

THE ART OF DOING NOTHING

Postgraduate Paper



Mark Rothko – Untitled, 1951

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“True healing is an invitation to a wholeness that already is the case”

Don Berkow, physician

PREFACE

To get to the heart of doing nothing, maybe for this assignment I should have submitted only blank pages with on the last page a poem or a prayer, but there is so much to say about it that I think is of vital importance. There's a wonderful world to be found in doing nothing!

This paper is the result of a stream of consciousness, it is a collection of thoughts (my own and those of the people I spoke to and the materials I have studied), experiences of myself and colleagues that I have interviewed. Therefore, this paper is not an essay with a statement, nor has it a scientific approach of the theme. In places it is more poetic than descriptive. It has taken me some time to find the right way to write about, and present this theme. In the end I followed more my intuition than my thinking. It has been a creative process similar to the processes of my art projects.

This paper is an invitation to dive into nothingness, to slow down, to explore stillness, to choose another direction in this roaring world.

Ultimately for me the goal is also to find new ways to bring my two professional fields (Core Energetics and art) together. This research will be ongoing for the rest of my life.

JUST SITTING

Well....	Accepting everything	....
....sigh....	Doing nothing	My buttocks on the chair
Feels good to sit	But sitting	My bum relaxing
Calming down	Just sitting	Widening
Sitting quiet	....	I feel my wide bum
Just sitting	....	Touching the chair
....	My heart is pulsating	Bum touching chair
Letting go	My hands are pulsating	Wide bum touching chair
Breathing	My belly is pulsating	'Riet Widebum (nl: Breedreet)
Breathing in	And my feet	Nice to meet you'
Breathing out	Everything is pulsating	....
....	I am pulsating	Let it go
Relaxing	Just sitting	....
Breathing	....	Breathe
In and out	My belly is relaxing	Be
Breathing deeper	Breathing deeply	Stillness
Just sitting	And letting go	Space
....	Hey, my intestines relax	....
Stillness	Never felt that before	....
....	....	That tree
Warm feet	....	Is just standing there
Feet on sheepskin	Breathing	Just standing
Warm	Letting go	Doing nothing
Feels good	Observing	It's just there
....sigh....	Just feeling	Colouring
Breathing	Being	Slowly colouring
....	Just sitting	And letting go of its leaves
Breathing	....	It's not doing nothing,
Being	....	Or is it?
Looking at the clouds	A fly on the window	....
Just sitting	It landed on the glass	....
....	To enjoy the warmth	Neither am I
Breathing	Warmth of the sun	I am sitting
Sitting	Just sitting	Just sitting
Stillness	Enjoying the sun	Breathing
Making space	....	Observing
Feeling space	Very convenient	Connecting
Feeling my heart	To have six legs:	And letting go
Letting go	Four to stand on	Just being
....sigh....	And two	....
Heartbeat	to polish your wings	....
Space	And after that	Stillness
Stillness	Just sit	....
....
Could I do this lying down?	The fly is sitting	Space
'Just sitting' lying down?	Or is it standing?	....
Pain between my shoulders	On the window...	....
Tension in my neck	I am sitting	Breath
Tired	Just sitting	....
Maybe I should lie down	....	....
....	The fly on the window	Fly
....sigh....	Me on the chair	....
Or not	Just sitting	....
Stay put	Breathing	....
Just sitting,	Doing nothing	Tree
Being	Being
No dramasigh....
Just being
Breathing	Letting go again	Me

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1. INTRODUCTION

Choosing this theme for my postgraduate paper has been -and still is- a challenge. For me **doing** is so much easier than **not doing**. In chapter 2 I will give a first outline of the theme as I have studied it.

Doing nothing used to be unknown territory for me, far out of my comfort zone. Growing up on a farm I've learned that you never do nothing. In the chapter on my personal experience (chapter 3) I will elaborate on this. Also in our ever accelerating society, action and speed are so much more valued than inaction, slowing down, reflecting and honestly connecting. I believe doing nothing could contribute to the healing of humanity, help us to snap out of the illusion of the importance of material ownership and perpetual economic growth. (chapter 4). Doing nothing seems like a lost art form and sometimes even an act of rebellion.

When I started getting involved with Core Energetics it was like stepping into a new world which had not so much to do with the way I'd lived my life before, working in the arts. Now, eight years later, I am working towards both working fields to become one. One of my writings for this paper (Just sitting, page 3) I will use in a performance experiment on the Oerol Festival in June (Oerol is a music and performing arts festival in nature in NL. I've worked there for 10 years as a production manager and young artists coach, now sometimes I am going there as a participating artist). Also my presentation for the exam committee in June will contain both. In chapter 5 and 6 I go deeper into the matter by writing on the art of listening and the principles of nonduality to give more depth and understanding of the possibilities of doing nothing. I have tried to be as concrete as possible in order to make this matter, which is so difficult and sometimes paradoxical for us Westerners, comprehensible.

In chapter 7 I will give examples and exercises to apply in personal processes and in therapist-client relations. Chapter 8 is about doing nothing in therapy sessions. If there is a bigger message in this paper it is about creating space and peace in therapy sessions apart from the approaches and interventions that we have learned in our training.

As a research I have talked to colleagues about this subject. Outcomes of these interviews you will find in chapter 9.

Finally I could not stop myself to research this theme in the work of artists. It was impossible not to. Throughout this paper you will find these in internet links and statements from artists, quotes from books I've read and in chapter 10 I will describe some artworks in which doing nothing opens up new worlds, inviting audiences to not only address their brains, but also their hearts, their senses and their spirituality.

In some ways the artistic and the Core Energetic approach are quite similar. In *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* Rebecca Solnit says:

"There are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns. That is to say we know there are some things we do not know. There's the unknown knowns, the things we don't know we know, the Freudian unconsciousness. And there are also unknown unknowns, the ones we don't know we don't know.

Artists are looking for the unknown, the idea or the form or the tale that has not yet arrived. It is the job of artists to open doors and invite in prophecies, the unknown, the unfamiliar; it's where their work comes from. They transform the unknown in the known, haul it in like fishermen; artists get you out into that dark sea."

You could replace **artist** for **therapist** in this description I believe.

As most of my art projects this paper will be like taking the readers on a journey, a quest for knowledge, new experiences and a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world we live in.

2. DOING NOTHING, WHAT IS IT?

It is easy to think 'doing nothing' means to switch off, to withdraw, stop communicating and become inert and disconnected. This is not what this paper is about. In personal processes and in therapy, it is kind of the opposite: in personal processes it means opening up, breathing, connecting to your body, calming down your thoughts, accepting everything that is there, in that moment. As a therapist, on top of this you make a truthful connection to your client, feel and see him or her without judgements, being receptive for whatever is there

and for whatever comes to you. You are present with body, mind, emotions, will and spirit in order to support your clients in their process.

In Wu Wei doing nothing is called the 'action of non-action'. Wu Wei in essence is acting without interference of the ego, the willpower, the thinking. It is acting from instinct, skilfulness and wisdom. Like an animal: instantly, direct, and clear. It is called not-doing, because the ego is only observing, not acting, not initiating.

To slow down, stand still and do nothing might be an important and very simple way to heal ourselves and by healing ourselves, heal others. Doing nothing special, nothing difficult, nothing in particular, might create space to reconnect to everything around us.

The action of not doing I would like to focus on in this paper is about reducing thought, opening up the senses, relaxing the muscles and breathing, being receptive and present, listening to the body and trusting intuition and impulses, letting yourself be guided. About sensing we are not separate, because we are one.

*At the still point of the turning world
Neither flesh nor fleshless
Neither from nor towards
At the still point, there the dance is.
But neither arrest nor movement
And do not call it fixity
Where past and future are gathered
Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline
Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance
And there is only the dance*

(TS Eliot, 1943)

It was one thing in my hectic life to notice I needed to slow down but it (sometimes still) is very hard to get out of my habits and beliefs and allow myself to just stop running, to stand still, observe and feel myself and the world around me honestly and openly. To stop thinking all the time and start feeling my emotions and the responses of my body. To not move forward but go inward and feel. To open my heart and my senses, let myself be guided, and trust this. Then from a different place and with a different energy go outward again and truly connect to others and the world around me.

