

Borders are invisible lines that stir up war

Arkadi Zaides portrays in his performance art piece, *Archive*, the choreography of violence. As humans in a society we all participate in choreographies that are unknown to us. Mentally and bodily we inhabit the invisible flow of information around us, and through our movements we all take part in a game that recreates society as a whole. Coming to Israel as an immigrant from Belarus, Arkadi got to experience the choreography of Israelis. His main concern became the consequences of borders. In his performance he frames the body language of Israeli settlers in a beautiful dance of violence, hatred and power. We are shown video footage of Israelis confronting Palestinians. His interpretation of the scenes are expressed through dance and music derived from the sounds and movements in the film. This way we experience not only the gaze of the Palestinian, but we get a whiff of the bodily sensation of being a Palestinian confronted with hatred. Arkadi says he is trying to regain the physicality of conflict which is lost for us through the 2-dimensional presentation of war in media. The experience of conflict is the bodily sensations of both hatred and fear. To understand the physicality of conflict is to see conflict as a system of violent gestures. The bodies of a society inhabit these gestures and by acting them out they re-establish the separation in society. Arkadi looks to the border as the spring for violent choreographies to evolve.

«Who invented the border? **Borders don't exist.** Borders are invisible lines that stir up war. They are as incredible as unicorns. Thus we might enter History, which is always a History of borders. Today we are in an era of the resurrection of nationalism. People are swollen with *home-neid* (home-envy). This home-neid is not only the need for a land and roof. It is primarily a need for the proper, for a proper country, for a proper name, a need for separation and, at the same time, a rejection of the other; it is less a need of difference than a distaste for difference, a desire to leave coupled with a desire to expel. A harsh, trenchant desire not to be you.» (Cixous 1993, 131)

War towards the other

Cixous is concise when she captures the essence of the war of today. It is not only a war of nations fighting each other, but a war of humans fighting against themselves. This is what Alice Miller explains in her “The Truth Will Set You Free” revealing to us how our upbringings shape our minds and in turn shape our societies. Maurice Merleau-Ponty deepens our understanding of our minds through his writings about rigid personalities in “The Primacy of Perception”. He describes in more detail how our perception of the world is connected to how our primary relations are shaped. He does this by introducing us to psychological research as the basis for his statement. Both Alice Miller and Hélène Cixous understand the cultural backdrop for our upbringings. The Book of Genesis is a perfect symbolic representation for the core of our culture. God creates the world and Man and Woman, and he introduces temptation through the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. He instructs Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree, and punishes them when they violate this. To Alice Miller the story of the Creation is one that preaches obedience as a virtue, curiosity as a sin, and ignorance of good and evil as an ideal state. It teaches a barrier in the mind that hides our true feelings from us and restricts us from love. (2001, 1-2) Cixous reads Clarice Lispector when she tells the story of those He-Bible, the masculine writings that teach us what is unclean and abominable. (1993, 113) This submission to authority and abomination of the true nature of evil is somehow a characteristic of our society. Pierre Bourdieu analyzes the structures of our modern society and finds in it the dominance of the masculine and the play between authority and obedience. (2000) For Bourdieu and Michel Foucault the power structures are normative or bodily. By becoming a part of us through our families, through norms, they become a trait of our mentality and simply a way we move about in the world –blindly inhabiting our respectable choreographies.

The nature of today's wars.

Foucault explains the rise of a different kind of warfare in his analysis «The history of sexuality». A shift in the role of the state gives rise to a new enactment of power. Earlier in history the obedience of the people has been ensured through the threat of death. This has forced people into war, enabled labour and prevented rebellion. In modern history, however, the politics revolve around preserving

life. This makes for a different type of war. Wars are still highly territorial, but the motivation for going to war has become a biological one. In a society where life is at the centre of state protection, the justifications for war change in their nature. In order for wars to be justified as life preserving, there has to be an apparent threat to the life of a people. The rise in nationalism that Cixous talks about shows this exact rhetoric. Nationalist movements thrive on the separation between a country's own people and other cultures. In World War II this kind of nationalist politics sparked a mass genocide. (Focault 1995, pt. V)

