



Thomas Tiller

I, We, and the Transformation of Fields

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Sharing an experience, using an example that concerns all of us.

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In my world I constantly experience a very real distinction. It is the distinction between me as an individual and all the fields that I am not only part of, but which I am a representative of.

Here is one example to make clear what I am talking about: the global field of men. My point is not to say, all male individuals are the same. And certainly not to sort all human beings into two categories. I know the world is not binary. My point is about fields. And this is precisely where I repeatedly fail to convey my experience – in personal conversations just as much as in my work as a facilitator, process guide and consultant. And even more so in contact with others who are, at that very moment, acting as representatives of a field and who not only fail to notice it, but experience themselves as an autonomous individual speaking only for themselves.

Does all of this sound very abstract? Well, in my world it is painfully concrete.

An example. A classic situation I often find myself in is talking with people of different genders (and it makes no difference whether binary or non-binary, whether biological, social or individually experienced) about the topic of feminism and equality. Always an emotional subject. Of course.

Now, I am a classic, white cis man, so not only do I have a visibly male body, but I also identify both with the binary male gender and experience myself as a representative of this “type.” Moreover, I have no inner resistance whatsoever when others “use” me in precisely this “capacity” as a counterpart, in order to grapple with the subject of feminism, masculinity/femininity/non-binarity and the inequality of power and of rights depending on gender; when, for example – as it happens to me quite often – I am confronted because “we men” still rest on our privileges, because violence against women and above all femicides are not decreasing, because the hetero-normative roles are carried on almost unchanged as they have been for centuries, and because otherwise, practically nothing changes in the unequal distribution of rights and power between men and women, even though people (above all: women) have been fighting very actively for this for over a century. It becomes even more complex when I, as a representative of the classic cis man, am confronted by people who do not



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assign themselves to a binary gender and its corresponding social understanding, but experience themselves differently and want to live that without restrictions too – which I can not only completely acknowledge as an absolute and non-negotiable basic right of every human being, but I see, and honour, the fight and the struggle that all the people who are active in this cause carry out on behalf of us all. I really want to say all of this in advance, because the point I am concerned with usually immediately leads to a debate about content, even though in this text that is precisely not what I am concerned with. Here the topic, or the field, serves merely as an example that quite simply concerns every human being. And only with an example that concerns everyone do I believe to have a chance to convey the topic at hand.

My experience is this: whenever I find myself in a situation that is about feminism, gender diversity and the fact that classic cis men are the ones responsible for all the gender-specific violence and injustice, or at least do nothing to move things toward genuine equality, it becomes emotional. On all “sides.” Very different and mutually contradictory positions and feelings then surface in me, which I can barely “hold” all at once. And the statements and reactions of everyone else involved show me that things seem to be no different for them. Incidentally, this also holds true in the situation where only cis men are engaging with the relevant topics.

Here is my – above all inner – experience, which makes such situations so uncomfortably “unsolvable” which very often leads to a hardening of the polarities rather than to a dialogue that might move everyone involved a step further: I am present as two people. One is Thomas, the individual, with my history, my most intimate realities, wounds, pains and character traits, which – as with every human being – are completely unique. As this individual, I haven’t – ever since I consider myself present as an adult and grown-up part of society – done violence to anyone on account of his or her gender, oppressed no one, nor brought any other injustice into life. As an individual, I am in relationship with other people, and this relationship – human to human, individual to individual – is just as unique as the two people who share it.

Now I am – and I am still with the example of gender justice – always also present as a second one: as a representative of a field. In this case, of the archaic male field that has existed for centuries. For me that means that, as a carrier and representative of this field – provided I accept the corresponding “representation” or carriership – I experience, “know” and share responsibility for everything that representatives of this field, have ever done, felt, thought ... – and are still doing in the name of this field.

I personally experience this “carriership” very consciously. That was always so (and, as with everything concerning me, I can trace it back to my not so happy childhood, but that’s not the point here). The fact that I made relationship and



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communication my profession and that for half of my life (so far) I have always put myself in situations in which I worked with people on precisely these two levels – I and We, individual and collective, representative of a field and field – might have also contributed to my sensorium on the I/We level becoming ever more sensitive.

One way or another, I am writing this in the hope that a sharing of the distinction between the things I experience inwardly, and the sharing of my continual practice of this distinction, might perhaps inspire someone to try out and test this distinction and to see what kind of change it might bring. It is the distinction between I and We in the very concrete, inner experience of this distinction.

