

# Open Research Online

---

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

## Locating violence: the spatial production and construction of physical aggression

### Book Section

#### How to cite:

Wood, J. Carter (2007). Locating violence: the spatial production and construction of physical aggression. In: Watson, Katherine D. ed. *Assaulting the Past: Violence and Civilization in Historical Context*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 20–37.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2007 Katherine D. Watson and contributors

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://www.c-s-p.org/Flyers/Assaulting-the-Past-Violence-and-Civilization-in-Historical-Context.htm>

---

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

---

[oro.open.ac.uk](http://oro.open.ac.uk)

## CHAPTER ONE

# LOCATING VIOLENCE: THE SPATIAL PRODUCTION AND CONSTRUCTION OF PHYSICAL AGGRESSION

J. CARTER WOOD

It is possible to speak of the 'place' of violence from a variety of perspectives. Along with using 'place' to refer to the cultural importance or acceptability of physical aggression in any given society, there is also a more literal way to 'locate' violence. After all, every violent act occurs within a particular spatial context which has at least some effect on it: revealing it to (or concealing it from) public view, shaping its form or influencing its interpretation. Since ways of thinking about space vary across time, the geographies of violence can be examined historically. Spatial perspectives on violence are complicated, however, by the many meanings of both 'space' and 'violence'. 'Space' is formed not only materially, by the built environment with its particular enclosures or openings, but also by imaginative elements, with some kinds of behaviour (including violent behaviour) being associated with particular kinds of spaces. Thus, there are both 'built spaces' and 'imagined spaces'. 'Public' and 'private' are perhaps the most immediately apparent spatial distinctions, although in practice their borders are often quite permeable. Street brawling and domestic violence are thus fairly obvious examples of spatially defined violence; however, there are also other connections between violence and space. For example, certain neighbourhoods, streets or areas are seen (whether rightly or wrongly) as dangerous.

Both 'built' and 'imagined' spaces are relevant to the 'production' and the 'construction' of violence. The production of violence refers both to the causes as well as to the forms of physical aggression. Space is sometimes a more or less passive (though still significant) backdrop for violent activity; in other cases, it provides motivation for the use of force or is actively manipulated as part of a deliberate strategy of violence. Along with the production of violence, space is also connected to its construction, the ways that physically forceful acts

are individually and collectively interpreted. Thus, like 'space', the term 'violence' is also used here in two ways. First, it more objectively denotes non-consensual physical acts which cause injury. Second, and more subjectively, it is a label applied to physically forceful acts which are seen (at least by some) as illegitimate. Thus, 'violence' refers, on the one hand, to acts and, on the other, to interpretations of acts. Both senses of violence interact with space, and these interactions have influenced the history of violence's production and construction. Although, as should become clear, these topics are related, they will be dealt with in turn.

### Space and the production of violence

Material spaces are one of the most stable elements of daily life, but more than simply forming an inert, neutral background, they influence patterns and forms of social coexistence. As Michel Foucault has argued,

It is spaces that provide fixed positions and permit circulation; they carve out individual segments and establish operational links; they mark places and indicate values; they guarantee the obedience of individuals, but also a better economy of time and gesture.<sup>1</sup>

Although helpful insofar as it highlights the influence of space upon interaction, movement and meaning, such an analysis sees people as largely passive. From this perspective, spaces seem to act upon people but not people upon spaces. Michel de Certeau provides a helpful corrective to this problematic view. In his analysis, 'place' is contrasted to 'space'. 'Place'—similar to 'built space'—'implies an indication of stability', as do all physical forms; 'space' is related but different:

space is a practiced place. Thus, the street geometrically defined by urban planning (a place) is transformed into a space by pedestrians. In the same way, an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e., a place constituted by a system of signs.<sup>2</sup>

In Certeau's view, 'space is like the word when it is spoken', and, like language, spaces are used in many ways.<sup>3</sup> 'Pedestrian speech acts' transform spatial urban texts in ways which may even be contrary to their planners' intentions; thus, the imposition of certain kinds of order may be actively resisted, unconsciously undermined or simply ignored. The essential point is that analysing spaces means not only looking at material structures themselves but also at their use.

Considering the reciprocal interactions among material spaces, imagined spaces and the uses of space allows greater attention to the ways that particular

kinds of spatial environments have influenced violent behaviour. One of the most well-worn spatial categories is 'urban'. We have, for instance, a well-established picture of nineteenth-century urban life: as one writer put it, 'human masses pent up, crowded, thrust together, huddled close, crammed into courts and alleys'.<sup>4</sup> This view certainly influenced the ways in which violence was constructed, becoming one ingredient in a discourse of urban savagery fundamental to nineteenth-century understandings of both class and the city; however, attitudes toward the civilizing effects of cities were complex.<sup>5</sup> In a somewhat different way, images of the crowded, anonymous city continued across the twentieth century to condition popular as well as professional views of violence. However, as they remain, urban environments were not only the source of myths of urban danger but also factors in generating actual violence.

