

Football Hooliganism and the Practical Paradigm

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There has been a convergence in the study of football hooliganism in the 1990s between the approaches of Clifford Stott and Steve Reicher, and Anthony King, whose work emphasizes the interactional rather than predispositional element to football violence. Instead of looking only to the dispositional factors within the members of the crowd, which past research has emphasized, both Stott and Reicher and King highlight the way in which violent outcomes are the results of mutual interactions between the crowd and other agencies, such as police. Consequently, crowd violence cannot be read off as the automatic result of premeditated intention but should be seen as a complex and potentially contingent occurrence, where prior dispositions inform interactions but do not determine them.

Il y a eu une convergence des recherches faites pendant les années 1990 sur la violence et le vandalisme des spectateurs au soccer. Les approches utilisées par Clifford Stott et Steve Reicher se sont rapprochées de celles d'Anthony King, qui mettent l'accent sur l'élément interactionnel plutôt que sur la supposée prédisposition qui expliquerait la violence au soccer. Au lieu de considérer les facteurs de prédisposition présents dans les foules, Stott et Reicher aussi bien que King ont souligné la façon dont les événements violents sont issus des interactions entre la foule et d'autres groupes tels que le corps policier. En conséquence, la violence des spectateurs ne peut être considérée comme le résultat automatique d'intentions préméditées; elle doit plutôt être vue en tant qu'évènement complexe et potentiellement contingent. En ce qui a trait aux prédispositions, elles sont utiles pour bien comprendre les interactions mais elles ne les déterminent pas.

There has been a convergence in the study of football hooliganism in the 1990s. In an article published recently in *Sociology*, Clifford Stott and Steve Reicher introduced a social psychological perspective to the study of hooliganism, which emphasized not the prior dispositions of the social actors but rather the dynamics of specific interactions that led to violence (Stott & Reicher, 1998). Although they do not discuss any connection with my research on hooliganism beyond a single, brief citation, their position is more or less identical to the argument I laid out in an article in *Sociology* a few years ago (King, 1995), derived from Waddington's flashpoints model (Waddington, 1990; Waddington, Jones, & Critcher, 1989) and Bourdieu's practical theory (Bourdieu, 1977). Although we cannot assume, as Parsons famously does in his voluntaristic theory of action (1966), that simply because various theorists independently converge upon the same position, that position is correct—presumably various eminent medieval theologians converged on the view that the earth was certainly flat—the fact that both Stott and Reicher's account of hooliganism and my own are similar suggests that this shared practical paradigm

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may be a useful theoretical framework for the contemporary study of football hooliganism.

Stott and Reicher claim that the incidence of crowd violence cannot be explained purely in terms of the crowd itself, in terms of models that posit the existence of determined and premeditated individuals who plan and initiate all subsequent violence or in terms of “groups norms” from which violence inevitably ensues (1998, p. 357). When models such as these are posited, “it is difficult to differentiate between events and explain why violence occurs in some cases and not in others” (1998, p. 357). Against deterministic models, Stott and Reicher argue for a dynamic model that emphasizes mutual interaction between parties. Violence is not inevitable given certain predispositions in the crowd, but the negotiated process that eventually leads to putatively obvious and inevitable violence has to be highlighted and analyzed in detail.

For Stott and Reicher, the starting point of this mutual process of interaction, which often accidentally leads to violent confrontation, is the creation of preconceptions in the minds of the individuals who will become members of the parties involved in the subsequent disturbance. Thus, in Cagliari on June 16, 1990, during the Italia 90 World Cup (Stott & Reicher, 1998, p. 366), the day of the incident that Stott and Reicher employ as a case-study, the England fans typically boisterous activities—their singing and drinking—was interpreted as particularly dangerous by the police who already thought of these fans as “hooligans” (1998, p. 365-366). This led to over-aggressive interventions on the part of the police, which were increasingly seen as “unwarranted, illegitimate and indiscriminate” by English fans (1998, p. 367-368).

