

## Proposition Three

### - SINGING-DANCING GENDER RELATIONS AND GROUP HEALTH

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After the onset of dark, if the circumstances are right, men and women gradually gather in a circle in the central village space, men on one side, women on the other. First-comers sit on the few plastic chairs, others settle on mats on the ground. The mood is quiet, even if there is laughter and chatter. One of the women lets her yodelling voice travel out into the night air. Pause. Whilst others are still chatting, she yodels a second time, calling out for a response. It comes as the men begin to play the drums, and individual women reply to the call by beginning to sing, at first in a more reserved manner. As the remaining women join in, singing and clapping, those currently with babies carrying them on their backs, volume and intensities of drumming, singing and clapping increase. This is not just any kind of singing - it's *polyphonic* vocalising. Hearing Baka polyphonies is hearing a composite of beautiful sounds that create bodily vibrations that make you lose yourself, setting the deepest aspects of your bodying presence in motion. Each voice is individual and yet forms part of the overall composition of voices and sounds. All parts contribute more or less equally to the musical fabric, reverberating into the night sky. Each woman has her unique melodic tune, which she sings in response to the intensities felt in and around her; to the presence and sounds of the other women; to the men drumming; to the bodily movements of all participants; to the temperature of the night air; to the wind in the forest trees; to the crackling of a night animal moving through the undergrowth; to the crackling of the fire, if one has been lit. One woman will lead the melody or melodic changes, which are followed by the others, as long as it is pleasing to all. She repeats her song, as it overlaps and loops with those of the other women. The nuances of these dynamics can only be felt in your moving-sens-

ing bodying. It is not a state of trance, but a pulsating force running through all bodily systems at once, creating a sensation of heightened awareness of human physicality. At the same time, it transcends bodily boundaries as you no longer have a fixed and bounded body. You have simply merged with the overlapping socialities of humans, forest plants and animals, the night-time atmosphere, and whichever other qualities you can attune to.

The questions to explore are

*whether we can activate the generative intensities of polyphonic practices, which have literally served the development of humanity, in novel ways? Can or how can generative polyphonies become part of diverse socialities? Can we bring polyphonic vibrations into our conversations with each other? Would this create the connectedness that so many people crave?*

*How would such a change feed forward into economic and political models? How is the generative dynamic linked to ecosystems?*

## Socio-Somatic Polyphonies

### Polyphony

Baka enjoyment of polyphonies means they are making music with several simultaneous lines of melodies that are both independent *and* interdependent. The technical definition of Baka singing is that of a ‘highly integrated, non-hierarchic choral yodelled polyphony, composed of multiple overlapping melodies’.<sup>1</sup> The term *yodelling* refers to a singing style alternating between head and chest voice, and gives your ear an idea of the sound qualities emanating through the village space and interweaving out into the forest trees. The polyphonic reverberations are intense sounds, which have a strong sensorial impact on the surrounding listeners, who then feed off the emanations to create their own distinct melodies. The idea is to sing your part, keeping it different from everyone else’s, whilst grounding it in theirs.<sup>2</sup> Each singer listens both to her own line and also to what others are singing, all the

1 Lewis 2014:80

2 Rouget & Buckner 2011:111

while adding improvisations and unexpected sounds. Baka interlocked hocketing polyphonies are not just enchanting, but are socio-politically relevant as 'structural devices inculcating egalitarian values' such as sharing.<sup>3</sup> The polyphonic harmonies prevent any one singer monopolising performances, emphasizing this quality of *independence within interdependence*, of autonomy in connectedness, which is central to the healthy workings of Baka egalitarian social organisation. Sounding and moving together generates and maintains key qualities of social cohesion, harmony, happiness, trust, and reliability.

The Baka term *be* can be translated as dance, but actually it means the combination of song *and* dance, of sound *and* physical movement. Singing and dancing are considered to be one and the same practice in many cultural groups, and the Baka equally do not distinguish between the two. Baka polyphonic singing is not just about audible sounds, but the bodily, physical engagement of the singers. Singers will lean over towards one of their neighbours, better to hear their voice, and thus be able to respond to them musically. This is called 'performative polyphony'.<sup>4</sup> The physical engagement leads to a certain self-effacement, as each separable singer becomes one with the body of singers. This generates a special vibratory state within the group which has been termed 'socio-somatic', as it brings into resonance the 'entire social body'.<sup>5</sup> Generally speaking, *somatic* is another way of saying body or physiology. In comparison to the *body* as seen from the outside, so from a third-person perspective, *somatic* refers to a first-person perspective of the body's internal workings.<sup>6</sup> With regard to Baka and similar Central African hunter-forager groups, somatic is understood not just as referring to body or corporality, but equally to the 'life that animates bodies', and specifically to 'activities that bring the body into resonance'.<sup>7</sup> Creating this resonance, enmeshes senses as much as mind in processes of thinking-perceiving. *Socio-somatic* can then be understood as referring to a first-person perspective of the body's internal workings, not just with reference to one person, but from the group perspective. Socio-somatic means from the viewpoint and co-presence of the entire social body, and includes the excess generated by and shaping the vibratory state. These group bodyings emerge from unbounded potentials, similar to 'relational fields', which are prior to individual or group