It is, of course, possible to overemphasise the causal connection between cities and violence, and historical scholarship has begun reversing this perception.<sup>6</sup> Urbanisation, along with creating new potential types of disorder, also generated new forms of order, discipline and control, and not only those imposed by the state. Faced with a 'strongly predictable compulsion or pressure' based upon changing social interdependencies (such as the need to adjust one's behaviour to that of countless others) it became particularly important for urban individuals to develop a strong capacity for self-control.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it was the tension between the new forms of order and disorder created by urban spaces that shaped the violence which occurred within them. Urban spatial organisation alternatively contributed to and limited conflict. With regard to nineteenth-century urban (and primarily working-class) spaces, three features are especially relevant. First, they tended to be crowded. Second, due to a lack of private amenities, shared public (or semi-public) spaces were used for the performance of many daily tasks.<sup>8</sup> Third, spaces served a variety of purposes: the same courtyard, for instance, might be a place for clothes washing, a site for socializing, a walkway, a place for children to play and a location for a variety of other activities. This has been labelled a 'promiscuous' use of space.<sup>9</sup> These crowded, shared and promiscuous spaces contributed to the ways that violence was produced.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Charles Booth expressed a commonly held view that tenement housing 'destroyed the feeling of neighbourly responsibility and interest':

common rights and duties, lead, of course, to endless contention. (I may quote the remark of a neighbour on the ferocity of the combatants in a washing-day dispute: 'Why, they'd tear you to pieces; bull-dogs I call 'em'.)<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, as David Woods has concluded, the 'sheer frustration of trying to get a living in miserable, overcrowded conditions' was a causal factor in nineteenth-

century neighbourhood conflicts.<sup>11</sup> Crowded spaces which had to be shared produced violence in specific ways; however, this was not because they were used chaotically. To the contrary, dense networks of shared responsibility required negotiation and the formation of rules. It was the breaking of rules or disputes over their interpretation which often led to insults or violence to defend use-rights and respond to challenges to honour. Thus, rather than the chaotic use of space, aggression and violence were generated in the context of regulating an ordered system of spatially relevant rights.

This is not uncommon. In some ways, the dynamics of common laundry facilities can be compared with other spaces which, at first glance, would appear to have no connection. Bars, for example, are places in which

issues of social control are problematic: for example, disputes may arise from turns on pool tables and other games, who should be served and, above all, over refusal by the bartender to serve a customer ... Thus, the bar is a place where rights and obligations may not be clear-cut leaving it open for people to view the situation from the perspective of a personal set of values.<sup>12</sup>

In the late 1990s, a study pointed out that nearly twenty percent of violence in British pubs occurred around or near pool tables.<sup>13</sup> Susanne Karstedt's investigation of the impact on violence of nineteenth-century developments in train travel in southwestern Germany is also suggestive of the complexity of the relationship between order and disorder. The rapid expansion of rail travel affected behaviour patterns, having both isolating and integrating effects.<sup>14</sup> The spatial contexts of train cars and stations brought vast numbers of people into periods of extended close contact with strangers outside of the frameworks of more traditional forms of informal, community control. The 'enlargement of public space' occasioned by rail travel increased the need for individual self-control and subjected people to new types of formal regulation; however, at the same time 'the new modes of behaviour that it brought about in public space increased the potential for those types of conflicts that are expressed in less severe interpersonal violence'.<sup>15</sup> While serious violence declined, minor violence increased. As these examples suggest, particular kinds of spaces have an important impact on the production of aggression, due to the ways in which they shape the nature of interpersonal relationships and the potential for conflict. Tenements, bars or train stations are not simply disordered; instead, they serve as settings for particular tensions between order and disorder.

Another significant relationship between violence and space involves territoriality, in which violence is employed to define and defend space. This may include ritualized demonstrations within a space, thereby signifying control over it, or the use of force to physically exclude (or expel) those who violate local notions of spatial belonging. Some have highlighted the role of social

elites in this process, emphasising that ‘the powerful are continually vigilant of the borders, which they institute for themselves, between themselves and those they oppress’.<sup>16</sup> This view, like Foucault’s, links spaces with the power of social elites to define and order them. Certainly, poor and working-class communities in most cultural contexts and historical periods can be seen as excluded spaces formed by the ability of wealthier groups to separate themselves and police the boundaries of their own, more exclusive spatial enclaves. In an era in which some countries are witnessing the expansion of ‘gated communities’ (with their attendant private security forces), the relevance of this perspective is immediately clear.

However, territorial exclusion is rarely simply monopolised by one social group. There were—and are—many layers of power and types of exclusion, and the use of exclusionary violence to establish dominance over spaces is a common social phenomenon. In this regard, it helps to see ‘power’ in terms other than a generalised or abstract force. Instead, ‘power’ refers to the ‘power over’ something (or someone) or the ‘power to do’ something, and is an aspect of all social relationships.<sup>17</sup> Power can, for example, involve territory. Defining a space as a territory requires not only demarcating boundaries but also identifying those who belong within them. This is true on many scales, such as nation, region, town, neighbourhood, street or even individual courtyard. Concepts of spatial belonging are affected by issues including class, sex, age, status, ethnicity and profession, and violence can play a role in all aspects of territoriality: identifying who has the right to be within a particular space, establishing the boundaries of that space and excluding those who do not belong.

