Pari Perspectives

Ideas in Science, the Arts, Spirit and Community

"The future has an ancient heart"
CARLO LEVI

This Is Not Art

SEE INSIDE FOR DETAILS

Issue 24 / June 2026

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This Is Not Art: See Inside for Details

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The Meaning of Invisible Impact: Not Measurable, Infinite Value

10

MARJOLIJN ZWAKMAN

'You have a lot of energy, don't you?' my father asked me.

He was lying in his hospital bed in the final phase of his life.

It was enough for him, he longed for death, was 88 years old and decided to stop eating and drinking.

'Yes, I do have energy,' I answered. I was surprised. During his life he never used a word like 'energy.' He was married to my mother, a jewelry designer and artist, but his own background was in the navy—'the best time of my life'—and afterwards a train engineer—'wonderful, alone in the cockpit, no hassle with other people.'

A word like 'energy' or 'energetic sensitivity' did not fit into his vocabulary.

Now he was lying there. Even thinner than he had always been (185cm, 65 kilos). Vulnerable. Calm. Gentle. Quiet.

'Can't you give me some of your energy?' he asked me. 'If you have enough anyway?'

Internally I had to laugh. Is this really happening? What is dad actually saying? But it was not the moment to start a witty discussion about it.

1. Energetic Dance

'Yes, I can give you some,' I said. I walked to his bed and we had a beautiful experience together. I gently moved his fragile feet, his thin hands; stroked the skin of his head and then took some distance. Just above his body, I held my hands. I felt the space between my hands and his body becoming warmer.

I am a visual thinker. I saw a golden glow, a kind of network of golden threads over his body that gradually filled the room.

Then it was enough. I took a step back. 'Yes, thank you, something like that, yes,' he said.

Two days later he passed away, with a gentle smile around his lips.

The impact of what happened was not visible to the eye or measurable. Between my father's body and my body a warmth emerged. The separation between me as 'impact maker' and my father as 'impact receiver' disappeared. In place of that separation something emerged in the space between us.

This moment that I shared with my father represents a way of being together that I also want to cultivate in the artistic exploration spaces that I create as an artist. There is room for pre-verbal knowledge; there is room for energy that can flow between people. In these spaces, something can emerge that is not immediately visible or explainable. It does not follow a clear line from action to result and cannot easily be captured in words. Precisely there, in that in-between space, something shifts. Another way of relating becomes possible; another way of sensing what is at stake.

The dance I performed during the funeral of my father, Pieter Zwakman, on August 10, 2024.

2. Impact as Mystery

Freeing Impact from Its Tight Jacket

As an artist-researcher I am affiliated with the professorship Change Management of The Hague University of Applied Sciences where I work on questions around innovation in organizations. Together with professionals, I explore recognizable organizational issues (for example, 'How to deal with uncertainty?') in an artistic way. With performances and experiential installations, I address other layers than the mental field of cause and effect. The idea: precisely in the shared experience of a performance something new can reveal itself in relation to the issue. But then the fluorescent lights come on, we return to work and the question is: How does what happened in the performance continue to work in everyday practice? What is the impact and how do we measure it?

Practice-oriented researchers are expected to realize demonstrable impact on societal issues with their work. Impact is often reduced to what is measurable: numbers, reach, visibility. Working in organizations, I recognize the need to make impact visible. And I understand that desire. We want our work to matter. At the same time, discomfort is growing among researchers and artists about this reduction. It narrows what we can perceive. What can be counted becomes central, but how do we speak about impact that cannot be captured in numbers?