In his book *The Path is Everywhere*, psychotherapist, writer and teacher Matt Licata says:

'This doing nothing is not passive but volcanic in its implications. It is a nothing that gives birth to the stars. It is the Big Bang that resides deep within your own heart'.

In my parallel working field, the performing arts, there is a discipline called modern mime (based on the French mime corporel of Etienne Decroux) in which standstill is the foundation for the movement that will follow. In the full time four-year training of the theatre school in Amsterdam the principle of 'Zero' is one of the basic skills, meaning objectivity, neutrality, openness and transparency. It refers to the performers' relationship with the body, the moment and the actual situation, creating space for a different way of perception and thus a deeper relationship between performer and audience. Decroux said:

'The performer should evict the tenant (reduce his own personality and ego) to zero in order to be inhabited by God'.

So there was even a spiritual quality to his training. The Dutch mime considers the essence of movement to be standstill. Standing still, doing nothing is the forgotten part of movement. By analogy, you could say that doing nothing is the forgotten part of developing and growing.

Another analogy has an agricultural nature: sometimes the land needs to lie fallow for one or two seasons, to give the soil the opportunity to restore its fertility. Dutch philosopher and anthropologist Ton Lemaire spent an entire chapter on it in his book *Verre Velden*. (Eng: *Distant Fields*)

3. MY PERSONAL STORY IN RELATION TO DOING NOTHING

I am a farmer's daughter who ended up working in the arts before becoming a Core Energetics Practitioner. In both of these working fields the work is never done. Cows need to be milked also on Sunday, calves are sometimes born in the middle of the night, if the grass is turning to hay and bad weather is coming, the work only stops when the hay is hauled in. And if the harvest is done, the land needs fertilising, the machinery maintained, the barn cleaned, the fences fixed, the trees trimmed.

Also in the performing arts the work is not done between 9 and 5: Daytime rehearsals, evening performances and matinees on Sundays. When on tour with a performance, you need to account for the last one and prepare the next. And ideas and inspiration can hit you at any time, and when this happens you need to act immediately, day or night, weekend or holiday, before it's gone again.

You have to be ready to catch them anytime (quote from Catching the big fish - David Lynch)

So, a busy life, full of doing, was all I knew.

On a trip to Africa in the 1990's I learned about slowing down and the mystery of it. At a border post the customs officers made us wait a long time and I wandered off into the desert, away from the anger and the frustration of myself and my travel companions. I laid down in the warm Sahara sand and immediately felt the power, the vastness and aliveness of the land and my irritations seemed to magically be absorbed by the sand. When I got back to camp I was completely reenergised and feeling light. Another time I had to wait for a ferry for a long time. Sitting under a baobab tree with locals for 8 hours made me slip out of my western experience of time and purpose and enter a state of ease and well-being, and I still remember it as a magical day, with a grande finale of light and thunder when we were finally on the water around midnight.

These experiences I couldn't quite understand, but they made me very curious. There was some sort of recognition and I sensed it appealed to something long lost in me. Something that I used to have and I longed for very much. At that time, I could not find a way to explore further.

In the 2010's in the busy working life that I loved so much slowly a feeling developed of discontent, fatigue and incompleteness that made me look for something new. Also there still was the curiosity and a longing for more depth, more feeling and sensitivity. I was too busy, going too fast, mostly ignoring the signs of my body that indicated a need for peace and introspection. After a short research I signed up for the four-year-Core training in 2012. In that same year in my art work I found my own artistic process again, next to the production and programming work I did for art festivals. In a period of research for one of my first projects I'd collected a lot of ideas and material, a very wise colleague said to me: 'stop collecting more, everything is there already'. So also in my artwork I came across slowing down, not running to something that I thought was out of reach, trusting the here and now. I was already there.

One of the most important lessons I had to learn in the Core Energetic training was also to slow down and not to work too hard. A major moment in this learning was an experience in a class of Ann Bradney in the third year. The exercise was about leading the group with the group having had an instruction for certain behaviour. I was very nervous and when it was my turn, I froze. Ann said: 'move!!' So I had the group jumping with me, screaming 'NO' with me. And then I stopped and said 'I don't know what to do'. 'Stay there and stay present with it' Ann said. It felt like standing on the edge of a cliff and falling off. It felt like a miracle happening when everybody calmed down, relaxed, some of my classmates even laid down on the floor at my feet. I felt myself opening and feeling and being able to connect quite easily to the ones that were hesitant. I didn't do anything, and I got great feedback: it made them feel free, serene, safe and loved. 'As long as you are there, I can cry'. Amazing! It was like Alice falling down the rabbit hole, arriving in an unknown world. I was confused: it felt strangely familiar, but also scary and very powerful.

Another experience was in the postgraduate module of Erena Bramos in an exercise of 'pure listening'. Listening to your client, not speaking, not affirming, not nodding your head or humming in confirmation. As a client, talking about my issue I sensed the invitation to go deeper and find a new understanding of the situation, feeling encouraged by the presence, the space, the support and the absence of judgement that was provided. As a therapist I felt a big love and a limitless connection in a timeless bubble. Miracles! Very rewarding and productive work 'doing nothing!'

I learned that mostly unconsciously I hold space for people, feel where they are, what they need, how to care for them, create harmony, connect. I think this is how I was born. When I was young however these qualities weren't recognised so I thought something was wrong with me and I moved away from them, disconnected. I was left with an irrepressible urge to do, to act, to be busy, to focus on others; to not feel so much myself, not feel my whole self. And with my big energy I got a long way doing so. I even turned my pattern of helping others light up and feel good into my profession: I trained to be an artist and performer and organised parties, varying from my own birthday parties to big art festivals, mostly outdoors. This was great until I met this desire to slow down and go towards the unknown, to better know myself, to find what had always been out of reach, to reconnect to what I'd lost.

The experiences during my training that I've described started a process of those qualities coming back to me, and me getting more and more consciousness about it. It brings me closer to myself, it brings confidence and peace. It brings a clearer connection with the people around me and it gives me more understanding and accepting of how people relate to themselves and to one another.

Also in sessions with clients I trust myself more and more to use these qualities. Sometimes I don't intervene, I just acknowledge the struggle a client is in, it gives her the feeling she's* okay, even in her mess and her connecting to it and it gives me the space to follow her, to get to know her patterns, to really see her in her wholeness and the ways she limits herself.

This is an on-going process, and often I still find myself in too much acceleration, too high a gear, too little connection and feeling, and always my body is signalling to slow down, before my mind is. When I was worrying about my father in the last months of his life my blood pressure rose, when I wanted to get in shape doing an extra yoga class every week an injury in my shoulder told me to take it slow and not push myself too much. It is still an everyday challenge to not always get into action-mode. It is a deep-rooted family pattern: when my father was actually dying I talked to him and said that we would take him home after he had passed, he said: 'should I put my coat on?' (nl: 'moet ik mijn jas vast aan doen?'). To die, he had the feeling he had to do something. I am forever grateful for his last conscious moments in which I held his hands and told him all the work was done, that he could rest and let go.

Slowing down, doing nothing, being more receptive seems to be my biggest challenge and my greatest adventure. I have been and will be finding myself discovering new aspects of this matter for the rest of my life I believe. In my own process, in my work with clients, and also in the art projects that I am doing. My body is grateful for my surrender to this way of living my life, it slowly starts to feel more balanced, more sensitive, more whole. It makes my life lighter, more spacious and more fun. And with a very beautiful addition: I now know how to regulate my bloodpressure!