Bloody and sexual society

Focault describes two principles for the organisation of modern society. He uses the symbolism of blood and sexuality to paint a picture of the different historical power principles. The symbolism of blood describes a period in time where obedience was obtained through the threat of death. The symbolism of blood is multifaceted, however. It is used to describe a society that demands instrumentality of being prepared to shed your own blood through war. It also symbolizes a nation cherishing people of the same certain kind of blood. There is a fluidity and fragility to blood – it has the ability to be drained, to flow out and to become contaminated. We recognize the bloody society where emperors exercised torture and proclaimed wars. It is a society where men were sent out to kill with honour. (Focault 1995, 161)

But recently the subtlety of sexuality came to govern our societies. The power structures of society have been directed towards life, towards the body and its ability to reproduce. The vitality of the individual, the race and the species is regulated through their health, education and sexuality. (Focault 1995, 162) Sexuality is always everywhere, and it is being continuously stimulated by society. Even though sexuality is very present it is somehow very invisible, since it is so personal. It is a personal matter that has become political. And even though it is now political, it is still something that is feared, so the political structures for sexuality is somehow hidden in norms we do not readily acknowledge. Therefore it is difficult to challenge the enormous power that sexuality has - it is both difficult to talk about and it is difficult to recognize it in one's self.

So on the one hand, you have what the blood represents: law, death, control. On the other you have what political sexuality represents: norm, knowledge, life, discipline and regulation.

Merging sex with blood

Despite the transition to sexualised politics, blood has not been eradicated from society. The politics of blood and sexuality overlap, strengthening each other in some ways. Rhetorics from the era of

blood is called upon to support the power politics that is established in sexuality. We see this in racism. There still exists an idealisation of pure blood. Through micro structures of the state racism is being ingrained in the minds and bodies of people. This is a system seeping through family, religion, education, media, psychiatry. By learning to hate we thrive to maintain unjust power structures in society. Nazism of the Second World War was the extremity of this – it made people sacrifice their own blood in order to kill others whose blood was not seen as pure. (Focault, 1995, 162-163)

In relation to Arkadi's political work, Focault's theory could describe the Israeli conflict as a result of two different historical principles of politics. The border and the war is a bloody matter being justified by making it into a bodily conflict about identity.

La Domination masculine/ A masculine society/a dominant society

These aspects of society that Focault captures through his symbolism of sex and blood, the two structuring principles of modern society, Bourdieu outlines them through the language of masculinity and femininity. Somehow we can understand the two structures of sexuality and blood as something that has now merged into a habitus of gender. Practical belief, a concept that Bourdieu introduces, we can understand as a choreography we inhabit. The important claim about practical belief is that it is not merely a state of mind, but a state of the body, governed by the rules of society. (Bourdieu 1990, 68) These choreographies are inherently linked to structures of dominance and submission, and therefore manifest and reproduce injustice and violence. He introduces the term symbolic power to describe the concealed forms of violence that emerge from these choreographies. (Bourdieu 2000, 9)

Being blind

What baffles Bourdieu, he tells us in *La Domination masculine*, is how readily human beings accept the conditions of society. In spite of deeply unjust structures, we mostly go about living our lives without much rebellion, playing by the rules and not asking questions. In turn, we step into and dance in a role of authority and submission. This, for Bourdieu, is a product of a society organised by the laws of masculinity, or dominance if you will. (Bourdieu 2000, 9) You can use the symbolism of Blood or that of The Bible. It amounts to the same thing: There is the Judge and those who follow Him. Authority calls for rules to be followed at the same time as it creates a safe place for you to live your life without much quandary. This is true for both dictator and slave, and manifests itself differently for the two roles.

Virility of masculinity stabbed by Vulnerability of femininity

Masculinity is what dominates and structures society. As honour serves as masculinity's highest virtue, masculinity is a constant game of manifesting its own honour. This is achieved through what you could call a virile choreography. Virility is so closely knit to honour and all the facets of it: strength, fearlessness, bravery. These characteristics are however tainted by their origin. Fear of exclusion pushes people to obey the rules of a game where participation is not a conscious choice. This takes on the form of all the virile games that men participate in. Sports are the perfect example of this culture, but in their most extreme forms we see gang rapes, street fights and other violent expressions of dominance. All done through fear of exclusion, the virtue of bravery takes on a whole new meaning. With vulnerability the most dangerous quality to flaunt, strength and courage can not exist. Shame takes honour's place when strength is no longer there to build it up. A violence is directed inwards towards oneself and expressed outward towards those who represent vulnerability. In extreme forms masculinity is hatred towards women. But the type of violent domination that masculinity represents seeps through all of the power relations in the world, inhabited by different genders and identities, ultimately explaining today's wars. (Bourdieu 2000, 58-62)