Territoriality has shaped violence in many cultural and historical contexts. John Archer asserts the important, reciprocal connections between violence and cultural understandings of space in contemporary urban environments:

The main reason that the streets of poor urban areas are the places where much inter-male violence occurs is because they are designated as male territory, particularly in US black and Hispanic cultures. Such cultures show a high degree of gender-role polarization, which is accompanied by antagonism between the sexes and their spatial segregation. For various reasons, men spend a lot of time out of the house, in a male subculture composed of individuals seeking to make a living in differing ways, often outside the law.<sup>18</sup>

Elijah Anderson’s study of violence in Philadelphia in the 1990s makes a similar point, emphasising the importance of ‘staging areas’ in which the credible threat of violence signifies one’s right to be within these territories (such as a particular street corner) and where ‘campaigns for respect’ are waged which typically involve displaying toughness.<sup>19</sup> Some dominate these spaces;

those without the ability to use or threaten violence—so-called ‘chumps’—are dominated:

Around such places, in various social arenas, and on the streets more generally, the chump gets little or no respect, and those who resemble him are the ones who most often get picked on, tried or tested, and become victims of robbery and gratuitous violence.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, certain spaces provide well-defined contexts within which some aspects of social relationships (such as maintaining hierarchies or establishing notions of belonging) can be worked out. Especially for those of humble means, physical domination of spaces (however insignificant they might seem) can be an important goal which greatly influences patterns of violence. As Martin Daly and Margo Wilson have demonstrated, such patterns are cross-cultural, reflecting the enduring importance of physical prowess and territorial dominance for men, particularly those who are unable to gain status in other ways.<sup>21</sup> The role of territory in establishing dichotomies between ‘us’ and ‘them’ appears deeply rooted in human psychology.<sup>22</sup>

In nineteenth-century England, exclusionary violence was common, and its targets were varied. The use of public spaces to enforce adherence to labour rules or strikes was one area in which the connections between space, power and violence are clear. Here, surveillance of the streets was combined with the assertion of control over them through public rituals or the beating of strike-breakers. Surveillance—by identifying threats from outsiders or those who refused to observe group discipline—served the selective use of violence to exclude particular ‘marked men’ from public spaces.<sup>23</sup> Labour disputes were part of a broader tradition. Motivated by a mentality in which the right of the community to police its own moral boundaries had a central role, community control was enacted through a strategic, spatial use of violence. Distinguishing between insiders and outsiders has historically been highly relevant to the issue of violence, not least because the ‘rules’ that governed violence between social equals (and which often constrained force through expectations of fairness) did not apply to individuals or groups seen as outside the boundaries of community respect.

Eric C. Schneider’s detailed analysis of street gangs in New York City in the decades following the Second World War also emphasises the close connection between violence and territoriality. Building on a view of the city as a collection of ‘urban villages’, Schneider depicts how ‘defended communities’ sought to create and protect local identities; in this context, street gangs cooperated with adult organisations ‘aimed at keeping outsiders at bay’.<sup>24</sup> In this environment, acquiring and defending territory meant the accrual of community, group and individual honour. There was, furthermore, a complicated relationship between

ethnicity and place with regard to gang identity. In some cases (though not in all), a shared sense of community belonging was more important than race or ethnicity in constructing the gang's identity. The territorial projection of this identity affected patterns in gang violence, as gangs sought to protect 'their' territory from incursions by rival gang members. Along with providing a context for the assertion of neighbourhood identity, the streets were valuable to men who were denied 'a secure basis for patriarchal authority' in the marketplace due to their ethnic background:

The street served as a public arena for the display and definition of masculinity, and, as a result, the significance of minor slights was magnified. Not only were other sources of honor few, but also the audiences for dramas of confrontation were large.<sup>25</sup>

In an environment where borders were well known and 'crossings were rarely accidental', young people 'organized their lives around a few blocks and were painfully aware of the dangers that lay beyond them'.<sup>26</sup> Changing residential patterns helped to ensure conflict, shaping patterns in neighbourhood violence.

The cross-cultural relevance of the close connection between violence and local territoriality is suggested by Andreas Gestrich's study of German village life in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>27</sup> Although rural southern Germany in this period had a social, cultural and spatial environment which was worlds away from that of post-war New York City, there were remarkable similarities in their geographies of violence. For example, the fighting which was common among the young men of neighbouring villages was motivated by a strong sense of territoriality. Groups of youths often attacked young male outsiders who entered their villages, in part to prevent their involvement with local girls and to protect their own chances on the local marriage market. However, another sort of semi-regular and partly ritualized fighting had an established place in the lives of the young men and boys of Ohmenhausen and other villages. On Sundays, rival groups of youths gathered at the village borders to taunt and fight one another. Such conflicts were symbolically important, explicitly territorial and a means through which group solidarity was cemented in opposition to outsiders.<sup>28</sup> Along with presenting an arena for proving individual manhood, violence was instrumental in constituting community identity. As in New York's 'urban villages', youth culture was both separate from and connected to broader patterns in adult relationships: the altercations among the young men in rural Württemberg were tolerated by adults, and they helped establish local enmities which lasted a lifetime.