* she/he, her/him

4. THE IMPORTANCE OF DOING NOTHING IN AN ACCELERATING SOCIETY

Often when I ask a friend or colleague how they are doing I hear: "I'm so busy... so very busy... I have so much going on, got so much to do". The energy that goes with it is mostly exhausted, desperate or even depressed. It is normal these days to be overwhelmed by work, study, fitness schedules and social media. The lines between work and home have become blurred. We are on our devices all the f*cking time!

Even kids have agendas with their activities and obligations after school: music lessons, sports, ballet classes, homework, playdates with friends so mom and dad don't need to be home in time. There's no time for slowing down, reflection, boredom; no time for doing nothing.

Also our relaxation is scheduled and usually it is a reflection of that same world of overstimulation. It often takes the form of action-filled films or games, or extreme sports.

We feel guilty when we stare out the window, it is wasting precious time. It produces nothing, it serves no purpose. We feel it's idle, irresponsible, disconnected. We've forgotten how important it is.

If you step out of the daily routines and look at our habits, we can only conclude that they are actually quite destructive. How did we end up living like this? Why do we do this to ourselves? When did we forget that we are human beings, not human doings? How did we create a world in which we have more and more and still more to do with less time for leisure, with less time for reflection and less time for community, for practicing the art of doing nothing, less time to just... be?

What happened to the world in which kids played outside, got muddy, got dirty, got messy, and got bored? Do we love our children so much that we overschedule them, making them stressed and busy — just like us? What happened to a world in which we can sit with the people we love and have slow conversations about the state of our heart and soul, conversations that slowly unfold, conversations with silences, with looking up at the sky, with time to taste an opinion, a thought, to let an idea really sink in? When did we start listening without taking it in and just think of what we will reply, instead of actually listening to what the other is communicating? Instead of listening with our brains AND our hearts? In many Muslim cultures, when you want to ask people how they're doing, you ask: in Arabic, Kayf haal-ik? How is your haal? Haal is the actual state of one's heart. So they ask, "How is your heart doing at this very moment, at this breath?" And that is really what you want to know. I am not asking how many items are on your to-do list, nor asking how many messages are in your inbox. I want to know how your heart is doing, at this very moment.

This disease of being busy is destructive to our health and wellbeing in every way. It weakens our ability to be fully present with those we love, and keeps us from forming the kind of community that we all crave. It makes us unhappy, stressed and ill.

Since the 1950s, we've had so many new technological innovations that we thought would (or were promised to) make our lives easier and simpler. Yet, we have no more free or leisurely time today than we did decades ago. We are losing the ability to live a truly human life. We need to be super humans.

It doesn't have to be this way.

We need a different relationship to work, to technology. We know what we want: a meaningful life, a sense of community, a balanced existence. It's not just about faster iPhones. We want to be truly human. Somehow, if we want to heal ourselves and the people around us and even heal the world, we need a different model of organizing our every day lives and our communities.

Let's create a healing connection, one filled with grace and presence. Let's look at the world in all honesty. In his three bestsellers philosopher/historian Yuval Noah Harari really zooms out to the big picture of the history of humankind, how homo sapiens became the ruler of this planet, of how people are turning into Gods and how to survive the complexities of the 21st century. A perspective that makes you look further than your own life and question the way that we live our lives in the 21st century.

In Holland historian/journalist Rutger Bregman questions the western belief in the depravity of mankind in his book *De meeste mensen deugen* (Eng: *Humankind, a hopeful history*) and gives quite a positive image of our own species. By starting from the goodness of humans instead of the badness. It makes you realise that with a different view we can change our lives. And the world.

These writers both are looking for a broader perspective on the way human life has evolved and how we can bring more balance and peace into the world. Maybe the point at this moment in history is that we evaluate the actions of humankind and change them so we can save the world for our descendants.

In my too-busy-life I am creating space to do this, to deepen the connection to myself and the world around me, to understand what we need to do to make this world a better place. Space to practice true listening and connecting, to reduce the importance of thinking and doing, in favour of perceiving and being. I am training myself to take time to reflect on my own existence, to know how my heart is doing, to practice loving kindness and share this with the people around me, being my dear ones, my colleagues, my clients, my fellow road users and the homeless man at the entrance of the supermarket. To practice the art of doing nothing.

5. NOT THINKING - LISTENING TO THE BODY - PURE LISTENING

From a busy life, a full agenda, responsibilities and obligations it is hard to get to doing nothing. Our overstimulated brains and senses cannot just stop and surrender to space, openness and doing nothing. There are different ways, different options to get there, step by step. Everybody has to find their own path. Here are some stops you could make along the way:

5.1 Not thinking

Not thinking is an important aspect of meditation, if not the most important. Westerners especially mostly live in their thinking, in their heads. For a lot of people, the idea of not thinking is hard to understand, simply because thinking occupies them completely most of the time. Of course the mind is there for thinking and not thinking is nearly as impossible as seeing without looking at something. It's a paradox: it is hard to get your mind around not using the mind.

Not thinking is also an important part of science, of investigation and of creativity. But in the gaps between thoughts the magic often happens, the good ideas appear, the solution is found. Some examples:

- Archimedes discovered the law of buoyancy while relaxing in his bathtub.
- Sir Isaac Newton grasped the law of gravity sitting under an apple tree, doing nothing, looking at a falling apple.
- Albert Einstein was well known for staring out the window. One of his famous quotes:

'Everything is energy and that's all there is to it. Match the frequency of the reality that you want and you cannot help but get that reality. It can be no other way. This is not philosophy. This is physics'

5.2 Heart perception

We are programmed to listen with our ears and our minds. We listen to the words that come to us, our minds process them and we'll come up with an answer. We also hear the tone of the words, we see the look on the face and the movements that come with the words. This influences our interpretation. But we can perceive at an even deeper level by listening with our hearts. The heart is an organ for pumping blood, but also a transmitter and interpreter of emotional states. Heart perception is feeling, sensing, knowing how to listen without judging, having no prejudices. It takes inner peace, the ability to not jump to conclusions, sensitivity and openness.

*'Your vision will become clearer only when you look into your heart...
He who looks outward dreams. He who looks inward awakens.'*
(Carl Jung)

5.3 Listening to the body

Focusing on the body is a way to reduce thinking. Noticing what information you get from your senses and your muscles brings you in connection with your body. Listening to your body often gives better information than listening to what you think. Your thoughts are flexible and can create the truth you want. Your body is honest and reacts like that. If you learn to pay attention to the signals of your body, you learn about your inner truth, you learn about your restrictions, your blocks and your boundaries.

In 1975, in *Your Body Speaks its Mind*, Stanley Keleman states that

'We do not have bodies; we ARE our bodies. Emotional reality and biological ground are the same and cannot, in any way, be separated or distinguished. By maintaining contact with our bodily experiences as the source of our self-referral, we develop a sureness, a faith and pleasurable in the forming of our lives'.

To be connected with the body brings calm, brings safety and security. It has its own pace though. It demands time, sensitivity and compassion. It slows you down.

5.3 Pure listening

In a conversation we tend to spend most of the time when someone is speaking, planning what we're going to say, evaluating it, trying to come up with our opinions, or controlling the situation. We have opinions, we want to be heard, we want to meet the other in our disagreement, our questions, all in order to feel ourselves. Listening and unconditionally receiving what the other expresses, is not always easy, it's letting go of control. And yet it's only when we can let go of that control that we open up to the real purity of connecting, of loving. We can't see or understand someone in the moments that we are trying to control what they are saying or trying to impress them with what we are saying. There's no space for that person to just unfold and be who he or she is.

Listening and unconditionally receiving what someone else expresses, is an expression of love. When we're fully in that listening presence, when there's that pure quality of receptivity, we become presence itself. The

boundary of inner and outer dissolves and we become a spacious field of awareness, of being. When we're in that open presence we can really respond to the life that's here. When we are truly listened to, we feel connected. When we're not listened to, we feel separate.

The more we listen, the more we understand, the less we fear

The less we fear, the more we trust.

