert violence,
2) against whom violence can be exerted,
3) which action is to be interpreted as violence,
4) and whether violence is being exercised in a legitimate or illegitimate way.

Who is able to exert violence is determined by a mediating institutional order. It is inappropriate to define this from the standpoint of an external observer. The same is true for the understanding of those who suffer violence. Furthermore, it is not self-evident what counts as violence. It could be a gaze, a blow with a sword, or something different. What counts as violence is defined by symbols and institutions built by involved actors. Similarly, it is institutionally determined whether violent acts are to be understood as legitimate representations of valid normative expectations or as acts of illegitimate

violence. These institutional structures do not exist for themselves but only insofar as they mediate immediate embodied relationships.

An analysis of antagonistic interactions must take into account that violence always takes place in the context of a given procedural order of violence. Addressing these procedural orders of violence requires a theory of society. We will show in the next section how such a theory can help us understand the dynamics of violence beyond a focus on immediate interactions.

3. Rostock/Heiligendamm 2007: Did Violence Occur?

In this section, we turn to an event that Nassauer also analyzed: the protests against the 2007 G8 summit in Heiligendamm. In contrast to Nassauer's analysis, we examine the events from the perspective of a reflexive concept of violence. In doing so, we show where the shortcomings of Nassauer's approach lie and what advantages our approach offers. The main difference between these two approaches is that we do not understand violence only as an immediate event; rather, we understand violence as a mediated immediate phenomenon. It follows that violence can only be identified as such with reference to a symbolic-institutional order, which we call the procedural order of violence.

1) We presuppose the validity of a particular procedural order of violence, which is also an order of interpretation.
2) We explain the features of this order of interpretation and of this procedure that are important for our analysis.
3) The presupposed procedural order only exists if it is reproduced situationally. Whether the hypothesized procedural order is reproduced or modified can only be clarified by empirical research. Empirical research here is based on the reflexive concept of violence outlined above, i.e., on a socio-theoretical understanding of violence. Here we build on Nassauer's descriptions, which grasp the situation in part, but fail to include the discursive level of interpreting events as violence.
4) Empirical analysis is successful and advanced if it allows assumptions about the presupposed procedural order of violence to be completely or partially rejected or if it succeeds in differentiating assumptions about the procedural order of violence (see Barth et al. 2021, § 36).

Ad 1: In our analysis of contemporary political protests, we refer to what we call the "modern procedural order of violence," which provides an institutional framework for answering the questions raised above (who is an actor?

What is to be regarded as violence? Was the use of violence legitimate or illegitimate?).[5]

Ad 2: In the modern procedural order of violence, the circle of those who can exert and suffer violence is restricted to living human beings. There can be legitimate reasons, however, for the actor status of human beings to become questionable. For example, little children or patients suffering from dementia are not considered to be able to exert violence. At the same time, the moral status of most humans is such that they can suffer violence. Although modern societies operate with the general rule that all humans should be recognized as persons, a closer sociological look is necessary to analyze who specifically counts as a morally responsible actor and under what circumstances this holds.

With respect to political protests, the question of who counts as an actor is rarely problematic, but the questions as to what counts as violence and whether it is being exercised legitimately or illegitimately are of particular importance. This is because violence per se becomes illegitimate against the backdrop of the general recognition of the human dignity of all human beings. That is, to identify something as violence nearly always implies a negative moral judgment, so that violence appears to be fundamentally illegitimate. At the same time, there is a basic trust in modernity in the nonviolence of everyday interaction (see Reemtsma 2012). The structural precondition of trusting in nonviolence is the state's monopoly on violence: it is the task of the state to end illegitimate violence. With few exceptions (e.g., self-defense), state agencies are the only actors who may use legitimate violence. The moral justification for this is that this violence serves to end illegitimate violence.

Because successful definitions of illegitimate violence lead the state to act in this regard, there is a constant societal debate surrounding this question. This is of particular importance for the analysis of political protests. In principle, the modern procedural order of violence guarantees citizens the right to express political protest as a subjective public right, as long as it remains nonviolent. When protest turns to violence, it is the job of the police to put an end to illegitimate protest violence – the rationale being that those who use violence are not engaging in legitimate political protest but committing a crime. At the same time, the police would delegitimize their own actions if they themselves were to commit acts that can be identified as (illegitimate) violence. Political protest takes place within a symbolic-institutional framework that inevitably turns the interpretation of an event as violent into a moral and political statement. Only these assumptions allow the events in Heiligendamm to initially be understood as protest events. Now the first fundamental difference between Nassauer's analysis and ours becomes clear. Nassauer frames the events in Heiligendamm as a protest without reflecting

[5] For a more detailed account of the modern procedural order of violence, cf. Lindemann (2018, 19-22, chaps 2 and 3; 2021, 264-8).

on the dependence of this interpretation on the modern procedural order of violence. In doing so, she affirms the basic assumptions of the modern procedural order of violence, which is why she does not succeed in making it the object of her analysis. This has the effect of trapping her in the political and moral assumptions of the modern procedural order without being able to analyze them.