Put very briefly, and using the example of gender-related equality and me as a representative of the classic male field, this means: as a representative of the male field, I cannot not acknowledge the violence that representatives of this field – that is, men – have brought into this world. I cannot not acknowledge what violence – from atmospheric through systemic to very concrete physical violence and oppression – “we” have inflicted on the representatives of the female field and of all other gender-specific fields. Even while writing these lines, I cannot do otherwise than to give room to the tears of shame and of being shaken by the sheer incomprehensibility of all the violence inflicted. I weep. But who weeps? I as an individual experience the shame, the incomprehensibility, the remorse. Very real. Even though I, as Thomas, have not “done” any of this in my life. But “we” have done it. If one representative has done it – whether consciously or unconsciously – the field has done it. And I am representing the field, if I want or not. And precisely in this lies my personal and perhaps also most difficult practice. Not only to be aware that we (that is, the male field through all its representatives) have done all of this, but to acknowledge it, to accept it, and inwardly to take full responsibility for all of it. Put differently: in that moment to be one hundred percent the representative of the field and thus “the field itself.” To fully accept the pain, the shame, the grief, the violence inflicted, the suffering we have caused – quite simply everything – to experience it, and to live through it. To bow inwardly and not to avoid it. In my world, the transformation of everything that has ever happened to more than one person is only possible if individuals place themselves in the service of the field in whose name things happened, and “live through” what must be lived through, so that reconciliation, healing, connection and honest contact can happen.

It is – at least this is how I am in the world – a decision. A decision to place oneself as an individual in the service of a cause, so that transformation can happen. A field has no way to feel remorse. Only people do. And a field can only live through pain, anger, hatred, remorse, joy and all the other processes necessary for a genuine transformation if people do it who place themselves in the service of this field.



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Now I very often ask myself why I put myself through this, and why, among other things, I have made precisely this my profession and the content of my life: to support and accompany others in placing themselves in the service of fields, in order to enable the transformation or healing of a field. My only answer is: I have no choice. This is how I am in the world. I did not choose to have the ability to distinguish inwardly which experience is truly my individual one and which, through the carriership of a field, is the inner experience of the according field. I did not choose to have been born and raised as a heterosexual cis man in Germany and thus to always be a carrier of precisely this field – whether I want to or not. I did not choose to always experience the interactions of others as these two or more different, simultaneous interactions: that of the individuals and that of the fields these people are representing or carrying. But at some point, I decided to acknowledge that this is what life has given me, and not to dodge it.

Now, there are difficulties that arise in me and in the outside world when I take on the practice or task of always experiencing myself, in every moment and with every action I take, both as an individual and as a carrier of the fields present at that moment, while making a distinction as to what the source of my inner experience is in each case – I as a unique individual, or a field, or “We,” that I am currently representing. Amongst others, these difficulties are:

I as an individual want to be seen and liked. So, I and my ego (for lack of a better word) certainly do not want to be present as the carrier and representative of an unpopular “perpetrator field” and, on top of that, to take full responsibility for everything this field and its representatives have ever done.¹

What I as an individual want least of all is to be made responsible for things, that I haven’t done. Of pure self-preservation resistance against that will grow in me immediately. But I, as a representative of a field – in this case the male field – cannot do otherwise than to say yes to descriptions of violence that we (that is, all previous representatives of this field) have brought into the world, and not to deny them or pretend they haven’t happened. Perhaps this is the most difficult part of the practice, because – not to betray me as an individual – I would have to keep saying, “I did not do this, but as a representative of the field I take responsibility for what we have done.” Except: this sentence alone carries the danger of a hardening of the positions involved, because my counterpart will not feel fully heard. To be fully heard means to be listened to and received

¹ Except when, in rare occasion, it is about the “positive” things that we – or better, “this We” – have brought into the world. But even a weighing of the positive against the negative is a way of “avoiding”: of avoiding placing myself one hundred percent in the service of the field. Instead, I am taking the third person perspective on what the Field has done good to the world. Being in the third-person perspective, not living through things in the first-person perspective, talking about a field instead of talking “from it” or “letting it talk through me” means having given up the role as representative of the field and distancing myself from it.



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unconditionally in what one shares. Even the qualifier “I did not do this ...” introduces a condition that relativizes the feeling of “being fully heard and seen” – unless the one sharing has themselves completely and clearly grasped the distinction between I and We, is ready to place themselves one hundred percent in the service of their field currently at work and to live through everything without “taking it personally”; which I very rarely encounter. And I cannot hold “not having this ability” against anyone, because after years of the corresponding practice I regularly fail at it myself.