All societies distribute rights to use certain kinds of violence in certain contexts, forming the crucial basis of various 'cultures of violence'.<sup>29</sup> In larger and more complex societies, various cultures of violence typically coexist.

While one of them may become dominant, competing understandings of violence may also circulate within particular classes or social groups, often because these alternate mentalities are more appropriate to local social contexts. Thus, the boundaries of legitimate violence within any particular culture of violence may be unstable or contested. Since space—both built and imagined—has helped define the ways in which physical force could be legitimately employed, spatial issues have been important in struggles over the legitimacy of physical force. Cultures of violence, after all, are dynamic, subject not only to alterations in other cultural understandings (for example, those of ‘propriety’, legal rights, property, gender or class) but also to social change and conflicts between different social groups for status and dominance. For instance, conflicts over order and masculinity contributed to a relative decline in public violence in eighteenth-century Britain.<sup>30</sup>

Cultures of violence are also dependent upon psychology. As Norbert Elias has theorised, the process of civilization involves a change in social structure ‘that demands and generates a specific standard of emotional control’.<sup>31</sup> Although not exclusively concerned with violence, the relevance of the civilizing process to physical aggression is clear. Two historical developments in social relations have had particular importance: increasing interdependence among individuals and an increasing monopolisation of legitimate force on the part of the state. Interdependence is driven by new patterns of social and spatial interaction. Traffic systems, for example, can be depicted as ‘spatial functions’ of ‘social integration’.<sup>32</sup> As mentioned above, the expansion of the public sphere through new forms of transportation (such as railway travel) along with dense forms of urban living generated new forms of social interaction; although these were undoubtedly bound up with new kinds of conflicts, they also helped to impose new types of individual self-control.

The second factor emphasised by Elias, states’ monopolisation of force, was also spatial:

When a monopoly of force is formed, pacified social spaces are created which are normally free from acts of violence. The pressures acting on individual people within them are of a different kind than previously.<sup>33</sup>

From their origins, states’ efforts to combat crime have been largely fixated upon the pacification of public spaces. It is also there that—at least in the long view—they have been most successful. Establishing even a partial monopoly of force, however, is a difficult task, bringing the state into conflict with communities which may hitherto have asserted their own rights to self-police public spaces. The development of policing has been inseparable from spatial thinking: establishing ‘beats’—which meant determining how much space could be patrolled in a given amount of time—has been a crucial issue, not only for

the police in general, but also for the individual policemen who had to walk them. Certain areas are allocated more than an average share of police resources; in some cases, the extra policing of one area is intended to protect another. Some neighbourhoods may receive little protection from the authorities, allowing alternative powers to assert themselves, and there may even be ‘no-go’ areas in which the police are normally absent. Thus, state power, whatever its more abstract relevance, is actually experienced (or not experienced) within particular spaces. In England, as in other nations, the police increasingly patrolled the streets in the nineteenth century and actively intervened in public social traditions; so too, resistance to state power coalesced around trying to defend local control of public spaces. (The more organised forms of criminality also function in relation to particular spaces, such as the ‘turf’ belonging to a street gang or other criminal organisation.)

David Sibley has encouraged us to see the built environment as ‘an integral element in the production of social life, conditioning activities and creating opportunities according to the distribution of power in the socio-spatial system’.<sup>34</sup> Spatial environments undoubtedly influence the interactions which take place within them, and this includes violent interactions. This influence derives not only directly from the material components which create spaces, but it is also—and more importantly—a consequence of the ways in which particular spaces are used and the cultural expectations which accumulate around them. Material spaces provide motivations for and shaping factors in the production of violence. Sometimes, spaces help generate constellations of tension and accommodation which produce conflict. In other cases, violence is territorial, weaving together notions of power, belonging, social hierarchy and the public display of social status. Space can thus serve as the arena within which broader struggles for status or other kinds of social power are played out. On the streets, the ‘turf’ confronts the ‘beat’, each of which is a spatial context for the deployment of particular kinds of (at least potentially) violent power. Long-term changes in social relationships and organisation—whether due to new forms of public interaction or developments in state power—have played out within a myriad of local spatial contexts.