Ad 3: Was the modern procedural order of violence reproduced in the events surrounding the 2007 G8 summit in Heiligendamm? If violence occurred, in what sense did it do so?

Not until we turn to the third step do Nassauer's descriptions become relevant. Nassauer asks why some protests no one expected to end in violence and chaos do while other protests that are expected to become violent because of, e.g., announcements in this respect in the run-up, nevertheless remain peaceful. Among the protests she examines is the G8 summit in Heiligendamm in June 2007. Nassauer meticulously examines how the embodied interactions between protesters and police develop. In the case of Heiligendamm, she traces how, in the course of a protest march that began peacefully and was accompanied by police officers who were initially committed to a strategy of de-escalation, an ever-increasing confrontational tension developed on both sides of the groups of actors:

> Visual data show how severely tension and fear increased due to both sides' spatial incursions, in addition to other relevant interactions: at the beginning of the protest, both police and protesters look happy, relaxed, and mostly focused on their own group's actions [...]. Pictures show protesters smiling, their shoulders down and relaxed, others talking to each other in a relaxed mood, and police officers interacting with different protest clowns in a friendly manner [...]. Yet when police officers ran through the protesters' assembly space, protesters showed characteristics of tension and fear. Videos and pictures [...] show their eyes are tense and wide open, their upper eyelids raised, their lower eyelids raised and tense, and their brows raised. They show open mouths and drawn-back, tensed or stretched lips, postures and movements that are tense, their shoulders drawn up. All these are indicators of fear [...]. Officers show the same emotion expressions. Small units move even closer together. Pictures and videos [...] show that they start standing back to back to avoid possible attacks from behind. Some officers show wide-open eyes, mouths stretched back. Officers move their heads a lot in these instances to see every potential danger in their vicinity. Shortly after these tense situations and displays of fear, violent altercations erupted in Rostock. (Nassauer 2019, 55-6)

Following Collins (2008), Nassauer reconstructs the genesis of confrontational tension as a precondition for the constitution of violence. Other conditions in addition to confrontational tension must pertain, however, for violence to become constituted, e.g., police mismanagement or property damage. As a necessary but not sufficient condition for the emergence of violence, Nassauer identifies spatial incursions by a group involved in the

protest, for example, "when police officers ran through the protesters' assembly space."

We show that Nassauer analyzes concerns how embodied interactions become increasingly dense and antagonistic, but that she does not, in fact, analyze violence itself. In order to study violence, the analysis of the situation must take into account the modern procedural order of violence. We proceed in two steps: first (a), we show how the events are interpreted by relevant third parties: the media and the courts. Second (b), we discuss Nassauer's research findings, asking whether there is evidence that the modern procedural order of violence is challenged by actors in protest situations and to what extent this interpretation is maintained by third parties.

a) A few days after the events, the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* described the conflicting views on what had happened: was it a legitimate protest against the policies of the G8 states or was it an act of criminal violence? According to *Der Spiegel*, it was clear that those who acted violently were criminals, while the peaceful protesters expressed their criticism in a legitimate way and distanced themselves from the illegitimate violence.[6]

But this was not the end of the story. In 2010 and 2011, three years after the events in Heiligendamm, different newspapers reported unanimously on unlawful behavior by the police.[7] They also put into perspective the above-mentioned reports from 2007, according to which around 430 police officers were said to have been injured.[8] The updated reports showed that the majority of injuries sustained by police officers were caused by water spiked with tear gas from their own water cannons, and the number of seriously injured officers had to be corrected to a total of one. These reports show the enormous relevance of whether or not an event is interpreted as violence. If necessary, this question must be resolved in court, and, if needed, the process of interpretation can last ad infinitum. In the case of Heiligendamm, an orgy of violence turned into a more or less legitimate political protest.

Such changes in interpretation are beyond the scope of Nassauer's analysis of increasing antagonism in embodied interactions, which, as she writes, can culminate in "actors injur[ing] or kill[ing] another" (Nassauer 2019, 197). This she defines as violence. Instead of analyzing the symbolic-institutional framework through which something can be interpreted as violence in the

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[6] "Hundreds of hooded men held an entire city in suspense, giving free rein to their blind rage, smashing everything in their path and attacking the police with extreme brutality." https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/g-8-protest-randale-in-rostock-430-verletzte-polizisten-a-486280.html.