Oppression through the body

The subtlety of warfare Bourdieu explains through his term *symbolic power*. Because the nature of oppression is bodily, labelled through gender and inhabited through childhood imitation, symbolic power describes power structures that for the most part are invisible to us. Oppression of women or other vulnerable participants in society is difficult to talk about precisely because it isn't a problem rooted in language or institutions, according to Bourdieu. It is ultimately an oppression rooted in the body. Practical belief is what he calls choreographies that make systematic violence. He emphasises that practical belief is not a 'state of mind', still less a kind of arbitrary adherence of a set of instituted dogmas and doctrines ('beliefs'), but rather a state of the body. (Bourdieu 1990, 68) Symbolic power is ultimately deep-rooted linguistic and muscular patterns of behaviour (Bourdieu 1990, 69) that give life to a system of oppression in a cyclic routine.

“Practical sense, social necessity turned into nature, converted into motor schemes and body automatisms, is what causes practices, in and through what makes them obscure to the eyes of their producers, to be *sensible*, that is, informed by a common sense. It is because agents never know completely what they are doing that what they do has more sense than they know.” (Bourdieu 1990, 69)

Therefore the mind follows blindly what the body has set out to do, to think, to value.

Bringing up our bodies

And who shapes our bodies more than our parents? At least after the army of psychoanalysts stressing the importance of our upbringings for our adult lives, we readily acknowledge that parents in some ways shape their children into who they become. Alice Miller writes about the importance of our upbringings in her book *The Truth Will Set You Free*. She writes about how the violence that parents pass on to their children manifests itself in the child's body, so that when the child grows up to become an adult it keeps acting out this violence both inwards and outwards. We are taught a barrier in the mind that executes ourselves along with others. Merleau-Ponty offers knowledge to deepen our understanding of this kind of mental barrier that shadows our perception. (1964) Alice Miller gracefully knits together both the cultural and psychological aspects of violence. By showing us how mass murderers like Hitler and Mao are made, we understand all criminals as neglected children.

“Gradually the conviction took shape in my mind that evil is re-produced with each new generation. Newborn infants are innocent. Whatever predispositions they may have, they feel no urge or need to destroy life. They want to be looked after and protected, to love and be loved. If those needs are not satisfied, if children are abused instead of cherished, then that will determine the entire course of their lives.” (Miller 2001, 58)

The creation of evil children

Opening her book with some thoughts on the story of Creation, Alice Miller shows us the cultural backdrop for hurtful upbringings. Cixous would call it Those He-Bible, the holy writings that tell us the story of Adam and Eve and the Tree of knowledge. For Alice Miller this is a story from her childhood, from her first meeting with values in this world. She sees it as the story of the forbidden fruit. The tree of knowledge holds the truth about good and evil, and God forbids Adam and Eve to eat from the fruit that it holds. Eve is tempted by the snake to eat it anyway, and they are then punished for disobeying God's words. And thus we are taught obedience as a virtue, curiosity as a sin, and ignorance of good and evil as an ideal state. God serves as the authority that you can't criticise, a judge teaching us shame and obedience. (Miller 2001, prologue) Rebellious this kind of teaching, Alice Miller shows us a world of redemption and true love:

“To my way of thinking, the apple from the tree of knowledge promised an explanation of evil and hence represented redemption – good as opposed to evil.

[...]

I believe in the power of love, but for me love is not synonymous with being “good” in the sense of being obedient. Love has something to do with being true to oneself and one's feelings and needs. And

the desire for knowledge is part of that. God obviously set out to deprive Adam and Eve of this loyalty to themselves. But why? My conviction is that we can love only if we are allowed to be what we are: no pretense, no disguises, no facades. We can genuinely love only if we do *not* deny ourselves the knowledge available to us (like the tree of knowledge in the Garden), if instead of fleeing from it, we have the simple courage to eat the apple.”