### **Space and the construction of violence**

Space not only influences the ‘production’ of violence but also the ways that violence is ‘constructed’, that is, the ways that physically violent acts are interpreted. People come to terms with violence through the creation of narratives which not only describe the occurrence itself but also explain it, placing it within their understandings of everyday experience. Attitudes toward violence are about many things other than violence itself, and many of these

other attitudes (toward gender, class, age, propriety, politics, race, etc.) have spatial components. Moreover, violence is rarely, if ever, thought about purely abstractly. Instead, it is associated with specific incidents (whether experienced, witnessed or imagined) which take place due to particular causes and in particular places. The reverse is also true: certain spaces (such as neighbourhoods) may be associated with danger or violence. In thinking about our geographical environments, real spaces are overlaid with imagined maps expressing various assumptions and fears. On the one hand, this process takes place on an informal, private level, affecting countless individuals' perceptions. On the other hand, space is more formally associated with violence, as police departments create computer maps colour-coded according to the risk of violent crime; so-called 'hot spots' are identified in which there is a higher risk of conflict or crime, and policing resources are distributed accordingly.<sup>35</sup> Recently, criminological approaches focusing on the importance of 'micro crime places' in producing crime have become an increasing area of interest.<sup>36</sup>

There is an enduring connection between space and the interpretation of violence. For instance, the label 'violence' is itself connected to the issue of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of physical force (acceptable force is rarely described as violence), and legitimacy is often reliant upon—or at least in some way affected by—space. Some uses of physical force are seen as legitimate within particular kinds of spaces. In other cases, their legitimacy is tied to the ways that space is used. Furthermore, as the spatial organisation of social interaction is affected by civilizing trends, changes in the production of violence have important effects on the ways that violence is understood, the role it plays in culture and individual psychology. As noted, one of the most important spatial distinctions with regard to violence is that between 'public' and 'private'. These notions, of course, are not simply mental constructions: they are connected to material structures which arrange, reveal or conceal activity in particular ways. Nonetheless, spatial imagination is not limited to a mere description of built spaces; instead, it reflects cultural values which affect the perception and understanding of material spaces and what happens within them.

For example, Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidoff have emphasized the way that 'home' could be 'as much a social construct and state of mind as a reality of bricks and mortar'.<sup>37</sup> As has been pointed out, 'the home has both physical and social "dimensions"':

The home, in short, is a 'locale' where the physical form of the dwelling, its external and internal design and contents both reflect social interactions and social forces and also condition and compose them, blending the 'spatial' and the 'social' into an indivisible whole.<sup>38</sup>

However, while the 'spatial' and the 'social' may in many cases form an 'indivisible whole', there are cases in which the tensions between them result in a more complex relationship. For instance, the material realities of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century working-class housing undermined sharp distinctions between public and private space, which were crucial to dominant definitions of respectable domesticity. Many people were crowded into overfilled buildings and rooms which were often separated by flimsy partitions, and they were dependent upon shared spaces; thus, working-class privacy would appear to have been merely illusory. However, material limitations notwithstanding, there was a vitally important and carefully defined cultural concept of privacy. Partly as a result of material limitations, this was a complex notion which even distinguished between 'closed' and 'open' domestic spaces, differentiating those areas which were most private from those which were 'much more accessible to informal access by neighbours, visitors and acquaintances'.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, many 'domestic' conflicts, whether inadvertently or deliberately, had an audience, placing them within the public realm. The *East Kent Times* complained that 'the lower classes take their domestic squabbles out in the street. A loose-tongued virago and her sable husband quarrel and the whole city is thrown into a state of excitement'.<sup>40</sup> The public nature of so much of working-class violence was an important element in shaping 'civilized' notions of lower-class 'savagery'. Making violence public, however, may have been part of a venerable tradition. Margaret Hunt has examined domestic violence in the eighteenth century, concluding that 'violence in the early modern period was a dramatic spectacle, played out in the presence of everyone in the immediate vicinity':

One often gets the sense, reading these cases, of acts designed specifically for an audience. Men persistently abused their wives in front of relatives ... Others attacked their wives with knives in front of people who they knew would intervene.<sup>41</sup>

Nonetheless, with regard to violence, the imagined space of the home was often more durable than its material counterpart. People typically respected the 'privacy' of domestic spaces which were, in a real sense, not private. For instance, they refrained from intervening in domestic fights as long as any force used did not exceed acceptable levels. Despite the relatively public nature of working-class private spaces, domestic violence was often seen as justified insofar as it was motivated by perceived disruptions of an idealised home life. Thus, an imagined private sphere helped to construct the legitimacy of violence, as physical force used to maintain the 'home' or to respond to violations of proper household order was—to varying extents—acceptable. Much of the

resulting violence was (in a material sense) public; nonetheless, it was treated largely as a private matter.