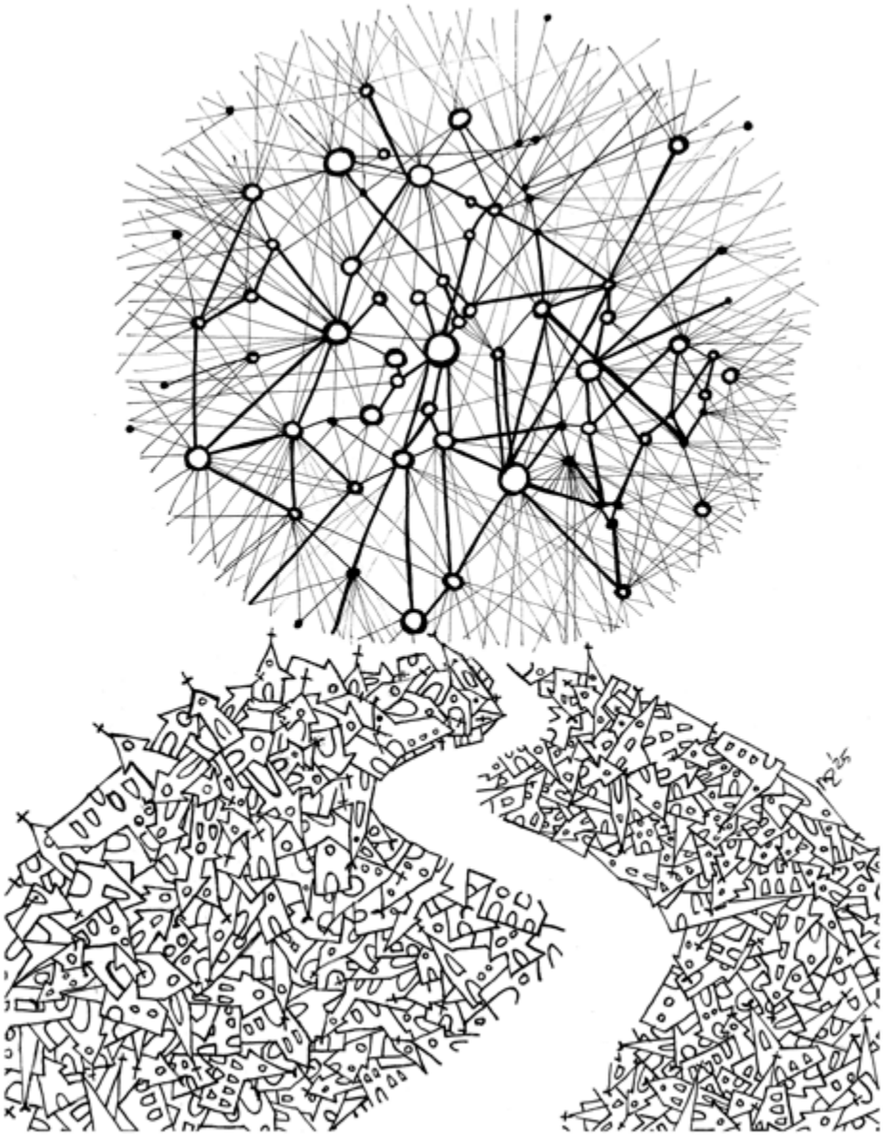
Some problems can be clearly delineated and solved. But many issues are complex, ambiguous and relational in nature; so-called wicked problems—complex challenges without unambiguous solutions in which different values, interests and forms of knowledge come together (Rittel & Webber, 1973). They require not only optimization, but the emergence of new ways of thinking and acting. In that context, impact is not only technical or policy-driven, but also cultural, emotional and imaginative.

Impact as Mystery. Video stills from the video I developed for the Impact Event on January 28, 2026. The imagery was created in collaboration with artist Annemiek Vera.

3. Scaling Deep

In my work, I create—through performances, installations and shared experiences—situations in which something can emerge that is not fully predetermined. Something that moves between people, that lingers, that returns in unexpected ways. This work moves between making and reflection, between experience and interpretation, and tries to stay as close as possible to how impact arises in practice. These are the kinds of shifts that are also needed in transitions. Not only changes in systems or structures, but changes in how we perceive, relate to each other and create meaning. Subtle movements, often barely noticeable, but with the potential for something else to emerge. What happens is often relational, distributed, sometimes quiet, sometimes intense, and not always immediately recognizable, let alone measurable.

To truly be able to change, we also need the imagination of artists and researchers, makers, thinkers and dreamers who open up other futures. But how do we relate to the workings of such processes? And what language helps us to speak about them? To deepen this further I spoke with professors in higher professional education: What dilemmas do they experience in 'measuring' 'immeasurable' impact?