The more we trust, the more love can flow.

*'Isn't it true
that to get to know the beauty and majesty of a tree
You have to be quiet
and rest in the shade of that tree?'*

(Tara Brach)

5.4 Yoga nidra

Yoga nidra or yogic sleep is a state of consciousness between waking and sleeping. It is practised in the savasana posture, lying on the floor on your back with an absence of any impressions. Most yoga classes end in savasana, but yoga nidra is also an autonomous practice in the yoga philosophy.

In this position your body is motionless and your mind is alert and calm at the same time. Your body comes to rest and can release any tension, and your mind becomes clear.

In a yoga nidra class a voice leads you through the different phases of the practice.

It starts with focusing on the senses and the breath and doing a body scan. You observe the different sensations in your body without judging, everything is as it is and that's okay. The voice will give some visual images that help you to connect to unprocessed impressions and to release them. In yoga nidra your body and mind automatically do the work you can't reach with your thinking brain. Your breathing and heart rate slow down, and getting to total relaxation of body and mind gives your systems the opportunity to release. It can support the healing of f.e. anxiety, depression, burn-out, high blood pressure.

Savasana is also called 'dead body posture' and it symbolizes the death of the ego and the promise of awakening to a greater consciousness within. The fact that doing nothing lies close to dying might be an important reason why we find it so hard to slow down, to surrender to doing nothing. Because we fear death....

'With a still mind you realize your own true nature.'

(Swami Satyananda Saraswati)

6. NONDUALISM

6.1 Buddhism, Fenner and Zöllner

Of course in Buddhism I've found a lot of 'doing nothing'. The way to enlightenment requires meditation, letting go of thoughts, humbleness and loving kindness, and these all have to do with 'doing nothing' as I have researched it. However important and inspiring Buddhism is, for my personal process and my work as a therapist I was also looking for practical tools to use in my daily western life. Because you need some dualism to describe nondualism there are different options. Buddhist philosopher Ken Wilber to me has made a good attempt:

"Every experience you have is already nondual, whether you realize it or not. So it is not necessary for you to change your state of consciousness in order to discover this nonduality. Any state of consciousness you have will do just fine, because nonduality is fully present in each state... recognition is the point. Recognition of what always already is the case. Change of state is useless, a distraction... subject and object are actually one and you simply need to recognize this... you already have everything in your consciousness that is required".

I've found the work of Peter Fenner a great help in the combining of Eastern spirituality with Western psychology. Being a Tibetan monk for nine years and now an author and teacher of nondualism around

the world he gives fresh and contemporary examples and exercises, although for the western mind some of his theory seems truly paradoxical.

In the Netherlands there's the Art of Life Centre of spiritual teacher Alexander Zöllner. He studied with Fenner and has a lot of exercises in his Handboek Non-duale coaching en therapie and website artoflife.nu

From both writers I have drawn content for this, and the next chapters.

6.2 Nonduality – the human experience

Body and mind, man and woman, good and evil, life and death: these contradictions are all illusions. At least, that's how non-dualism teaches. Nonduality is indivisible and unconstructed. In nondual awareness there is nothing to think about, nothing needs to be done or said. We are being no one, going nowhere. Pure awareness can't be divided because there is nothing in it. We can't talk about things being inside awareness because there is nothing outside of it.

Nondual awareness is about doing nothing: nothing needs to be done, nowhere, not ever. Everything is perfect as it is, nothing needs fixing and nothing needs to change. For humans in the 21st century this is a very hard concept to grasp. Our brain, our neo-cortex wants to understand, to analyse, to fathom. It wants to push forward, it wants to expand, it wants to differentiate, it wants to separate. The following example really made me get the idea of nondualism: A tree grows, and there is not someone or something inside it that does this, it is nature in motion. Everything, including us humans, is connected, is part of one big organism called nature. You read this paper, and there is not someone inside you that does this, it is nature in motion. Or is it....?

If a tree would have a sense of self (an ego) and intellect it would think: I am growing my leaves, I am moving in the wind, I have decided to stand here. But why am I not standing over there? That's a much better place, look at that tree, standing in the sunlight. I want to be there. I am not worthy, I am depressed, I need therapy!

It is the human experience that you are a separate being, separate from other human beings, separate from the rest of nature. It is our sense of self (our ego) that creates this experience. In a child it is developed around the age of 1,5 year. Then you recognise yourself in the mirror: 'that's me!' The individuation phase. The idea emerges that you are the actor of your actions.

The nondualistic perspective on therapy is that a client doesn't need to become whole because he/she already is. The therapy is a journey to the realisation hereof. The work is about allowing all feelings, thoughts and impulses and integrate them in our consciousness and in our daily life.

6.3 Addictive busyness

One of the characteristics of contemporary Western culture is a need to be active and busy. Out of restlessness, discomfort, guilt, or merely habit, we're continually creating projects: material projects, relationship projects, self-improvement projects, creative projects, and of course: the enlightenment project. There are strong cultural judgements to simply being in a relaxed unproductive fulfilment. If we are troubled by our feelings or life circumstances we're conditioned to respond by trying to do something about it. Our actions don't even need to be productive, sometimes anything will do, anything that keeps us distracted from our feelings and thoughts. In the absence of interesting stimuli, we doodle, sleep, have sex, watch TV, or even trace the hairline cracks on the wall with our eyes just to keep busy.

Obsessive busyness is an obstacle to the unconditioned awareness of nonduality (which needs nothing and is already fulfilled) because it is always focused on achieving some future outcome. Nondual practice invites us to let go of all effort and struggle, and experience unsurpassable peace in this very moment.

"Since effort -which creates causes and effects, whether positive or negative- is unnecessary, immerse yourself in genuine being, resting naturally with nothing needing to be done.

The expanse of spontaneous presence entails no deliberate effort, no acceptance or rejection.

From now on make no effort, since phenomena are already what they are.

(Dzogchen yogi Longchenpa)

This doesn't mean we need to become inactive, sitting passively at home, not communicating. It means we are free of all compulsion; there is nothing we need to do or not do.

Let's reveal our habitual tendency to do, and open up the possibility of simply being present to what is, without needing to move incessantly toward a self-prescribed goal. Let's release our reactive emotions by practicing unconditioned awareness. In unconditioned awareness there is nothing to do, we are part of the whole, we are complete, we don't need anything.

Let's liberate ourselves without escaping and without renouncing anything. There's nothing else we need to be and nowhere else we need to go.

6.4 Paradoxes and ego

Non-duality is not an object, it has no beginning and no end, so we can't really say anything about it. At the same time it is so all-encompassing and lies at the basis of everything and therefore cannot be denied. It exists because it does not exist. This is incomprehensible to dual thinking. Nonduality is a world of paradoxes. We live in a dual world and we need some duality to stay grounded in our attempts to grasp the essence of nonduality.

Non-duality sees ego as an illusion and any attempt to change the ego is therefore also illusory. But the ego seems to be in the way of understanding our true nature. Paradoxically we need some ego to rise above the ego, to rise above: "inner development is impossible because everything is as it is". In fact, we need a solid ego structure to allow the core truths about our existence to enter into our lives. We need guidance in clearing the obstacles that obstruct the view of that truth.

6.5 Radiant Mind

Nonduality is a reference, a state of being. It does not tell you what to do, or not to do. There is no doer, everything happens as it happens, it is nature in motion, the universe in action. We are one, energy in motion. Everything is one energy in motion.

Non-duality shows that when our mental acuity and desire for control decrease, our lives become more natural, spontaneous, creative and effortless. The nondual approach opens up the possibility of liberating disturbing thoughts and feelings by doing nothing, "leaving what is, just as it is".