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3 Lewis 2013:58

4 Olivier 2007:106

5 Rouget & Buckner 2011:111

6 Hanna 1970

7 Rouget & Buckner 2011:111–112, quoting Bouet, Lortat-Jacob, and Rădulescu 2002:215)

experience.<sup>8</sup> The strong emphasis on life as social and relational, and the intense interweaving of bodiliness, physiology, soma, of human and more-than-human aliveness, of *socio-somatic bodying*, makes Baka activities stand out from similar choral singing practices around the world.<sup>9</sup>

It is limiting to express the intense sensoriality and relational depth of a Baka *be* in words. Semantics cannot do justice or evoke how repetitions and variations of individual female songs create an *ambience*. This is the term for what emerges as an atmosphere of non-linear interdependence, which is at once rigid *and* fluid, stable *and* generative. Neither does the polyphonic music symbolically represent Baka social organisation, as the music at the same time conserves *and* creates egalitarian dynamics.<sup>10</sup> The generative quality is neither sequential nor a question of duration, as sounds and sociality become co-composing, overlapping, folding streams of movement. This type of polyphony and singing-dancing practice has been around for millennia, and with these energies that both repeat *and* vary, enables social continuity *and* change.

### Enchanting the Forest with Sounds

Polyphonic yodelling is one way in which Baka communicate with the forests they live in. Tropical forests have eco-acoustic qualities, similar to that of cathedrals, in which the yodel resonates exceptionally well and can be heard from far away. Given the density and visible impenetrability of rainforests, using sounds is easier and more advantageous than other senses, such as sight.<sup>11</sup> Auditory acuity, meaning the capacity for sharpness of hearing, in tropical forests, is both about adapting perception and the sociality of listening.<sup>12</sup> Forests are systems which are aware of the sounds of human laughter and song, offering their abundant resources in resonance to the type and quality of the human sounds. Forests dislike unhappy sounds like shouting or fighting. As anthropologist and hunter-gatherer specialist Jerome Lewis has

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8 Manning 2013

9 Using the verb form 'bodying', rather than the noun 'body', underlines how the 'body' continually transforms itself and is already not, at the moment when I speak of it, what it was a few seconds ago' Laplantine 2015:13. See also relevant subheading in Proposition One.

10 Lewis 2013:61

11 Feld 2012:10, Lye 2021

12 Feld 2012:xxv

shown through his long-term research with the *Mbendjele*, another Central African group like the Baka, the sounds most likely to enchant and please the forest, causing it to wake up happy and offer its abundance, are those of the forest itself, mimicked by humans and echoed back.<sup>13</sup> This is how *Mbendjele* and similar forest groups understand their polyphonic singing, as *responsive practice*, as echoing, in relation to forest sounds. The human resonances come not as words, but focus on a few vowel sounds, in that they 'consist not of lip or tongue modulations but exclusively of pitch changes expressed in vowels'.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, for the Aka, another group similar to the Baka, the verb meaning 'being happy' has a primary sense of 'giving a response (in a song)'.<sup>15</sup> Music and dance are enchanting and relaxing, and this opening dynamic includes all ecosystemic co-presences, the trees, fungi, mosses, humans, non-human animals and the many other more-than-human beings and qualities. The *musicising*, to use Small's term,<sup>16</sup> humans co-compose with all the surrounding sounds to generate a powerful and enchanting on-going vibrational quality, which both conserves *and* creates.

## Ritualised Gender Roles and Egalitarian Politics

There are many beautiful descriptions of the over 50 types of Baka dances for different ritual and social occasions.<sup>17</sup> Baka dance and sing, for example, in preparation for collecting honey or for having success in the elephant hunt; for communicating with ancestral spirits, or to 'wake up' the forest. Notwithstanding this diversity, the same song-dance can be used either for entertainment or for a ritual purpose. Music is omnipresent and there is high fluidity between every day and ritual practices, one often turning into the other as things proceed. To recall, egalitarian for the Baka means that there is no hierarchical status differentiation other than between age groups and sexes.<sup>18</sup> Continually balancing out female and male power potentials is key to (Baka)

13 (Lewis 2009:252)

14 (Lewis 2009:252), Rouget & Buckner 2011

15 Bahuchet 1985:530. Furthermore, for *Ju/'hoan* groups in Southern Africa, looking for *n/om* (*n/om* being a term for healing power), is always 'the journey of carrying a song to the other' Keeney & Keeney 2013:14.