It was at this moment that the interactions between the police and the English fans reached a new level and a self-perpetuating escalation of violent confrontation occurred. English fans increasingly saw their resort to violence as legitimate since the police had provoked them, but more importantly, the fans saw it as necessary. It was only by violently confronting the police *en masse* that the fans could protect themselves from the random and indiscriminate assaults from the police. In response to police harassment, the fans initiated violence in order to preempt and, therefore, lessen the impact of the police’s violence on them; participants construed “their own aggressive actions as an attempt to stop aggression” (1998, p. 370). The result was quite the opposite, for the police, already primed with ideas of the violent disposition of English fans, responded in kind and escalated the violence. The violent outcome was the result of a complex process of interaction, informed by cultural understandings between the Italian police and the English fans. Thus, according to Stott and Reicher, an adequate theory of football violence requires the examination of “the unfolding process by which the understanding of each side translate into actions which impact upon the understandings and actions of the other and thereby back on themselves” (1998, p. 373-374).

Although Stott and Reicher emphasize the dynamic and interactive process that leads to fighting and conclude that sociologists must always examine both groups’ contribution to the process that leads to violence, in fact, they fall slightly short of their own standards. Throughout their analysis, Stott and Reichers under-emphasize the nationalist and masculinist culture of many English football fans, which is a crucial factor in violence as many other writers such as Williams and colleagues (1990) have demonstrated. For instance, Stott and Reicher condone as innocent the England fans’ intentions to “march” to the ground without noticing

the obviously militaristic and imperialistic implications of this act—an act likely to worry, offend, and potentially intimidate locals. It is significant that fans describe themselves as marching to the ground rather than merely walking to it (Stott & Reicher, 1998, p. 369). Stott and Reicher consistently play down the English fans' role in the disturbance (e.g., Stott & Reicher, 1998, p. 358), and throughout the article, there is more than a suggestion that the Italian police were to blame for this incident. Clearly, the police's handling of crowds is often an important factor in subsequent violence, as it has been in many incidents involving English fans in Europe in the 1990s. However, it is against the very dynamic model for which Stott and Reicher argue to suggest that the English male football fans were somehow only the innocent victims of police harassment. Police harassment could not cause violence independently and without the active involvement of the crowd.

Despite the very different theoretical sources that inspire Stott and Reicher (and although, in the end, they do not quite live up to the standards they propose with their dynamic model), their article is very close to the analysis I made of a violent clash between Manchester United fans and local Turks, which occurred when Manchester United played Galatasaray in November 1993. Like Stott and Reicher, I insisted that violence cannot be read off as the deliberate outcome of intention or social rules; rather, there was a complex process of interaction between subsequently warring parties, neither of which necessarily set out with the intention of fighting. I employed a reworked version of Waddington's flashpoint model for the specifics of my account and, in fact, would disagree with Stott and Reicher's claim that Waddington's model is too general and context insensitive (Stott & Reicher, 1998, p. 357) because it operates only with a notion of a group norm. The kind of inevitabilist, dispositional model that Stott and Reicher impute to Waddington is exactly the one that the latter was primarily concerned to reject in his work.

However, although Waddington was very useful in creating a three-stage model of violence, the original inspiration for my analysis of this violence was Bourdieu's celebrated practical theory. That theory is laid out most brilliantly in the first 15 pages of *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) and is encapsulated in one of the many memorable phrases that appear in that first, seminal chapter. Talking of gift exchange, Bourdieu writes that "cycles of reciprocity are not the irresistible gearing of obligatory practices found only in ancient tragedy. A gift may remain unrequited, if it meets with ingratitude; it may be spurned as an insult" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 9). Gift exchange does not have the formulaic structure that Levi-Strauss paradigmatically gives it. Gift exchanges are not the inevitable, systemic outcomes of rules but rather are the uncertain result of individual negotiation and manipulation, where social agents know the practices of their society so well that they do not abide by strict rules. Like virtuosos, they can improvise upon and even subvert rules for their own ends in their relations with others.

For Bourdieu, it is only the visiting anthropologist who is unfamiliar in this social setting, who needs to understand social life as the objective and automatic outcome of rules. For the outsider, these rules and the system that flows from them are a map, which is unnecessary for the natives whose lives are not the fulfillment of systemic needs but rather the negotiated manipulation of relations with other individuals. For Bourdieu, by transforming social life into a system that is the inevitable outcome of objective rules, sociology misrepresents social interaction, imposing its own peculiar, external and intellectualist position (with its predilection

for formal rules and systems) onto the virtuosic and knowledgeable practices of social life, taking uncertain, mediated outcomes for necessity.