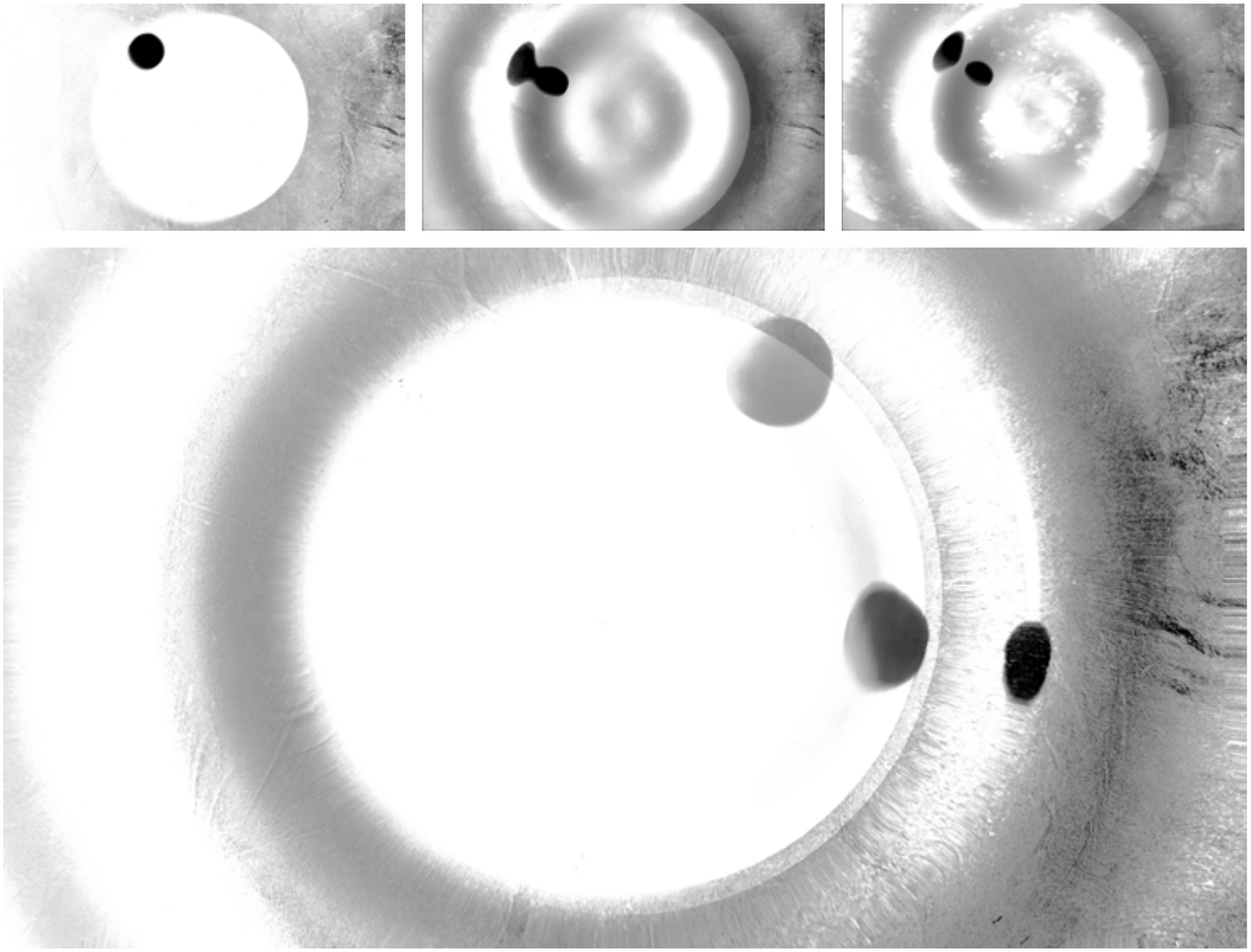


Scaling Deep. A drawing I made in 2025 titled Established Dogmas*: How do you let go of established dogmas to make space for the energy that wants to flow between people?*

4. Impact as a Cloud of Meaning

Professor 'Impact as response-ability' Theo Niessen expressed concern that the concepts 'impact' and 'societal challenge' solidify into nouns. In reality, according to him, they refer to a dynamic in which people affect and influence each other. Impact is then more like a 'cloud of meaning' that comes into being in a meandering way (Zwakman, M. 2025). The researcher is not the solution designer but a process facilitator, co-discoverer and enabler.

In my art practice I indeed create 'spaces' in organizations in which such a cloud of meaning can arise. I work in a combination of preparation, a design for an intervention, and then I let go of the outcome. I call that a space in which an autonomous process can emerge. Impact is not an end goal we have to achieve, but an autonomous flow that we must make space for. I start the projects I do by creating the 'content' myself from form; by dancing, experimenting with objects and video. This happens from intuition, without already having a conclusion about what the form means for me (or the other). What follows in sharing this work is a conversation, still without conclusion. 'The other' is needed to give the work meaning.



Impact as a Cloud of Meaning. Video stills from the video I developed for the Impact Event on January 28, 2026. The imagery was created in collaboration with artist Annemiek Vera.