(Miller 2001, 1-2)

To understand why courage is a lost virtue in the story of the Creation, we can become aware of the masculine light shining through the story. Cixous called it *Those He-Bible*, a quote from Clarice Lispector, illustrating how the book and our culture has a moral of masculinity. (Cixous 1993, 113) Masculinity gives us an authoritative Father, introduced by the Bible and taking on real shapes in our real lives. Merleau-Ponty also points out the nature of an authoritarian society. The dichotomy of authority and obedience is a way of life. And if one follows this path, one ends up having to be completely obedient or else the whole principle of authority will be called into question. (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 102) This is a difficult rebellion that includes a shift in mindset and a certain opposition to society. Alice Miller explains her own epiphany when she realised that the Bible was written by men. Imagining a terrorised child at the hands of his own merciless father passing on his lessons to the world. (Miller 2001, 7) This is a world where love is conditional, separation is taught and borders are built as we learn to deny ourselves and others.

building up Frontiers

“*Poisonous pedagogy* is a phrase I use to refer to the kind of parenting and education aimed at breaking a child's will and making that child into an obedient subject by means of overt or covert coercion, manipulation, and emotional blackmail.”

(Miller 2001, preface)

Authoritarian parenting is criticised in Miller's writings. Combining Miller's psychological experience with patients marked by childhood trauma and Merleau-Ponty's philosophical writings based on empirical psychological research, we gain a perspective on the importance of upbringings. Merleau-Ponty uses empirical psychological research to demonstrate how we are taught to perceive separation in the world.

Frenkel-Brunswik has carried out this study on what she calls rigid subjects. She demonstrates how children with an authoritarian upbringing have a tendency to perceive rigidly. Lacking the ability to perceive ambiguities, people are seen as either good or bad. This is also connected with a distorted view of their own parents who the child sees as perfection while subconsciously directing anger

towards them. Rigid subjects are unable to confront squarely the contradictions that exist in their attitudes toward others. (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 103) Instead, they project the most feared features of themselves onto others. The gendered aspect of this is what Bourdieu demonstrated in *La Domination Masculine* - women are taught to fear their own virility and men their own vulnerability, and so masculinity is exercising dominance over other subjects that are seen as weak (such as women). This could also explain political extremism on both/all sides of the political spectre. Racism is perhaps the most obvious example of rigid perception.

Thus hatred towards parts of oneself is projected onto a minority, a gender, a political opponent etc. To Merleau-Ponty rigidity is a way to perceive the world in general, linked to the upbringing that children experience that shapes the way they interact with the world and the people in it. The world is divided into good and evil, virtue and vice, masculinity and femininity, by the Frontiers in the mind. (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 102)

Violent bodies

The Truth Will Set You Free is a book about people suffering from violence inflicting a barrier in the mind. Patients develop serious physical symptoms as a result of the psychological damage from childhood, tearing on their bodies until they are faced with the demons of their subconscious. (Miller 2001,

Alice Miller advocates that prisons should focus on rehabilitating their inmates by offering therapy. A project in Canada did just this, making child abusers realise they were passing their own traumas onto their children. (Miller 2001, 70) We understand that criminals are suffering people. Even the worst criminals that the world has faced, such as mass murderers Mao and Hitler are explained through the stories of their childhoods.

“We know that as a boy Hitler was tormented, humiliated, and mocked by his father, without his mother being able to protect him. We also know that he denied his true feelings towards his father... This hatred remained repressed because hating one's father was strictly prohibited, and because it was in the interests of the child's self-preservation to maintain the illusion of having a good father. Only in the form of deflection onto others was hatred permitted, and then it could flow freely.”