16 Small 1998

17 See for example Tsuru 1998

18 Woodburn 1982

egalitarianism. This process of manging and balancing female and male energies is most visible during a *be*. In the colourful ethnographic descriptions, what is often neglected is that for a *be*, people get together, women singing, men beating out rhythms – and yet the party doesn't really take off. Women jokingly reproach the men, for the lack of vigour in their drumming, saying it is not loud or strong enough. Men accuse the women that their singing is not powerful and vibrant enough. They tease and complain to each other, insisting that the other side is 'not giving enough', saying they are 'fed up' with the other sex's contribution to the *be* practice.

**The secret of a *be* is that women and men must contribute together,  
co-compose, to make it work.**

Finding the right intensity within this balancing exchange between women and men, between female and male energies is hard work (in ways similar to any relationship). The exchanges of teasing and complaining, which are serious but always humorous, go on for a while. Sometimes the party does still take off, but more often than not, people slowly disappear into the night, into their dwellings, and go to sleep. *Be* only happens in the co-composing powers and interactions of men and women. Only their joint sound and movement contributions result in structuring a 'visceral inter-sexual conversation'<sup>19</sup>, in shaping the beauty and intensities of polyphonic musicking into a highly powerful and erotic dynamic communication, which becomes part of egalitarian politics.

### **Baka Gender Concepts**

Baka infants grow up feeling-hearing their mothers sing so that musicking skills are sensorially learned from an early age on, including tracing into the qualities of shifting-sliding of the infant's fascia. Children have special children's songs and also participate in the gender-specific practices of the adults. As in many cultures, Baka women and men are expected to adhere to distinct gender roles. Becoming a Baka woman is a process shaped also through song and dance. Young girls have musical repertoires around this theme,<sup>20</sup> and polyphonic choral singing is essential to Baka women expressing their female identity and bonding emotionally. In response to my questions around

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19 Finnegan 2013

20 Fürniss 2005

what it means to be a Baka woman, the women in Adjab and other villages along the Ivindo explained that being a Baka woman of course means 'doing a woman's work', gathering foods from the forest, which nowadays includes tending plantations of manioc and other food plants, cooking, and washing clothes. For young girls, giving birth forms a really important aspect of their conceptions of what it is to be a woman.<sup>21</sup> Becoming woman is also becoming *wose na titili*. This translates as 'a woman who weighs', which the women specified as meaning 'to have a heavy heart'. I was surprised at this, and yet, as a woman, I immediately knew what they were talking about. The expression refers to sadness, disappointment and other forms of suffering as a result of betrayal, of verbal or physical abuse, by the women from their Baka men. For example, women may have to prove they have been faithful even whilst the men are known to be having an affair. As a Baka woman you take such grievances into your heart and it can become 'heavy' as you learn to continue your life with those sorrows. Both genders have secret societies, into which you must be initiated, and along the Ivindo there are stories about female circumcision rituals for Baka girls as part of such initiation rites. However, the women in Adjab referred to their female elders in Northern Congo, saying only those women would really still remember these practices from times long ago.

Becoming a Baka man involves, among other things, learning to hunt successfully, and to imitate animal sounds in order to attract game during hunting. Baka use vocal mimicry, meaning to use the human voice to mimic other sounds, in order to deceive the animals and draw them out from the dense forest. When I asked the Baka men, about what it means to become a Baka man, they emphasised that one important aspect of what makes them men is being circumcised. It is debated whether circumcision is a longstanding Baka tradition, or something they only adopted recently to be accepted into the larger societies which they now form part of.<sup>22</sup> Along the Ivindo and in large parts of Central Africa and beyond, not being circumcised is looked down upon. What is particularly poignant is that this applies irrespective of the official religion a man, from any ethnic group, adheres to; whether you are Christian or Muslim, circumcision is tantamount to becoming a man.

Attending a circumcision and initiation for two Baka boys, one nearly a grown man around 18 and the other around 7 years old, was one of those im-

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21 Gallois 2017

22 Fûrniss 2005

memorial experiences along the Ivindo. The whole process went on for several days, with various steps and stages. One of the most important dynamics is when all the women together move through the village, from dwelling site to dwelling site, singing songs with lyrics, which are sometimes merely suggestive but mostly completely lewd. The dynamic is that of eroticism and aggressive playfulness, as part of the ongoing dialogue between male and female energies. The lyrics return to phrases mocking the virility of men, and suggesting that the vagina will always win out over the penis.<sup>23</sup> No amount of academic literature had prepared me for the intense hilarity and raucousness of these dynamics; the way women flaunt their sexuality, taunting the men, conjuring and manifesting energies which become so tangible to be nearly overpowering in their strength and potency. Everything is alive with intertwining erotic playfulness and power. During the final parts of the circumcision festivities, I was permitted to visit the two initiates in the special space they were occupying during the ceremonial activities. Chatting with them, the two boys expressed being both scared and excited about what was happening to them. Later, they were covered in a paste of ground-up dark red pigment, the colour of reproductive menstrual blood, as they were becoming initiated into the secrets of the cyclicity and ongoing balancing of aspects of production and reproduction. The cyclical qualities of production-reproduction underlie the lived egalitarian practices of today as much as ancient egalitarian hunter-gatherer cosmologies.