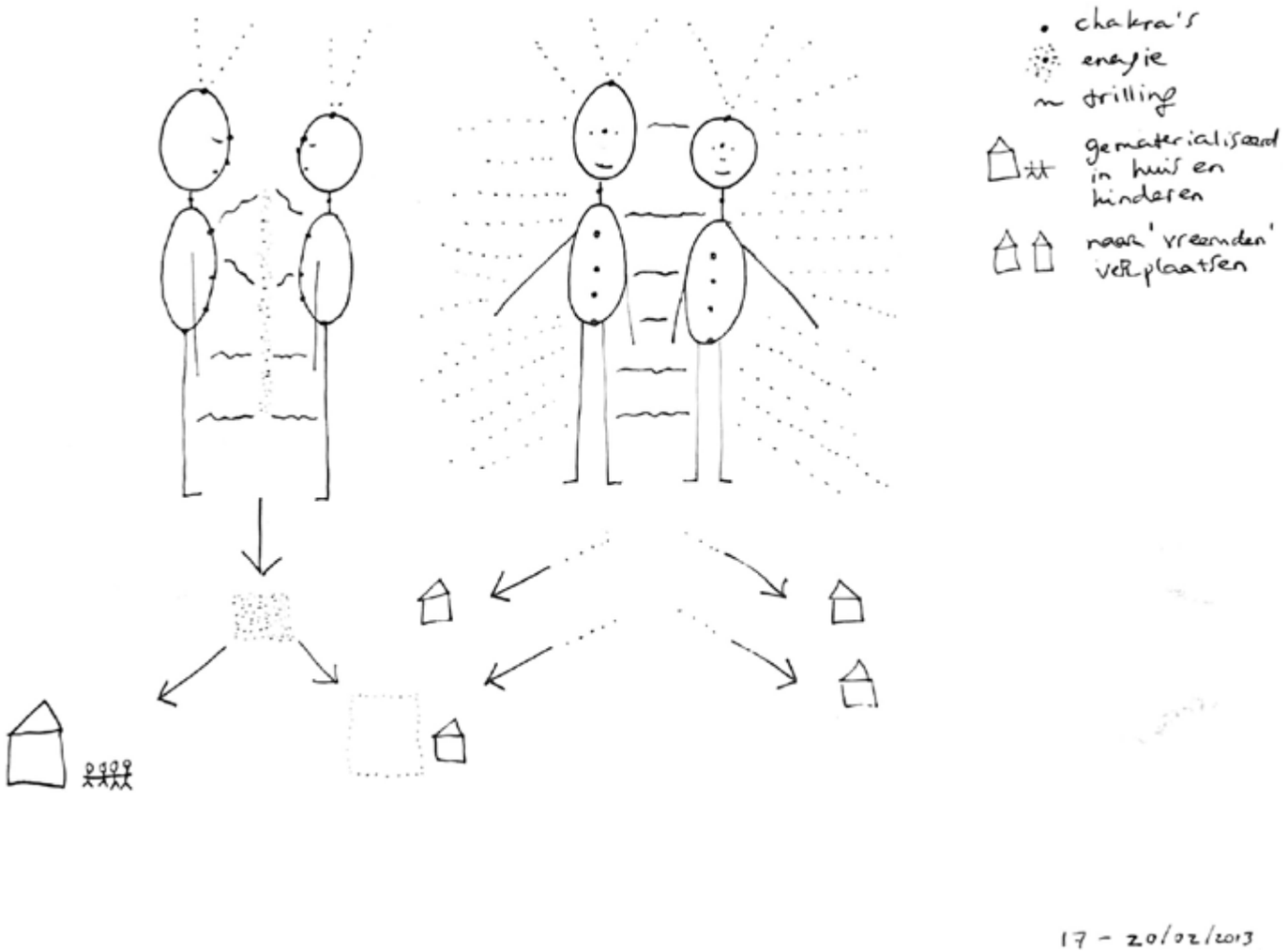
5. Life Force Energy

Impact: Exchange Between Maker and Receiver

Professor 'Change Management' Jacco van Uden (The Hague University of Applied Sciences) pointed out that when impact is viewed mainly through a controlling lens, essential information disappears. Impact depends on the receiver; the separation between 'maker' and 'receiver' is artificial (Zwakman, M. 2025). In my own work, I indeed experience impact as a shared field in which everyone takes something different with them. In the example of the interaction with my father at his deathbed, while I experienced a network of 'golden threads' that taught me something about energy, he may have mainly experienced a deep calm and attention. The artistic forms I use open a state of being in which exchange and insight can arise, without those experiences having to be unambiguous. The audience becomes participant.

It is precisely this ambiguity—in which different meanings may exist alongside each other—that clashes with contexts such as higher professional education, where decision-making often requires clarity and unambiguity. Then the misconception can arise that these are individual, separate experiences though it is precisely these inner processes and individual experiences that form the breeding ground for broader change.