The significance of imagined geographies can also be seen in the ways that notions of space could help construct the perception of danger. Despite being often undermined by material reality, the 'private' sphere of the home was increasingly defined as a woman's 'place', both spatially and culturally. This not only had consequences for views of 'the home' but also of views of 'the street'. The 'rape myth' described by Anna Clark located violent threats to women in the public sphere and suggested that women faced the greatest danger of violence from strangers. As Clark discusses, women were actually more likely to be attacked by men they knew within the bounds of the 'home', which was perceived as a protected location.<sup>42</sup> This background attitude was, then, particularly important in times of crisis, such as when the 'Jack the Ripper' murders in the late 1880s heightened women's fears of being on the streets at night. This was not least because some men used the crisis to their own advantage, threatening women in the streets or harassing prostitutes.<sup>43</sup> Such myths have proven to be durable, and cultural notions of danger to women—whether feminist or paternalist—have remained in many ways firmly fixed on the street. This is so even though it is men who are far more likely to be violently assaulted in public spaces while women remain most vulnerable in the home.<sup>44</sup> Definitions of 'public' and 'private' are historically variable and should, in any case, be seen less as a dichotomy and more as a spectrum. Nonetheless, such distinctions have in many ways been a decisive element in constructing attitudes toward violence, even if spatial reality has contradicted spatial imaginations.

The distinctions between public and private are especially relevant to those sorts of violence which are deliberately public, which are typically male and ritualized. The legitimacy of some kinds of violence is dependent upon public performance. Such violence seeks to actively make use of spaces, making its relationship to space different from other violence which is inadvertently public. The power relationships between the participants in violence as well as their goals in using physical force dictate the adoption of particular spatial strategies. For instance, sport fighting and other kinds of physically aggressive entertainment require, by definition, the use of public spaces. However, it seems that altercations among those of relatively equal social rank also tend toward ritualization, and rituals are most often dependent upon the manipulation of space and performance before an audience. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England, public fighting among men was ritualized on the basis of the sport of prizefighting.<sup>45</sup> In prizefighting, rings were formed with stakes and ropes, and fighting handbooks gave precise instructions on how they were to be formed. Although far less formal, street fights also took place within 'rings'

formed by the circle of observers who gathered around to watch them; if far more transient, they were no less important. Even the spaces within rings were clearly demarcated and organized, with the fighters' 'corners' and the 'scratch' line at the centre playing important roles. A legitimate strategy of violence in such circumstances included respecting the requirements of public fighting, observing the rules of spatial demarcation and employing only accepted uses of the fighting space. The public nature of ritualized fighting subjected it to community judgement and helped to ensure adherence to legitimate rules, giving public fighting a different meaning and social role than private violence. This is reminiscent of the distinction identified by Thomas Gallant between the duel and the vendetta in nineteenth-century Greek culture. The physical force employed in duels was public, rule-bound and aimed to prove manhood; that of vendettas could be private, was not restricted by rules of fairness and aimed to kill.<sup>46</sup> The construction of violence is at its most visible in public fighting, as spectators are able to evaluate and comment on what they witness. Here, too, we see the difficulty of separating the production and construction of violence. People often engage in violence in certain ways and in certain spaces so that it is perceived according to particular strategic expectations.

Such close interconnections with regard to the production and construction of physical force are also apparent in the relationship between the perpetration of violence and the extent to which knowledge about it is gained. In many cultures, the spatial contexts of violence have ensured, whether deliberately or inadvertently, that people knew about it through direct experience. Thus, the conditions of violence's production help to define the framework within which it is constructed. The nineteenth century, in which much working-class violence occurred in public spaces, provides an example. This was, furthermore, a world in which 'even the most "domestic" of incidents takes place within the context of other tensions and allegiances'.<sup>47</sup> In this regard, there was a curious parallel between rural and urban life: in different ways, both environments ensured that social interactions within the 'grid of neighbourhood space' were frequently observed.<sup>48</sup> The openness of such violence, its location within a particular kind of dense, public and shared spatial context, had consequences for the working-class culture of violence. The intimate network of relationships within which personal life was played out meant that the observers of violent acts often had detailed knowledge about the causes and background to violence. Specifically what impact this had on individual perspectives depended upon the observer's relationship to the participants in violence and other social and personal factors. One can say, however, that, overall, working-class understandings of violence were formed in relation to a particularly close-hand experience with incidents of physical aggression.

The civilizing process which, by pacifying public space, reshaped the contexts within which violence was produced, also shifted the patterns through which it was constructed. The 'joy in killing and destruction' which was earlier given freer reign came to be more 'repressed from everyday civilized life' and banished from an increasingly pacific public existence.<sup>49</sup> The reformation and pacification of space were among many priorities in nineteenth-century state and charitable efforts. Slowly, the declining importance of street culture and the reform of housing meant more privacy. While this process should be understood not as a shift from absolutely open to strictly closed spatial contexts, increasing portions of everyday life—including for segments of the lower classes—became more private between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. Public spaces were more intensely patrolled by the state and reshaped by the transformations in social life associated with industrialisation, urbanisation and increasing mobility. As with everyday life, so with everyday violence, which was, alternatively, pushed to the margins of public life or concealed behind the increasingly substantial boundary of the private sphere.