[7] https://www.heise.de/tp/features/Schlechte-Zeiten-fuer-Deutschlands-Polizei-3387159.html. https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2011-12/heiligendamm-urteil-menschenrechte. https://taz.de/G-8-Gipfel-in-Heiligendamm-2007/!5135051/.

[8] https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/g-8-protest-randale-in-rostock-430-verletzte-polizisten-a-486280.html. https://www.dw.com/de/fast-1000-verletzte-bei-g8-protest/a-2573796.

first place, and instead of including the corresponding interpretative processes, Nassauer takes on the role of a field actor such as the media cited above, as she participates in defining which acts are to be interpreted as violence.

b) The processes of interpretation are inherent to the event, and even the data presented by Nassauer show how the understanding of the events is mediated by the symbolic-institutional framework. This leads to the question whether the modern procedural order of violence is reproduced or modified situationally. From this perspective, the data collected by Nassauer renders a most interesting outcome: the event of Heiligendamm is characterized by an abrupt change from one procedural order of violence to another, with the normative preconditions of the latter differing qualitatively from those of the modern procedural order.

Nassauer describes the increase in confrontational tension on the part of the protesters "when police officers ran through the protesters' assembly space." She thereby assumes the protesters' interpretation of the situation, according to which the behavior of the police officers violates their claim to territorial autonomy. The protesters claim to have the right to be in Heiligendamm where the summit is taking place and to express their protest – it is based on this claim alone that it is "their assembly space." What Nassauer does not say is that the protesters are thereby laying claim to a normative entitlement that the police officers are violating. According to our socio-theoretical approach, violence is a mediated immediate event; that is, violence is always also mediated by normative expectations, which may be supported by third parties and thus become institutionalized – or not. This raises the question of what normative expectations are at stake in any given situation.

Nassauer seems to be on her way to answering this question. She mentions that situational definitions can change in such a way that, in the course of a protest, participants no longer see themselves in the role of legitimate protesting citizens at all (Nassauer 2019, 178). She also notes that cultural patterns are taken up and changed in situational definitions (Nassauer 2019, 180). However, she does not analyze here how an order can change in relation to what is considered violence and how legitimate and illegitimate violence can be distinguished from one another. According to the modern procedural order of violence, we would have to assume that the protesters are asserting their subjective civil rights. In this case, the critical claim expressed by the protest is doubled: both in relation to acts and mechanisms of world politics that are perceived as unjust as well as in relation to the illegitimate, because disenfranchising, behavior of those exercising the power of the state. But the reference to claiming a space of one's own points to something else: the mere right of local presence. If the latter right is in effect, the participants would have left the modern procedural order of violence, entering instead a procedural order of reciprocity and compensation (Lindemann 2021, 262f).

Demonstrators cannot accomplish such a transformation of the situationally valid procedural order of violence on their own. They can only succeed in this if the police officers' behavior supports them. If this is the case, the participants' relationship to violence changes fundamentally from their own internal perspective as they enter into a reciprocal obligation to exercise violence, according to which the illegitimate violence of one side challenges the legitimate violence of the other and vice versa.

The fact that an abrupt change from one procedural order of violence to another did in fact place is confirmed by an analysis of the practical and discursive preparation and further processing of the events. The Fundamental Rights Committee criticized the state preparations for holding the summit as being more akin to military than police measures.[9] This interpretation implies that the state was concerned with securing its own territory rather than enabling political protest. The violent protesters themselves interpreted their actions as a political and moral statement against a violent and oppressive system. This establishes a logic of "us versus them" that involves defending one's own space, the territory potentially considered liberated, against the police. Here, a procedural order of the reciprocity of violence is established, with an aim of beating modernity with its own weapons. A series of final acts of violence in the struggle against a violent system is supposed to make possible a truly free and nonviolent society. It becomes clear that radical political critique, according to its own understanding of itself, can accept a transformation of the procedural order of violence in order to achieve its final goal of a just and nonviolent society.[10]

Ad 4: Concrete analysis must empirically challenge presupposed socio-theoretical premises as well as the presupposed procedural order of violence. Even this brief interpretive sketch shows the analytical fruitfulness of a reflexive understanding of violence with regard to the validity of the modern procedural order of violence. At the same time, we must pay respect to Nassauer's precise presentation of data. Her accurate phenomenological reconstruction of events allowed us to elaborate our own interpretation.

We have shown that within the framework of the modern procedural order of violence, it is disputed – e.g., in the media, in the internal discussions of the political activists – to what extent acts of protest represent legitimate protest and thus rational critique or constitute, instead, illegitimate, criminal violence. Nassauer unreflectively adopts the normative assumptions of the modern procedural order of violence. Accordingly, her analysis concerns the transition of regular political protest to chaos or problematic violence. Her scholarly desire to decide whether an event constitutes violence or not does

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9 https://www.grundrechtekomitee.de/details/gewaltbereite-politik-und-der-g8-gipfel.