(Miller 2001, 59)

How to overcome

To break the endless cycle of violence from childhoods, we could get help from what Miller calls *helping* or *enlightened witnesses*. A *helping witness* is a person who stands by an abused child,

offering support and acting as a balance against the cruelty otherwise dominant in the child's everyday life. This can be anyone from the child's immediate world: a teacher, a neighbour, a caregiver, a grandmother, often a sibling. (Miller 2001, x) In adult life, a role similar to that of a childhood's helping witness may be taken over by an enlightened witness. Someone who is aware of the consequences of neglect and cruelty in childhood, empathises with them and helps them gain an understanding of their feelings of anxiety and powerlessness as products of their own history rather than some frightening, mysterious force. (Miller 2001, xi)

“In her book *Le Pardon Originel* the Swiss theologian Lytta Basset writes that we cannot eradicate evil because we are doomed to repeat the things that have already happened. All we can do is accept the presence of evil and pardon others and ourselves so that we can achieve as much freedom as possible.” (Miller 2001, 149-150)

Letting your problems flow out in a session of therapy, freeing the violence that is manifested in your body, tears up the troubles that it makes for you and the people in your life. In *Archive*, the performance art piece by Arkadi Zaidis, this violence is shown to us through the medium of art – dance, visual images and music. Cixous also touches our bodies through her writings, involving us bodily through the text as she aesthetically shows us the worst parts of ourselves and society. These are all ways to stir up the truth in us, to show our frontiers built by the hands of Man, and make us more boundless.

Crossing the borders/Descent/Nether realms

Slipping into the writings of Cixous, we are forced to cross frontiers along with the great writers of our time. By nature, literature is a borderless endeavour, rooted in every writer there has been anywhere in the world. Writing is a way to reach the nether realms of our minds, battling our mental, emotional and biographical clichés, to find the painful joys in us. Cixous writes that we are not taught that we can fight ourselves, that we should seek the joyous pain that leads to the truth behind broken barriers. Since we are shaped by years and years of all kinds of experiences and education, we must travel through all sorts of places that are not necessarily pleasant, to return to paradise: our own marshes, our own mud. And yet it pays to do so. Because one has to choose between losing what is mund and losing the best parts of ourselves that are called imund. Clarice Lispector travels there. Climbing with all of the strength from the body of the soul. Deep down, behind thought, somewhere in the depths of heart or stomach or womb.

(Cixous 1993, 118-119)

Clarice Lispector tells the story of a woman who meets a *barata*, a cockroach. She is faced with this abominable being, nearly killing it, touching it and the white paste that seeps out of it. The woman becomes *immonde*, impure.

This is her fantastic, total, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual revolution, which in short, is a crime. It makes her completely revise her clichéd way – our clichéd way – of thinking: our relations to the world in general and to living things in particular. Dealing with the phobia, with the horror of so-called abominable beings. (Cixous 1993, 112)

In a moment of self-knowledge the woman opens her mouth in fright to ask for help. She realises the impurity that she has made herself into, and the shame that it holds:

“I opened my mouth in fright to ask for help. Why? Because I did not want to become imund like the cockroach. What ideal held me from the sensing of an idea? Why should I not make myself imund? Exactly as I was revealing my whole self, what was I afraid of? Being imund? With what?

Being imund with joy.”

(Cixous 1993, 117)

Through redemption you find the joyous pain of giving birth to a whole self.

The because of the law.

Clarice Lispector tries to get to her own roots. But to get there she has to cross the barriers built by a whole list of institutions, media and machines banishing joyful truths. These barriers that create lies, dominance and violence are products of a masculine society. It is a masculine barrier that recreates itself – simply because it does not need to justify itself. This is “the Because of the law”, the fact that the law is right just by being the law. (Cixous 1993, 117) The moral of the story of creation tells us just this, and so we learn it through what Alice Miller calls poisonous pedagogy.

And so we dare not challenge it, because we are taught that we shouldn't. We follow all of these laws because we are afraid of exclusion - of not being loved. Cixous tells us that this is our emotional, our personal and political problem, the fact that we can't bear exclusion. We are afraid of it, we hate to be separated, and that is why we are apt to commit all kinds of small crimes, self-denials, and treachery. (Cixous 1993, 118)

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For there are things created that have never made themselves beautiful, and have stayed just as they were when created

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(Cixous 1993, 116)

back to the roots

Arkadi dances us to the truth. Making us feel that war is really our subtle, strong moves. We are shaped to deny ourselves and push a border into the mind, inhibiting us from seeing the violence in our bodies, instead making us blindly execute ourselves and the people that surround us.

In this way art liberates us. we should stare naked at ourselves and love. the world needs more poetry, angels and courage. and pure dancing from the roots of our hearts.

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