Peter Fenner created the Radiant Mind course, designed to access and deepen the highest possible spiritual experience (unconditioned awareness) and how to share it with others. He states that unconditioned awareness is the only experience to satisfy all our needs, simply because in unconditioned awareness we don't need anything, we're complete and fulfilled exactly as we are. Through these brief moments of unconditioned awareness we can experience total fulfilment in the midst of our conditioned existence. It cannot exclude thoughts, feelings and perceptions, because it includes all there is, and so it is not separate from our daily dualistic experience. Fenner focuses on integrating this experience in the totality of our lives. Fenner drew his knowledge from Prajnaparamita (perfect wisdom), Zen, Madhyamaka (the Middle Way), Mahamudra (universal embrace), and a lot from Dzogchen (complete fulfilment). The practices of Radiant Mind include a.o. exercises of meditation, dissolving fixations, living in the here and now, exploring openness, integration of discomfort and pleasure. And: increasing the capacity for non-action! This is what had my main interest in reading his work.

*Empty oneself more and more
Finally you reach no action
Where there is no action
Nothing is left undone*

(Lao Tzu)

7. DOING NOTHING AS A HEALING PROCESS, AN INNER JOURNEY

Slowing down and doing nothing at times has helped me greatly to get to know myself on a deeper level and has brought more sensitivity, space and accuracy in my sessions with clients. It is not easy, but very rewarding and in my experience the more often you create space for it, the easier it gets.

There are lots of practices to do when wanting to slow down and do nothing. Both Fenner and Zöllner give a lot of them in their publications. I've chosen the ones that I think are the most meaningful in the story that I am telling here and that have been of value to me personally. Simplicity, clarity and nature are important aspects.

7.1 Breathing

Breath and the beating of the heart are the most obvious examples of the pulsation of life in a human body. With breath we connect ourselves to all other living beings. We emit and emanate substances that other living beings emit and emanate. Breath is the first thing we do when we are born and after our last breath our life is finished. Like the rising and setting of the sun and moon, the changing of the seasons, the waves of the ocean, sleeping and waking, it is part of the rhythms of nature, of life on this planet.

From personal experience and from working with clients I know that breath is of vital importance when we want to slow down our activities and expand our consciousness. All movement exercises have to be combined with breathing to get the full benefit from it. There are thousands of breathing exercises, I will limit myself to just two examples that directly link to doing nothing.

The first one starts with counting breaths. When you count your breaths from 1-10, or mentally say 'in' and 'out' you bring your focus on the breath and your body and take it away from thinking. It slows you down and relaxes the mind. Counting takes up space in your verbal working memory so it's harder for other verbal thoughts to distract you while you're doing it. After a while you might not need to count any longer to just keep your focus on the breath, or on the energy around you.

The second one is one of the first exercises of the Wim Hof Method. Wim Hof is a Dutch trainer in cold therapy and breathing techniques. It is a natural method to get an optimal state of body and mind. It is a way to reduce stress levels, to get more energy and a strong immune system. One of his first exercises is to breathe deeply in and out 30 times and after the 30th outbreath keep your lungs empty 1 – 1,5 minute, then breathe in and hold it for 15 seconds. This you repeat three times*. This exercise is really hard when you cannot focus on your body and stay in your head. When you keep your attention to your body, you feel it relax, you feel its aliveness, you feel your energy. Wim Hof: 'Let the body do what the body is capable of doing, don't interfere!'

* <https://youtu.be/tybOi4hjZFQ>

7.2 Meditation – just sitting

Meditation is a pause in activity and a reduction of thinking, an exploration of what else is there to be lived, except for doing and thinking. Buddhism suggests that detaching from daily concerns and spending time in simple reflection and contemplation are essential to health, sanity and personal growth. I fully subscribe to this. But it is not easy. It is hard to welcome anything that is there, to welcome your thoughts of what to have for dinner, of who to call, the colour of your socks. Thinking is what occupies most people most of the time. Meditation is focusing on diminishing thought, 'awakening from thought' as Eckhart Tolle aptly calls it *1. It is training yourself to create an awareness in which you invite your thoughts to become more modest and humble, to create space for being, to go inward, connect to your core and from there go outward and be in the world. It is focusing on your senses, your breathing, your body. Simply sit down for 15 minutes or longer, doing nothing.

Or do a 10-day Vipassana course. Ten days of just sitting, focusing the mind on the breath and other physical phenomena, ten hours per day. No talking, no reading, writing or listening to music, no sexual activity, no praying or chanting, no looking in the eyes of your fellow meditators. Ten days for your inner process, calming your brain, connecting to your body, balancing your cravings and aversions, discovering your core. I was impressed by a documentary on Vipassana courses in the Tihar jail in New Delhi, India: Doing Time, Doing Vipassana *2.

Film director David Lynch (creator of dark, surrealistic movies f.e. Twin Peaks) first had zero interest in meditation, he wasn't even curious, it sounded like a waste of time to him. But he was full of fears, felt depressed and angry. From 1973 he practices Transcendental Meditation, twenty minutes, twice a day. His first mantra meditation felt to him like he stepped into an elevator and the cable was cut:

"Boom! I fell into bliss. Pure bliss! Meditation takes you to pure consciousness. And it is familiar; it is you! Intuition increases, the pleasure of life grows, negativity recedes."

From 1977 he became very successful with his films. He'd found a way to transform his anxiety into art.

*1 <https://dai.ly/x2pycrk>

*2 <https://youtu.be/WkxSyy5R1sg>

7.3 Slow walk

Doing nothing starts with slowing down. You can apply this to simple everyday activities like walking. Usually we walk from A to B in a brisk pace, mainly focusing on B, and how quickly we can get there. Strolling, hiking, wandering, racing, running, pilgrimizing, marching, pacing, sauntering; these all have their own dynamic and pace.

But walking can also be a goal in itself. Slowing down body and mind by walking slowly is a good way to perceive your surroundings and your patterns in a new way. Instead of focusing on the place you need to go, you perceive the here and now much stronger, you displace yourself from your daily routines, and connect with your body. Slow walking in the city gives you the sensation of the fast pace of the city life, of traffic, of noise, of people rushing from A to B, of time running short, of speed. When doing it in nature it might give you a feeling of perceiving the surroundings much more intense, of a natural space that is much wider and a natural time that is much less defined.

Flemish choreographer Anna Teresa de Keersmaecker organised a slow walk as an art project through the city of Brussels in 2016, walking from three points to the Grand Place at a very slow pace, with 3 large groups of voluntary participants*. The Slow Walk set itself against the hectic, high rhythm of the city by deliberately slowing down the pace at which we move. It was an invitation to slow down body and mind and experience the city and its inhabitants from a new perspective. De Keersmaecker wanted to make an attempt to "pause" at the city, to reabsorb it into ourselves, as it were, through the most basic form of movement imaginable: the walking.

* https://youtu.be/nUWZ1_zmrig

7.4 Pure listening

Pure listening neither encourages nor subverts another persons' communication. We don't need the conversation to continue or stop; we don't need to understand it conceptually. We listen without projecting or interpreting, without anticipating what someone is going to say next, without attempting to reconstruct or interpret their experience for them. We don't need them to complete what they are saying. We're completely satisfied with the communication exactly as it is. We're just listening, being purely present to what's there. Pure listening is not the same as empathy. In empathic listening, we're interested, attentive, consciously available and actively contributing our own experience. Pure listening changes the structure of what the other person is saying because they are talking into an awareness that is not conditioned, and they aren't receiving a conditioned response. In fact, they are talking into nothing. When constructions are neither encouraged nor discouraged, they tend to dissolve by themselves. And when we listen from nothing, we hear everything! For my personal experience with pure listening, see chapter 3. Pure listening you can do as an exercise but it has a quality that we can bring to all our interactions.

7.5 Silence

We are attached to speaking, we tend to forget that silence can be as potent as dialogue. Silence can create space, it can create connection, it can work as an allowance to get to feelings, it can decondition...

You can practice silence by yourself by just sitting, staring out the window. Paradoxically the point of staring out the window is not to find out what is going on outside, but to connect to what is happening inside, to listen to your slower and more quiet self, to what you are feeling on deeper levels.