Another difficulty is a situation in a dialogue or a debate, where I suspect that another participant is currently living through emotions or inner experiences of the field he or she represents, yet is attacking me as an individual instead of as a representative of the “opposing field”, that I represent as a participant in the dialogue or debate. In that moment I cannot point this out to the person who might be doing it, as, when I name the assumption, I immediately place myself above him or her, because I take over the leadership of the process without any permission and thereby lay claim to a position of power without having a mandate for it.²

My only option in this case is to decide to place myself one hundred percent in the service of “my” field, even if I must bear being seen and “attacked” as an individual by the others. And that, without being able to name or make

² A brief note on the topic of “mandate as facilitator or process guide”: As soon as I have an assignment as a process facilitator or guide, I have the mandate to examine utterances as to their origin. That is, through questions that might enable an awareness of whether an utterance is an individual one or that of a field. But that only works if I completely remove myself in terms of content and in no way, consciously or unconsciously, place myself in the service of one of the “present” fields that are currently – through their representatives – in the act of “experiencing”. An extremely high demand, which many process guides, facilitators, and counselors are not aware of. But in that moment, I stand in the service of precisely one thing: the process itself. An inner resonance with one of the “present” fields is unavoidable and will always happen to me. But I can – at best – offer such information of the respective field that shows itself to me through resonance as a suggestion to the representatives. And even that only if I name it as such. And precisely in this lies the permanent practice in this role: learning to distinguish between my inner reactions as an individual, the impulses that the process makes available through me, and the information that surfaces, that comes from the fields present at the time and represented by individuals. All three kinds of information express themselves in me as experience, emotions, information and impulses. The practice and task consist in distinguishing them according to their origin: me as an individual, the process, or one of the present fields. In short: I do have the mandate for the power position of process guidance and leadership, but only with the open or unspoken agreement not to place myself in the service of one of the present fields, or even to take a “side.” And it becomes even more subtle: even the “school” I come from and whose stance I unspokenly adopt (for example the systemic or integral approach and all its assumptions) can become another field, present, in whose service I (unconsciously) place myself. Which in turn can lead to disturbances in the process, even if “only” because the individuals sense these unspoken assumptions and go into resistance against them as representatives of their respective fields.



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transparent this “mix-up.” I completely must say yes to the current situation and, in doing so, take responsibility for my own personal integrity.

Precisely in this lies a further practice. As it only works for me to face everything that we (that is all previous representatives of “my field” – in this case the male field) have ever done, if I am always aware that I am not meant personally – not I as a human being (who in his life may not have done any of these things and who may even have an opposite attitude to what the “We” stands for. As a representative, however, my individual actions are not of any concern while I am acting as a representative. And yet I can only be there as an honest (and therefore helpful) representative of the field, if I have a stable and healthy awareness of myself as an individual and if I am able to notice when I am – after all – acting as an individual. For if that happens – I am “fighting” as an individual, instead of acting as a representative for my field. And by doing that it becomes personal, and the exchange turns into a personal discussion of two individuals; which not only disrupts but usually even prevents a genuine dialogue between the fields, or between the “We”. The fields do continue to act “through” those involved, but the dialogue of the fields ends because the individuals have taken over. Which very often leads to a serious rift between individual people, instead of to an acknowledgement of the conflicts between fields. More injury and suffering on the personal level, instead of transformation and healing on the level of the fields, as, perhaps, originally intended

All the unpleasant feelings and states that are necessary for a “healing” on the We-level or field level can –in my world – only be experienced and lived through by individuals who have placed themselves (consciously or unconsciously) in the service of the respective field, or “We.” But if these feelings are perceived and located as “purely individual” and on the individual relationship level, this tends to lead to a deterioration of the situation and to speechlessness. For me, as the one who in such a situation takes responsibility for himself and, independently of the awareness of my counterpart, as the one who acts as a representative of a field in order to enable³ clarification, healing and, ideally, transformation, there is therefore a further practice: to recognize when I either fall into the trap of “individualizing” a collective topic, or when the situation becomes personally unbearable for me because I can no longer hold my personal integrity and it moves toward “self-betrayal”; that is, when I personally feel ashamed of, or apologize for, things I have not done as a human being. I must live through and mean this shame and apology one hundred percent, but it is not my personal guilt as the human being I am in this life.⁴

³ And only that: to enable; not to “make” or even “force” – but that is another topic and would only complicate further what I am trying to share here.

⁴ A brief short notice as an example of fields, namely “gender-specific fields”: One reason there are so many men who move through the world as a kind of “permanent apology” and in a permanent



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Why do I write and share all of this? Why do I believe that my experience and my way of being in the world could be of interest to anyone else? Well, first of all because – of course – I wish for a world in which transformation on the We-level is possible and happens; a world in which people can be present as human being and as individual, intact and with integrity and with dignity, while at the same time taking responsibility for what their field has done and is doing – for the injustice and violence that has happened and is happening in the name of that field, for inequality regarding rights or power, and for every other “wrong” action that has been taken in the name of that field.