10 Einige autonome (ex-)StipendiatInnen. 2008: "Oops! We did it again." Demo und Riots in Rostock am 2. Juni 2007 aus autonomer Sicht. In *Eine Frage der Gewalt. Antworten von links*, ed. Rainer Rilling, 45-52. Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag.

not lead to a sufficient analytical distance, but to an entanglement with the normatively charged interpretations of the field actors. Instead of conducting an analysis, Nassauer makes a politico-normative statement that is explicitly directed against the self-understanding of some of the political activists, in that she denies the possibility that there can be legitimate violent protest against a violent system. We prefer a greater analytical distance from the events.

Our interpretation makes the modern procedural order of violence itself the object of analysis. This makes visible the transformation of one order of violence into another, which places qualitatively different normative demands on the actors. It is not about the transition from order to the immediacy of violence, but about competing procedural orders of violence.

4. Conclusion: Implications for Video Analytics in General and VDA in Particular

What we want to make clear is that violence is not merely the application of situational force and the deformation of objects and human bodies; rather, it is always situated within a discursive and institutional context that must be included by the researcher. Both the immediate event and the symbolic and institutional order as well as the interpretive discourses make up the real phenomenon that calls for analysis. A narrow concept of violence does not allow this dynamic to be taken into account: rather than *analyzing* the processes by which phenomena are identified as violent and by which they are thus morally evaluated, Nassauer (2019) and Collins (2008) themselves *engage* in these processes of identifying and evaluating phenomena as violent.

In our opinion, VDA seems to be helpful in controlling the perspectivity of the originators of this data (e.g., YouTube videos) within the framework of the methodological procedure. It does so by combining this data with sources other than image data or by varying image and video data. On the other hand, VDA has so far remained mute regarding the control of the observer position of the researchers themselves, which is mediated by the theoretical premises applied. Thus, while VDA triangulates data, types of data, forms of data collection, and data analysis techniques (Nassauer and Legewie 2018, 160; 2020, 143-5), it cannot take into account how participants in the field negotiate whether an event counts as violence or not. This foreshortened reference to the object means that VDA does not analyze violence, but rather describes or condemns certain events as violence. In fact, Nassauer's (2019, 23) preference for "defining violence as a physical action that is visible and observable" is ultimately based on a mirage that can only be dissolved by making the question of whether or not something is violence part of the research itself.

Like other data sources, videos can be profitably used for research on violence. However, it is not only the methodological control of the perspectivity of videos that is decisive for their usefulness. It is also necessary to rethink the methodological premises used to render violence recognizable in the data material. The substantive determination of violence from an external observational perspective leads to obscuring the field processes involved in the constitution of violence as well as the normative implications of making the identification of something as violence the task of the researcher. A purely situational analysis, which is not forced by the video material but is suggested by it, leads to a predetermination from the observer's perspective and thus to a commitment to a normative standpoint. Using the example of the protests surrounding the G8 summit in 2007, we have shown that a definition of violence from the observer's perspective is highly normatively charged and itself corresponds to a division of the object into legitimate and illegitimate violence.

This problem can be solved with recourse to a reflexive understanding of violence that, first, formally defines violence as an institutionalized state of affairs and, second, locates the observational standpoint of the violence researcher using a theory of society. This leads to researchers finding themselves in a reconstructive relationship to their subject. Other approaches (for an overview see Moritz and Corsten 2018) seem to be better prepared for this circumstance than VDA, even if the latter appears to be open to it (Nassauer and Legewie 2019). Thus, Knoblauch and Tuma (2019), for instance, emphasize the need to understand the data not as indicative of an immediately given reality, but itself as a phenomenon to be interpreted. Following this logic, such reconstructive approaches would have to conceive of violence not as self-evident, but as involving the institutional and symbolic mediation of the immediate phenomenon (nevertheless, this is not realized by Coenen and Tuma 2022, in this volume). This would be a first step, but it is not enough to handle the complicated hermeneutic circle of violence research. We must rather presuppose an interpretative order on the level of a theory of society in order to track how the involved actors identify particular events as violence. We call these orders of interpretation procedural orders of violence. Our reflexive concept of violence is a theoretical and methodological framework that develops a perspective for empirical violence research and takes into account the societal conditions of identifying events as violence. The brief interpretive sketch we have presented only provides a hint of the analytical fruitfulness of our approach. Nevertheless, this exercise was also significant for us because it allowed us to empirically identify the phenomenon of competing procedural orders of violence. Capturing this state of affairs more precisely is the challenge we will take on in our further empirical research.

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