Silence can be a powerful tool. When asked for your opinion on something take a breath and a moment, look inside yourself a little longer than usual and see if you may not be as certain as of your first thoughts suggested. Try to respond from a 'relative space of not knowing'.

Respect your inner silence, even though it might change the dynamic of the situation you are in. Don't push it to the point where it gets heavy, just explore the possibilities that it might bring.

7.6 Show me nothing

In the Rinzai tradition of Zen one of the first insight puzzles is the Mu koan. Mu means nothing. The challenge is to show nothing. How do you show someone nothing, without giving them the idea that nothing means that something is absent or missing? How do you express 'doing nothing' with your body? This connects to the Zero state in Dutch mime, see chapter 2.

7.7 The café exercise

I like this exercise because you can only do in a public space, surrounded by people who do their everyday stuff. It doesn't need any sacred setting or quiet space.

Go to a café, find a seat and order a drink. Don't start a conversation, don't read a magazine, don't bring your phone. You stay put, and after finishing your drink stay put, just relax and be there. Only when you get the feeling you could stay for a long time, you can leave. This exercise gives you the feeling of not needing to do anything and of your natural timing. It's confronting but it's also a fun exercise to do. (P. Fenner, Radiant Mind, p84-85).

7.8 Inquiry

Inquiry is an effective and structured method of exploring the articulated structures of thoughts and feelings with the aim of exploring their essence. It helps to discover deeper beliefs that underlie our behaviour. A very effective form of inquiry is the repetitive question. The inquirer keeps repeating the same question after listening to each answer. As a result, the inquiry remains strictly focused on that one question and the answer is becoming more and more profound and honest.

8. DOING NOTHING IN THERAPEUTIC SESSIONS

Therapists usually are willing to do anything for their clients to heal, so a major trap is to do the work for them. Most of us (and me definitely before I started this study!) tend to do too much. Also in Core Energetics there's a lot of intense bodywork, a lot of expression of emotions. I tended to focus on that, on the hard work. In studying this theme I've learned there are a lot of healing qualities to be found in 'just' being present, in witnessing the clients' process, in being silent together to let something sink in, or feelings coming up. In slow movements to check tension and connecting to the body, in listening to the clients and seeing them in everything that they are. No more, no less.

I've collected two quotes from teachers during the training that have to do with doing nothing:

'Very often when you don't know what to do, the client is resting. And needing that rest'.

'Sometimes when you do nothing you can help your client big time. Because then he/she doesn't need to do anything either and can start feeling'.

These quotes have been of great value to me because they gave me consciousness of what our factual job as a therapist is, namely creating a safe space and offer tools to the clients to find their wholeness; guiding them to find their own way to acceptance and integration.

8.1 Attuning

At the beginning of a session it is important for the client to create pace and space. Slowing down the pace of getting to your office, rushing through traffic. Space for arriving, for tuning in to the here of your office and the now of the beginning of the session. Tuning in with you, the therapist, and most importantly with themselves, their mind, their emotions and their body. The only thing you need to do here is to create this space and pace, inviting the client into this attunement and being receptive to whatever the session will bring.

8.2 Breath

Breathing is another important tool, in chapter 7 I've mentioned the importance of using breath and gave some exercises. Simply having the client breathe deeply, either lying on the floor or with accompanying movements standing up and finding a relaxed flow in doing that, will reduce thought, bring connection to the body and will often bring up feelings that can thus be processed.

8.3 Silence

In chapter 7 I've also already mentioned the importance of silence. A shared silence can be very reassuring, even empowering. It allows for rest, for contemplation, for allowing feelings and for integration.

8.4 Tolerating feelings

In Core Energetics we welcome the expression of feelings. One step before this expression is the mere tolerance of feelings, simply acknowledging and allowing them. Very often clients have learned to keep feelings in, hold them back, and lost the connection with them. For these clients allowing their feelings to come up and to get to know them is already a huge accomplishment. The therapist only needs to hold space for this, witness it, acknowledge and welcome the feelings.

8.5 The sacred mirror

Psychotherapist and Nobel Peace prize winner Carl Rogers identified in 1980 three healing qualities that a therapist provides: genuineness, unconditional positive regard and empathy. By genuineness he meant the capacity for a therapist to be transparent to the client, free of a professional front or personal façade. He defined empathy as a process of being at home in the private perceptual world of the other. He acknowledged a spiritual dimension to his work with people:

"I find that when I am closest to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow in touch with the unknown in me... whatever I do seems to be full of healing. Then, simply my presence is releasing and helpful to the other. There is nothing I can do to force this experience, but when I can relax and be close to the transcendental core of me... it seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. Our relationship transcends itself and becomes a part of something larger. Profound growth and healing and energy are present."

This awareness or presence is the core of sacred mirroring. John Prendergast writes about this sacred mirror in his article: *The Sacred Mirror: Being Together*.

How to become a sacred mirror for your client? Paradoxically, the effort to become a sacred mirror takes one further from it. It happens of its own, it is like trying to make the sun rise, it is like standing in your house and asking to get home. You are already there! It is a matter of nonmental understanding, a heart perception, which in turn allows a deep letting go. It is being with whatever arises rather than to analyse transference. Open acceptance stimulates authentic transformation.

For the client this sacred mirror can feel unsettling at first, but when they allow it and get into it, usually they feel it has a very natural quality. For both therapist and client, it brings the feeling of intimacy and awareness of the resistance toward such contact. This being together is a shared being with what arises, it is a shared presence. For the therapist this requires being at ease with oneself without the safety of the therapeutic identity. It requires a deep trust in oneself to be so open. For the client entering this state is soft but can also be potentially provocative or frightening. It is important to rely on intuition and common sense as to when and with whom one introduces it.

As we become intimate with this still centre within, we learn that our approach to life becomes increasingly less problematic as we accept everything what comes and allow what goes, grounded in something that feels solid in our core. Clients come to see that they are not problem-holders and gradually find a way to relate to their inner and outer lives with more compassionate acceptance and clarity. Therapists discover that they are not problem-solvers but rather collaborative co-explorers. Therapy becomes less about fixing imagined problems and more of an exploration into experiential truth, a collaborative journey into wholeness.

If this paper would have had a statement it would be the importance in body psychotherapy of creating space for breath, silence and the mere tolerating of feelings. For the therapist to refrain from the desire to fix the client but find the importance and effectiveness of being present, being the sacred mirror. The importance of bringing some nondual qualities in our work, the importance of doing nothing.

9. COLLEAGUES' EXPERIENCES

During this 1,5 year study I have researched and discussed the topic of doing nothing with family, friends and colleagues. I've had great conversations, questions, suggestions and remarks that have encouraged me to continue even when I no longer saw the forest for the trees at times. In general, the reactions were very positive, curious and excited. It gave me the feeling it wasn't only my personal fascination but that there was a broader interest. Hereunder I will give some experiences with doing nothing from colleagues. I have changed their names, so they'll remain anonymous.

9.1 Miriam, Core therapist

Miriam talks about a specific session with a client: "It was one of my first clients. We had done an attachment exercise, both lying on the floor. We laid side by side on the floor, looking up at the clouds, through a little window. I asked her to focus on her breath and her body touching the floor. For a long time, we just breathed

together and then we both felt as if we were spread out over the floor, as if we were one with the clouds, with each other, fused with everything around us. We shared this feeling but were not talking much. We were becoming one shapeless puddle on the floor.

We didn't dare to break it, continued breathing, both saying: this is very special. I think we've been lying like this for half an hour. The sun and the clouds that passed by, it had something magical, it was super-spiritual. We both felt the need to hold this unity that we felt. Nothing had to be said or done, it was just lying there on the ground. It was very quiet. It was perfect. It was really 'being', we were breathing creatures. Just air, that's what we were.

She has been with me for about two years and in our last session I asked her what the important moments in her therapy were. She mentioned this experience.

Very special. For me it was the same, I will never forget it."