In my world, the starting point for that is the conscious distinction of whether, in any given moment, I am present as an individual in a relationship with another individual human being, or as a representative and carrier of a field that needs clarification, healing and transformation – or as both. For me – as a human being just as much as in the role of facilitator and process guide – this is very often the key to enabling dialogue on the We-level, or field level, without the people who represent these fields in that moment having to betray themselves, or having to take sole responsibility for the individual integrity and inviolability of everyone involved in the respective clarification situation. As to take on both – that is, to represent a field without betraying oneself and at the same time to carry the responsibility of distinguishing the utterances of one's counterparts by field or individual and then reacting only on the field level – is a complete overload for most of us; and always carries the danger that everyone else who does not do this (whether because they cannot, or because they decide not to) can retreat to the place of distancing; that is, precisely not having to really grapple with themselves and with the topic of their “own” field. Because after all there is someone present who is personally “to blame” and admits it (individual level), so that no one else has to enter the uncomfortable inner “burden” that the field they are currently representing brings with it.

penitent's posture, and who count as “modern men” who have “finally understood” that as men they are automatically also perpetrators and “finally” place themselves in the service of women, is precisely that these men do not distinguish between “themselves as human being and individual,” as which they might per se and first of all have done nothing “wrong” – that is, they have the same right to be in this world with a healthy sense of self-worth as everyone else – and “themselves as representatives of the male field,” as which they cannot do otherwise than to feel remorse and shame for everything that representatives of this field have brought into the world in the way of violence. That is “self”-betrayal in the truest sense of the word, for they betray their individual and possibly innocent self by loading onto it the entire guilt of a field whose representative they are. But that brings only more individual suffering and an invitation to individual violence into the world – in this case, from women against these “modern” men, in the form of the classic victim posture, “Now we can finally make them feel what they have done to us all this time” – and that unfortunately does not serve the healing and transformation of the affected fields. Quite the opposite: it hardens the fronts and makes it difficult for those who, as representatives of the corresponding fields (man, woman, diverse, ...), want to consciously experience and enable a transformation on the field level.



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A practice of distinguishing what I experience inwardly, into “mine” (the I-level) and the field for which I consciously or unconsciously stand (the We-level), is possible in every situation. If only because each and every one of us always stands for something the moment we are in contact with any other. The question I ask myself with respect to this practice – above all when contradictory inner experiences are present – is this: who or what is expressing itself through me right now? As whom am I being addressed right now? And it usually is always and in parallel a part of me that has an individual history and at least one field for which I currently stand, or as whose representative I am currently perceived. Often a deeper work with the corresponding parts (for example with IFS) or with the We (constellation work) also brings to light the ever-surprising connections between the two, that is, between inner parts and the history of a We, or field, for which I stand. The respective inner journey is always an adventure.

Something that helps me with this is the experiment of taking every sentence – whether thought or spoken – that contains an “I” or a “You,” and tentatively rephrasing it. Instead of “I,” I use “I, as ...,” and instead of “You,” I try to find the addition “You, as ...,” and to insert a characteristic in place of the dots. For example, “I, as a man ...”. Whenever this succeeds without losing its original meaning, I am no longer meant as a unique individual, but as a representative of a characteristic and thus as a representative of a field. Why? Every distinction and every characteristic is something that does not apply to me alone. And whenever several people are addressed, there almost always is a field. Almost every formulation of the form “I, as ...” or “You, as ...” stands for a formulation “I, as a representative of ...” or indeed “You, as a representative of ...”

Furthermore, I have shared my experience here by means of gender-specific fields, because without a concrete example it would have become even more abstract than it already is. Of course, the distinction of inner information, between “origin in the I” and “origin in the We” – or the distinction whether I act as “I” or as a representative of a field – applies to all fields and “We” into which I was consciously or unconsciously born or have grown into. In my case these are many further “perpetrator fields” of which I am inevitably a representative. For example:

- The field of the Germans, with everything “we” did between 1932 and 1945.
- The field of “old Europe,” with all the suffering “we” brought into the world through colonization and the attitude that comes with it, and which to this day is the foundation of our privileged way of life at the expense of others.
- The field of European, Catholic Christianity (and this, even though I myself belong to no faith community, yet was baptized and socialized as a Catholic) with the suffering “we” brought into the world through self-aggrandizement, through the abuse of power, and through the of our human nature, that reveals itself most in imperfection.



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- The field of the whole of humanity, in which “we,” through our unchecked drive for security and outward advancement, have sacrificed our connection to that of which we are also a part, namely this planet as an ecosystem, and are thereby destroying this wonderful living entity.
- Many other, also considerably smaller, fields and We-instances, all of which have a history and in which healing and transformation are urgently needed.

What I really want to say is: try out this distinction on the inside, and, if you like, on the outside too. The worst that can happen is that nothing changes. Yet, what might happen, however, is that certain things you experience inwardly, and that are hard to bear, may perhaps have a completely different origin than your individual history. You will probably continue to experience these unpleasant things. But from a different place; and perhaps with a distinction – namely the distinction between I and We – that opens new paths on the inside (though not only there) and perhaps even makes healing and transformation possible. But only perhaps ...