As violence was detached from the daily experiences of larger numbers of people, attitudes toward it became more dependent upon media depictions. Initially, this process involved the growth of newspapers, many of which relied on violent crime to increase their readership. Subsequently, of course, the development of a popular culture based on radio, film and television also assisted in shaping attitudes toward violence. In essence, those attitudes were increasingly de-spatialised, coming less to depend on personal experiences of violence within one's local environment and more on news about and fictional depictions of violent acts. Violence was pushed to the social margins (both culturally and spatially), and there was a shift in the way that knowledge about it was formed. The frequency of being a spectator of violence in the public spaces of everyday life (whether in watching a fight, attending a public whipping or execution, witnessing a public 'domestic' row, or participating in sports involving open cruelty to people or animals) declined as a result of civilizing pressures. Spectacles of real violence were increasingly forbidden, as it became a commonplace among social reformers that public violence brutalised its observers.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, Elias notes, cruelty and violence 'do have, in a "refined", rationalized form, their legitimate and exactly defined place in the everyday life of civilized society'.<sup>51</sup> Civilizing narratives which condemned the infliction of pain and encouraged a 'spectatorial sympathy' with those who suffered pain may have proliferated; however, many of these effusions of civilized sensibility relied themselves upon increasingly lurid depictions of violent suffering.<sup>52</sup> Everyday life is pacified, but

for what is lacking in everyday life a substitute is created in dreams, in books and pictures. So, on their way to becoming courtiers, the nobility read novels of chivalry; the bourgeois contemplate violence and erotic passion in films.<sup>53</sup>

The increasing importance of indirect forms of knowledge about violence highlights the development of civilizing discourses which promoted new attitudes toward cruelty and pain. It also emphasises the extent to which 'cultural' change is driven by alterations in social and material conditions. The pacification of everyday life, particularly that taking place in the public sphere, had a deep impact on the culture, social role and psychological meaning of violence.

### Conclusion

I have sought to present a variety of ways in which attention to spatial issues can be a valuable addition to the historical analysis of violence. Certain spaces affect those social interactions which—especially if they involve the allocation of scarce resources or the display of particular kinds of social status—have tended to generate conflicts. Additionally, some violence has always been connected to territorial imperatives involving the definition and defence of space as well as the elaboration of notions of belonging and exclusion. New forms of social interaction and state policing, and their confrontations with traditional community order and criminality, developed spatially. Certain spaces have been associated with certain kinds of violence (and vice versa), some kinds of violence were legitimated through particular spatial motivations or uses of space and knowledge of violence was connected to the spaces within which it occurred. These trends continue, as contemporary imaginations of violence are linked to particular spaces and, in return, views of certain kinds of spaces—especially urban spaces—are closely connected to violence.

Changes in violence and attitudes toward it have not only been related to shifts in sensibility or abhorrence of physical force. Instead, they have been connected to developments in material spaces as well as to changes in imaginations of space. Growing state power was focused on the pacification of public spaces; this emphasis on the public, on 'the street', has in some ways remained, and it has been critiqued as a form of 'criminological myopia' which has denied attention to private violence among non-strangers.<sup>54</sup> A great deal of differentiation is needed in reconstructing the effect of the process of civilization on culture and behaviour, as civilizing processes 'may re deploy, sanitize and camouflage disciplinary and other violence without necessarily diminishing it'.<sup>55</sup> This is true beyond the context of state punishment: as more and more aspects of life have retreated into the private sphere, violence has become more elusive.

Space has long been important to the organisation of violence's place in everyday life, and even if precisely measuring quantitative variation in physical aggression has proven difficult, it is clear that many of its cultural assumptions and spatial environments have changed. Many forms of violence have declined over the last few centuries; however, they have not done so equally in all places. Social resources such as wealth, housing, public infrastructure and employment are unequally distributed, and the police powers of the state are not deployed in all areas to the same extent. Thus, not everyone is subject to the same civilizing pressures, nor do they receive the same state protection. As a result, many people, such as those who need to negotiate the dangers of 'the streets', are aware of the connections between space and violence. From a historical perspective, such attention is well deserved.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 117.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> T. Beames, *The Rookeries of London: Past, Present, and Prospective* (London: Thomas Bosworth, 1850), p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> J. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); J.C. Wood, 'A Useful Savagery: The Invention of Violence in Nineteenth-Century England', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 9 (2004), 22-42.

<sup>6</sup> E.A. Johnson and E.H. Monkkonen (eds), *The Civilization of Crime: Violent Crime in Town and Country since the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> N. Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* [1939], rev. ed., trans. E. Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1994), p. 450.

<sup>8</sup> E. Ross, 'Survival Networks: Women's Neighbourhood Sharing in London before World War One', *History Workshop Journal*, 15 (1983), 4-27, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> M.J. Daunton, 'Public Space and Private Space: The Victorian City and the Working-Class Household', in D. Fraser and A. Sutcliffe (eds), *The Pursuit of Urban History* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), pp. 212-33, on p. 222.

<sup>10</sup> C. Booth (ed.), *Life and Labour of the People of London* (London, 1902), 1<sup>st</sup> ser., vol. 3, p. 38.

<sup>11</sup> D. Woods, 'Community Violence', in J. Benson (ed.), *The Working Class in England, 1875-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 165-205, on p. 176.

<sup>12</sup> J. Archer (ed.), *Male Violence* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 126.