9.2 Stella, Core therapist

Stella also talks about a specific session with a client: "I had a client who was quite confused and kept talking, telling different versions of his story. It kept him really stuck in his head and I felt I was losing my grounding. So I asked him to stop talking, just breathe and look at the flowers in my office, staying in the here and now. He calmed down immediately and started to cry. I felt quiet and just connected to him, with an open heart. Then I asked him to slowly shift his gaze towards me. No movement, no talking, just breathing and gazing. It made him go beyond his story and start feeling. He left my office calm and focused. For me personally this was a very important experience, my first impulse is always to bring in an exercise, an intervention. Now I know this is to avoid the inner voice telling me 'you don't know what to do, you're not able to do this' etcetera, making me hard and detached. Now I stayed soft and open and it was easy to connect with him, quite remarkable!"

9.3 Lukas, Core therapist

Lukas talks about three things that he encounters in his sessions with clients when it comes to doing nothing:

1. Presence on a deeper level, giving space to the client. 'It is about feeling a strong presence and at the same time stepping back to create space for the client, and the universe to work. I experience myself more as a tool, I follow the flow of energy. I can more easily follow my impulses; it is like a dance of energy. It doesn't always happen but when it does it feels healing for the client but also for me. It's like alchemy'.
2. Stop responding. 'You have to be careful not to create unsafety, but sometimes I just stop responding to the client's defense. It is a risk to take away the usual and known response and see what happens. I just stop, do nothing and stay present'.
3. Not knowing what to do. 'Sometimes when I don't know what to do in a session I feel panic and tend to force myself into an intervention. The only right thing to do then is to stop yourself and wait for a more truthful impulse. It takes courage'.

9.4 Louise, Core therapist who volunteers in a hospice

Louise sits for approximately 2 hours with a person who is going to die, twice per week: "You're sitting there and there is nothing to do. What happens is that you open your awareness and your heart, that's all you can do. It's open awareness with no agenda whatsoever, not looking for patterns, not looking for triggers, not looking for choices, and behavioural patterns, not looking for where the energy's stuck. Just surrendering I guess, I guess that's all there is. Letting go. I sometimes see them move into a place of deep acceptance, deep love, and everything is fine, it brings them so much peace, and resolution and all I do is just sit there.

Sitting with a dying person makes me feel my own feelings of helplessness and sadness.

And it integrates me, it makes me connect to this open awareness, this expansiveness. There's not an 'I' in it, more a 'not knowing', just open to whatever happens, giving up the illusion of control. It makes me feel grateful, even for the stuff that I can't resolve. It's not about resolving anymore, just about accepting, dropping into the heart, into love.

The illusion of separateness falls away when I sit with these people that are dying. It brings humbleness and the truth of my own death coming. I am no different, I will also be dying some day. Remembering my own death makes me more alive."

9.5 Nina, practitioner of the Andean Mystical Tradition

The core of the indigenous tradition of the Andean Mysticism is the communion with Pachamama (Mother Earth) and the overcoming of the divide between the individual and nature. Nina talks about one of the times she went into nature: "I am going to sit under a tree in the woods for four hours. I have demarcated a piece of about 4 square meters. I'll stay here. To relax. That's pretty difficult. Restlessness. Boredom. All my sandwiches are gone within half an hour. So they won't distract me anymore. I'm trying to find sounds in the distance. I focus on the treetops. Look at them better. See that they move slightly in a breeze. I feel cold. Hear sounds closer. Animals? Wind? My attention goes to the roots of the tree. Pretty deep. I wonder if the tree wants to tell me something.... I can't tell. I'll try again.... No, still not. Thoughts are coming up about my life with friends and family. They drift off again. Suddenly I get a sense of unity, especially with the ground. I am part of this land, part of this woodland. I don't think, I don't push, I don't focus, I feel peace. I rest. I feel. I am."

9.6 Janne, Core therapist and yoga teacher

Janne talks about her sessions with clients. "I tend to do too much, worry too much and then go into resistance towards my own work. Yet, doing nothing before a session helps me to empty myself. Then the calm settles in, and curiosity and inspiration come.

That is the same during a session. If I can remember to sit back when pressure inside me is building, I can resolve to release this "pressure on myself to do" and just open up. This seems to open space for the client as well. He/she can then sink deeper. We sit together in stillness in a pause. Their next sentence then starts often with "Actually, you know....", and a new perspective, a deeper truth, comes bubbling to the surface. My supervisor helps me with my fears and pressures by reminding me that I am not the doer of healing, but a facilitator for the greater unknown to come in and work its wonders. My ego is time and again wagging its tail to perform, to rescue or save souls and shine in that task. But then it is about me. Doing nothing makes it about the client."

9.7 Josefien, Core therapist and healer

Josefien talks about the emptiness inside of her. "From a very early age I felt an emptiness, a part of me that needed (as I know now) recognition and support, but my parents couldn't accommodate me in this. So I often felt alone and just was in my room doing nothing, sitting on my couch. When I got older I still kept these lengthy periods of doing nothing but they got less dark. I had a cat and she was always laying with an open heart on my physical heart, it was really good to feel her love and I felt no longer alone. Even later, I found ways to fill the emptiness by learning about energy, spirituality and communicating about my sensitive qualities. Now I use these qualities in my work as a therapist and healer."

9.8 Froukje, Core and PSEN (Psycho Energetics) therapist

PSEN is a deepening and awakening process through the embodied and mindful presence of the practitioner which accelerates and amplifies the practitioners' professional development, as well as their clients' personal healing and which leads to growth and transformation.

Froukje talks about working with her clients: "Together with the client I create a container in which things happen on deeper levels that you then try to get conscious. It's a kind of fishing. You have to slow down, be really grounded. It seems like a paradox but I stay totally attuned to the client and at the same time keep my autonomy. By being in deep connection with myself I can deeply connect to the other. It is like a meditation together. Sometimes I just feel my heart getting quite big and full of love. The other day I saw myself as a baby lying on the dresser, which connected to a childhood trauma of the client. By reliving its emotions, this experience could melt and be integrated."

10. DOING NOTHING IN THE ARTS

Art has been an important reference for me for over 40 years, I have been studying and working in art since I left high school, it has made me grow, it has made me find my talents and my freedom, it has shaped my way of looking at the world. Since I am involved with Core Energetics I have been able to fill in the gaps that I sensed in my life, but could not grasp before. More and more I feel confident, sensitive and whole. This brings more calmness, more fun and more satisfaction in the things I do. These qualities are a part of me now and I also bring them into my artwork. Hereunder I am mentioning five art works related to the subject of doing nothing that have brought me new insights both in art and in therapy sessions.

9.1 Pieter Post – De Schildpad – niets doen is hard werken

(Eng: The Turtle – doing nothing is a tough job)

Pieter Post is a comedian and has been performing in the streets for years. For his latest show he wanted to challenge himself and his audience. "I wanted to make something about doing nothing because it's so hard for me to do. The starting point of doing nothing doesn't give you an action and in street shows usually you have to use all your jokes and tricks to keep your audience engaged. If they don't like what you do, they can just leave to find something they like better. This time I didn't want any action. In the preparations I have sat and walked a lot. It was the weirdest process ever, I tried to do nothing. To do nothing to get to the core of doing nothing. I walked a lot in nature, did a lot in silence."

So he begins his show with a statement of Oscar Wilde:

'To do nothing at all is the most difficult thing in the world. And the most intellectual'.

He wishes the audience "strength" and starts his performance. He challenges them to stay by saying that he expects that a large number of spectators won't be able to sit it out until the end... and he quotes about slowing down, doing nothing from the big pile of books that he has collected on this subject. Then with the audience he watches his turtle walk the distance to his food bowl at the end of the stage, app 8-10 meters away. He says: "I could make it more exciting for you, but I won't". Right before the end, he rewards the people that stayed with a special effect that the turtle barely survives before it jumps through a burning hoop into his nice bed of lettuce.