Following Bourdieu, my article, like Stott and Reicher's, was primarily intended to highlight this practical aspect of football violence. Although many of the now canonical analyses of hooliganism (Dunning, Murphy, & Williams, 1988; Marsh, Rosser, & Harré, 1977; Taylor, 1971) are important, these accounts tended to overemphasize the rules and dispositions that caused and structured violence. As I noted in my article, it is not true that these earlier studies never noted the importance of specific practices and interactions but only that consideration of actual practice was subordinated to discussions of norms, dispositions, and rules (King, 1995, p. 637).

In order to develop the work of these writers, therefore, I reworked Waddington's flashpoints model from a six-level into a three-level model, which included the "historical background," the "level of actualisation," and finally the "interactional level." Although Stott and Reicher do not talk specifically in terms of levels, their own account can be straightforwardly differentiated on the lines of my model. Thus, on my account, the historical background included the nationalist and masculinist dispositions of the Manchester United fans and the political crisis of the Turkish state, which had been partly responsible for engendering an extreme anti-Western reaction in Istanbul (King, 1995, p. 643-644). In Stott and Reicher's work, this "historical background" would include the Italian police's prejudices against the English fans and, although they barely mention it except in a more general discussion at the beginning of the paper (Stott & Reicher, 1998, p. 358-359), the masculinity and nationalism of the English fans.

Although Stott and Reicher might underplay the fans' prior consciousness, their discussion of the "boisterousness" of the English fans closely echoes the same practices of the United fans in Turkey, where their more or less innocent singing of songs and drinking was similarly interpreted by locals as aggressive and intimidating. Adapting Waddington, I called this moment the "level of actualisation," when the two groups come into contact with each other and when a spiraling relation of intimidating interaction is initiated (in line with the understandings of both parties derived from their historical backgrounds) (King, 1995, p. 645-646). In the Turkish case, the masculinity and nationalism of the United fans meant that they drew themselves into an aggressive relationship with local Turks, who were inspired by similar nationalist ideas, from which neither could retreat without loss of nationalist and masculine pride. In Stott and Reicher's case, the nationalist and masculinist understandings of the English fans and the Italian police's belief that the English fans were hooligans constituted this level of actualization.

Finally, I discussed the actual occurrence of violence, which I termed the *interactional level* (King, 1995, p. 647-649), when groups interacted with each other directly and physically, and when a self-escalating logic of violence is enacted in the manner that Stott and Reicher noted. Like the England fans on whom Stott and Reicher's research was based, the United fans also explicitly argued that they had to escalate violence in order to ensure that they preserved themselves by winning the fight. Thus, although Stott and Reicher do not formally divide their study into the three levels I employed, those levels are implicit and highlighted in what they write, even though they are never named. Like my own article, Stott and

Reicher emphasize the need to recognize the practical negotiation between groups that lead to outcomes neither party necessarily planned, expected, or wanted.

There is, therefore, a striking convergence between my own work and that of Stott and Reicher's, especially given the differing theoretical backgrounds that inspired it. This convergence involves a similar approach to the problem of football hooliganism, an approach that is theoretically aware but empirically oriented. Above all, this convergence involves the insistence that if we are to study crowd violence, we cannot merely assume a particular outcome, given a set of rules or dispositions. Social practice is the complex and historically located outcome of negotiated interaction between individuals and groups. To assume the form that practice will take from the outset and to ignore the process that leads to it is to adopt the false intellectualizing and externalist perspective that Bourdieu rejected. Although it would be wrong to demand that everyone submit themselves to a single system of thought, this convergence in the study of football crowds may be of use to other sociologists or social psychologists in their future work on football hooliganism or, more widely, on crowd violence. However, whatever particular approaches sociologists find useful in the analysis of sport, it is only through the creation of theoretically informed but ethnographically detailed models that the sociology of sport will attain its proper place as a major and respectable empirical field in sociology.

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