<sup>13</sup> Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), *Taking Stock: What Do We Know About Violence?* (Uxbridge: The ESRC Violence Research Programme, 1998), p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> S. Karstedt, 'Strangers, Mobilisation and the Production of Weak Ties: Railway Traffic and Violence in Nineteenth-Century South-West Germany', in B. Godfrey, C.

Emsley and G. Dunstall (eds), *Comparative Histories of Crime* (Cullompton: Willan Publishing, 2003), pp. 89-109, on pp. 95-96.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>16</sup> S. Pile and M. Keith (eds), *Geographies of Resistance* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> P. Spierenburg, 'Punishment, Power, and History: Foucault and Elias', *Social Science History*, 28 (2004), 602-36, p. 627.

<sup>18</sup> Archer, *Male Violence*, p. 126.

<sup>19</sup> E. Anderson, *The Code of the Street* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), pp. 77-78.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>21</sup> M. Daly and M. Wilson, *Homicide* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1988), pp. 127-29.

<sup>22</sup> J. Diamond, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee* (London: Vintage, 1991), pp. 267-68; P. Singer, *The Expanding Circle: Ethics and Sociobiology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 20-21.

<sup>23</sup> J. Carter Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth-Century England: The Shadow of Our Refinement* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 130-31.

<sup>24</sup> E.C. Schneider, *Vampires, Dragons and Egyptian Kings: Youth Gangs in Postwar New York* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 78-79.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>27</sup> A. Gestrich, *Traditionelle Jugendkultur und Industrialisierung: Sozialgeschichte der Jugend in einer ländlichen Arbeitergemeinde Württembergs, 1800-1920* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106-11.

<sup>29</sup> For further discussion of cultures of violence, see J.C. Wood, 'Conceptualizing Cultures of Violence and Cultural Change', in S.M. Carroll (ed.), *Cultures of Violence: Interpersonal Violence in Historical Context* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2007).

<sup>30</sup> R. Shoemaker, 'Male Honour and the Decline of Public Violence in Eighteenth-Century London', *Social History*, 26 (2001), 190-208.

<sup>31</sup> Elias, *Civilizing Process*, p. 164.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 446.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 447.

<sup>34</sup> D. Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 76.

<sup>35</sup> L.W. Sherman, P.R. Gartin, and M.E. Buegers, 'Hot Spots of Predatory Crime: Routine Activities and the Criminology of Place', *Criminology*, 27 (1989), 27-57.

<sup>36</sup> D. Weisburd, S. Bushway, C. Lum and S. Yang, 'Trajectories of Crime at Places: A Longitudinal Study of Street Segments in the City of Seattle', *Criminology*, 42 (2004), 283-322.

<sup>37</sup> L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 358.

<sup>38</sup> P. Williams, 'Constituting Class and Gender', in N. Thrift and P. Williams (eds), *Class and Space: The Making of Urban Society* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1987), p. 155.

- <sup>39</sup> S. D'Cruze, *Crimes of Outrage: Sex, Violence and Victorian Working Women* (London: UCL Press, 1998), p. 32.
- <sup>40</sup> C. Conley, *The Unwritten Law: Criminal Justice in Victorian Kent* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 75.
- <sup>41</sup> M. Hunt, 'Wife Beating, Domesticity and Women's Independence in Eighteenth-Century London', *Gender and History*, 4 (1992), 10-33, p. 23.
- <sup>42</sup> A. Clark, *Women's Silence, Men's Violence: Sexual Assault in England, 1770-1845* (London: Pandora, 1987).
- <sup>43</sup> J. Walkowitz, 'Jack the Ripper and the Myth of Male Violence', *Feminist Studies*, 8 (1982), 542-74.
- <sup>44</sup> ESRC, 'Taking Stock', p. 25.
- <sup>45</sup> Wood, *Violence and Crime*, pp. 70-94.
- <sup>46</sup> T. Gallant, *Experiencing Dominion: Culture, Identity, and Power in the British Mediterranean* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), pp. 121-34.
- <sup>47</sup> E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (New York: The New Press, 1991), p. 508.
- <sup>48</sup> D'Cruze, *Crimes of Outrage*, p. 50.
- <sup>49</sup> Elias, *Civilizing Process*, p. 166.
- <sup>50</sup> J.S. Cockburn, 'Punishment and Brutalization in the English Enlightenment', *Law and History Review*, 12 (1994), 155-79.
- <sup>51</sup> Elias, *Civilizing Process*, p. 166.
- <sup>52</sup> K. Halttunen, 'Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture', *American Historical Review*, 100 (1995), 303-34.
- <sup>53</sup> Elias, *Civilizing Process*, p. 453.
- <sup>54</sup> E. Stanko, 'Challenging the Problem of Men's Individual Violence', in T. Newburn and E.A. Stanko (eds), *Just Boys Doing Business? Men, Masculinities and Crime* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 32-45; p. 34.
- <sup>55</sup> V.A.C. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People, 1770-1868* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 590.