9.2 Schwalbe – Op Eigen Kracht

In a former power plant mime theatre company Schwalbe performed Op Eigen Kracht (Under its own Steam) in 2010. In the creation process they explored energy in all possible forms. It gave rise to discussions about melting ice caps and apocalyptic scenarios for the future, about the romantic longing for a more earthly existence and the addictive ease of comfort. All these big questions were reduced to one simple act: cycling. During their performance of more than one hour this was the only thing they were doing: cycling on exercise machines. With their cycling they generated the electricity for the big theatre lamp that made visible for the audience what they were doing. No acting, no text, no plot, no conflict, defying all the laws of theatre. Once I got over my irritation, my judgements and expectations I found it fascinating to perceive their performance. I started to look deeper, opening up to follow what was happening to them, how their bodies and movements changed, how they got tired how they started sweating. It opened me up.

<https://youtu.be/ZYvSdk9b7DI>

9.3 Mark Rothko - Monochromes

Rothko was an American painter of Lithuanian-Jewish decent. Before WWII he painted figuratively. After the terrible atrocities of the war he felt he had nothing more to say so he painted his (nearly) monochromes. These paintings have a very emotional impact on a lot of people. Dutch writer Joost Zwagerman described it as a "merging into an exalted silence. An escape from yourself in sublime tranquility".

I believe Rothko's work could also feel as a refuge.

<https://www.volkskrant.nl/es-b78c90ea0>

9.4 John Cage - 4'33"

Influenced by Zen Buddhism, composer John Cage created 4'33" in 1952, in his own opinion his most important work. It is composed for any instrument or combination of instruments, and the score instructs the performer(s) to not play their instrument(s) during the entire duration of the piece that consists of three movements. It consists of the sounds of the environment that the audience hears while it is performed, although it is commonly perceived as "four minutes thirty-three seconds of silence". The title of the piece refers to the total length in minutes and seconds of the first public performance.

The magic of this piece is what happens to your hearing when you don't hear what you expect to hear.

<https://youtu.be/JTEFKFiXSx4>

9.5 Marina Abramovic - The Artist is Present

Performance artist Marina Abramovic did an endurance performance of 3 months in MOMA in New York in 2010. For 90 days, 6 days a week, 8 hours per day she sat in the museum, with in total approximately 1000 museum visitors sitting in front of her, just looking them in the eyes. She had trained herself not to move and not needing to use the bathroom for 8 hours. "I'm interested in how far you can push the energy of the human body, how far you can go, and then see that our energy is almost limitless".

One visitor described sitting with Marina Abramovic as “a transforming experience – it’s luminous, it’s uplifting, it has many layers, but it always comes back to being present, breathing, maintaining eye contact.”

To me it was striking that so much happens when nothing is happening.

The chair in front of Abramovic was always occupied, and there were continuous lines of people waiting to sit in it. “It was a complete surprise...this enormous need of humans to actually have contact”’ Abramovic commented.

Couldn’t we say the same things about Core Energetics Therapy?

<https://youtu.be/-OG8dvrtw5s>
1.10’12” – 1.15’04”

11. CONCLUSION

I don’t know if there is a conclusion to what I have written. There is no end to it. I will just keep discovering, keep learning and growing. And writing about it.

I have struggled to find a beginning and an end with a coherent path connecting. I have read many books and articles, got lost in what I wanted to say, so many things seemed to be important, seemed to have to be part of it. In the end I chose to follow my intuition and preferences and for what is logical and of importance to me, hoping it will be received as such. I’ve found different perspectives on doing nothing, it has been a journey on a winding road, with lots of possible sideways. And I am not at the end of this road, it will continue for a while longer, and I will enjoy it. I’ve found a lot of associated topics that were very interesting and it was difficult to keep focusing on ‘doing nothing’. To appease my tendency to collect I’ve made a list of topics that I could write another paper on: time, death, walking, breath, nature. Maybe one day I will....

I will not work with my clients and in my art projects in nonduality, but allow its influence in my work. I’m already allowing more space, more silence, more ‘just being’ in my sessions. I’ve had some beautiful moments in which clients found their way to allow and acknowledge their feelings and sank deeper into themselves. I will not move away from movement, from touch, from psychosomatic teaching, from challenge and discomfort for the client, from block, bataka and roller, but since my preoccupation with doing nothing my sessions got more gentleness and more sensitivity.

The theme of my next art project is a comparison of human and plant growth, it is about time, about walking a labyrinth that we will create in a flower and/or vegetable garden or a forest. It is about slowing down and doing nothing for some time, about connection to yourself, the people around you and the planet that we live on.

I am training myself in doing nothing, getting more and more familiar with the peaceful, unlimited space and the effect it has on my connection with myself and others, on the way I experience my life.

Like the Inuit have a lot of words for the different appearances of ‘snow’, I believe ‘doing nothing’ has a lot of different aspects, different colours which I am only starting to grasp. I believe however that for the future of humanity this could be of importance, we simply need to expand our consciousness, away from stress, our demanding work ethics, our materialism and other unhealthy habits. We have to find ways to end limitless economic growth, and aim to end separateness in all its manifestations.

Doing nothing could maybe open the way to another way of growing, it could stimulate the search for connection, for community and wholeness, the awareness of the fact that we are all one, part of one organism: this planet.

During writing this paper I have struggled with my own impulses of liking so many things, collecting a lot of material and sometimes drowning in it. I found that to write about doing nothing it is important to start with practicing doing nothing. A very valuable lesson.

It is remarkable that while finishing this paper the world is forced to slow down by the Corona virus. People are forced to let go of their routines, governments take drastic measurements to limit the spread, public events are cancelled, schools are closing, even borders might close. It is surrealistic, bizarre and scary. On the other hand, it is an opportunity to show flexibility and creativity, and the strength of community: in Italy people are singing to each other from their balconies, in Spain and Portugal people randomly join in rounds of

applause for the health care workers that take risks for their own health and work overtime. This morning I was standing before the empty toilet paper section in the supermarket with some total strangers, keeping a respectful distance from each other and joking about the creative solutions we could think of how to live without toilet paper. Rutger Bregman is proving right: most people are virtuous. I trust we will overcome this crisis one way or another.

I want to thank my advisor Erena Bramos, Core colleagues Kate Montague, Carolyn Kubena and Marjolein van Belle and art colleague Kirsten Roosendaal for their support and critiques. And everyone else who has contributed and inspired me in this process. Working on this paper has brought me to a deeper level in my personal journey.

I am very grateful for this.

I hope it will bring some insight and/or inspiration to everyone who reads it.

EPILOGUE

Going through my fathers' stuff we've found this poem in the dialect of the Achterhoek, where he and I both were born. I've translated it into English and finish this paper with it:

SOMS ZIT IK ZOMOAR ONDER 'N BOOM

*Soms zit ik zomoar onder 'n boom
En denk ik.
Soms zit ik zomoar onder 'n boom
En denk ik neet.
Ik veul de wind,
Ik heur de veug'le,
Ik zee de loch
En zitte and de kante van 't ingezaejde land,
Waarop de kieften loopt.
Ik vlege in de wiedte
En dichterbiej.
En weer in de wiedte
En weer dichterbiej.
Ik bun 't land,
De veugle
En de loch
En zweve al moar wieter weg.
Dan aodem ik mijzelf wer in
En zitte zomoar onder 'n boom
En denke neet*

SOMETIMES I JUST SIT UNDER A TREE

*Sometimes I just sit under a tree
And think.
Sometimes I just sit under a tree
And think not.
I feel the wind,
I hear the birds,
I see the sky
And sit at the edge of the sown land,
On which the lapwings run.
I'm flying in the distance
And closer.
Again in the distance
Again closer.
I am the land,
The birds
And the sky
And float farther and farther away.
Then I breathe myself back in,
Just sit under a tree
And think not*

(Derk Jan ten Hoopen)

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