What if impact is not a 'thing' that you make or transfer, but something that arises in the encounter, something that moves through us in (inter)action? In that perspective, impact shifts from measurable result to a relational and experiential process. That requires a view of humanity in which not only the mental and rational count, but also the sensory, emotional and perhaps even the spiritual. In this way, space arises to not only measure or explain impact, but also to experience it, live through it and collectively interpret it.



Life Force Energy. A drawing I made in 2013 titled Life Force Energy. *Chakras, energy, and vibration can be materialized into a house and children; you can also direct this energy toward 'strangers,' into projects.*

6. Impact Event Embodied Research

Impact: Meaning-making Afterwards

Professor 'Art Culture and Transitions' (HZ University of Applied Sciences) Godelieve Spaas points out that we have placed scientific knowledge above other forms of knowing. While forms of knowing such as experiential knowledge and spiritual knowledge are also essential but cannot be reduced to causality (Zwakman, M. 2025) it requires something new from us not to see this cause-effect thinking as the only way to give 'direction.' It seems appealing: 'I do this, and then that happens; I take responsibility.' And the sharpness of our mind is also very helpful. But perhaps we need to give our linear thinking, which helps us to create overview and interpret a situation, a different place. Not so dominant at the start of a process, as a condition to begin, but occasionally in between, and at the end. If we have taken the time to let a process take its own course (autonomous process), and we have been able to learn from the shared experience, then we derive new meaning and direction from it.

In this way, the various professors and I came together with a group of about 100 people for an 'Impact event' in a theater in The Hague. Based on the interviews I conducted with them, we explored four aspects of impact, both physically and in collaboration with the professors themselves as well as the artists and researchers. Not only by talking about impact, but precisely by letting thoughts and dilemmas around impact flow through us, feeling them and experiencing them. For this I used the principles of experiential learning and reflection that I learned at the Werkplaats Muzisch Onderzoek (Musework, 2014):

- first experience/expression
- later interpretation, analysis or formulation of questions
- l Impact as Responsibility of the Researcher earning as subsequent meaning-making

Impact Event Embodied Research. Photographic documentation of live Impact performances by various professors, artists, and researchers during the Impact Event on January 28, 2026. Photography by Sophie Blommers.

7. Impact Event Embodied Lecture

Scaling Deep, the Invisible Impact that Makes Change Possible

To see meaning-making as a way of learning and also to see the value of invisible impact, I find the work of Tatiana Fraser on Scaling deep (Fraser, 2023; Moore et al., 2015) very helpful. She describes this as anchoring change by transforming culture, values and relationships. Whereas scaling up and scaling out focus on growth and dissemination, scaling deep goes to the cultural roots of change.

- In my work I see that this deep impact takes place in relational and emotional processes that are difficult to capture, but essential for transformation. It is about creating conditions for change. Practices of scaling deep focus on collective learning, connection and healing. They shift the focus from solving to meaning-making, from accelerating to slowing down, from control to relationship.

Impact Event Embodied Lecture. Photographic documentation of my embodied lecture: What if 'impact' is not a 'thing,' but something that wants to flow through us, in interaction? Impact Event on January 28, 2026. Photography by Sophie Blommers.

- **Collective learning** shifts the focus from measurable indicators to shared meaning-making. It brings together diverse perspectives to see what becomes visible as a whole and supports collaboration across differences, appreciation of multiple forms of knowing and wise action in an iterative process.

- **Connection** focuses on restoring relationships—between head and body, human and earth, and between people themselves. These practices slow down the pace, create space for the relational domain and promote somatic and relational attunement.

- **Healing** shifts the idea that problems must be 'solved.' Instead, they can be seen as signals of systemic imbalance, inviting awareness, restoration of relationships and the re-finding of balance.

- Perhaps that is what my father showed me in his final days—that impact is not something you possess, produce or transfer, but something that arises in the quality of presence. In that silent moment between us nothing was measured, nothing proven, and yet exactly what mattered happened. If we dare to approach impact in this way, as a shared, relational and often invisible process, space may arise to truly touch what makes change possible.

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MARJOLIJN ZWAKMAN is a multidisciplinary artist with a background in theatre (BA, Toneelacademie Maastricht), visual arts (MA, Sandberg Institute, Gerrit Rietveld Academie), and music theatre (MA, Royal Conservatoire The Hague, cum laude). She develops interactive performances, video installations, and workshops in which she collaborates with co-learning partners to create temporary spaces where the rules and protocols of the system are set aside.

Within these encounters, she explores the tensions and possibilities that emerge, and what can be learned when we put our assumptions at stake. Since 2013, she has used her artistic practice to open up space within social and organizational transitions, in collaboration with other artists. She is affiliated as a researcher with the Research Group Change Management at The Hague University of Applied Sciences.