### Production, Reproduction, and Lunar Cycles

For Central, Southern and Eastern African hunter-gatherers, there is a 'mythical intertwining of production (hunting) with reproduction (menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth)'.<sup>24</sup> There is both powerful attraction *and* opposition between the bodies and blood of women and the bodies and blood of game animals. The two blood types must never be allowed to mix.<sup>25</sup> Successful hunting

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23 Lewis 2002:157, Kisliuk 1998:131

24 Power 2017:195

25 For hunters, menstruation belongs to categories of transformative potency like *ekila* and *n/om*, while for farmers and cattle people, it becomes a source of pollution and ill-omen. Its power and centrality to ritual remains (Power 2017:198, drawing on the work of Testart, A. (1988), 'Some Major Problems in the Social Anthropology of Hunter-gatherers', *Current Anthropology* 29: 1–31. See also Lewis 2008).



is a delicate co-composition of male and female energies. Especially with the Baka and the Mbendjele, women generate and hold the power to influence the hunting of large game animals. They activate this power by performing special polyphonies. Baka call this ritual *Yeli*, and before a hunt, *Yeli* female initiates locate forest animals such as elephants by communicating with the animal spirits, also through song.<sup>26</sup>

These belief systems and mystical practices are further closely related to the moon and its phases. Generally speaking, lunar movements guide nomadic hunter-gatherers, whereas solar calendars structure the activities of sedentary farmers. The fascinating research of Camilla Power and colleagues shows how living with reference to lunar frameworks transcends simplistic environmental considerations. It is more importantly an interweaving of practical living concerns with mythological beliefs which allow for and support generating and maintaining egalitarian values. For one, this addresses the obvious unease around night-time visibility. Some animals which are dangerous to humans, such as large cats, have better eyesight at night and during dark moon phases. This reverses prey-predator dynamics, as at night humans become the easily hunted. Singing-dancing together loudly helps to keep the dangerous cats at bay.<sup>27</sup> With regard to social organisation and ritual practices, the moon's cycles of waxing and waning define distinct taboos about when sex and certain types of meat are available or unavailable.<sup>28</sup> The waxing, growing moon is the period of heightened powers, ritual activity, and sexual and food taboos. The ordinary time comes with the waning, decreasing moon when food taboos are relaxed and sex is available.<sup>29</sup> Examining taboos and rit-

26 Joiris 1998, Leclerc 2001

27 Knight & Lewis 2017:437

28 This lunar framework forms part of a theory on the origins of symbolic culture which includes the 'sex-strike' hypothesis (Knight & Lewis 2017). The theory proposes a female strategy of periodically refusing sex to all males except those who supplied them with fatty meat. As Power and Watts (1997:539) summarise, the approach posits that the symbolic domain emerged through collective female defiance expressed in ritual performance. The signature of the sex-strike is a systematic reversal of the 'normal' signals of animal courtship (Knight et al. 1995:84). While mate recognition in the animal world involves signalling 'right species/ right sex/ right (i.e.fertile) time', sex-striking human females would deter male advances through a ritual pantomime of 'wrong species/wrong sex/ wrong (i.e.infertile) time. The aspects of menstruation, sexual availability and moon cycles were likely also influenced by 'Lions' habit of eating people on moonless nights' (Knight & Lewis 2017:442, quoting Packer et al. 2011).

29 Power & Watts 1997:554, 556; Power 2017:187

ual beliefs around the moon in hunter-gatherer mythology over time, shows these to be extremely conservative and stable symbolic complexes, which 'potentially reconstruct a source cosmology for African hunter-gatherers traceable to Middle Stone Age populations'.<sup>30</sup>

**Moving-sensing with lunar cyclicities of waxing and waning, and  
the linked shifting-sliding between abundance-scarcity,  
between production-reproduction  
are age-old, magical practices.**

Returning to the nowadays, the rigidity of Baka gender roles along the Ivindo surprised me at first. Again, no amount of reading had prevented me from imagining egalitarian gender as free, open, loving; I was definitely guilty of expecting Baka sexuality and gender roles to be more "hippy-like". Thankfully, exactly this wishful thinking enabled me to clearly appreciate the connection between Baka polyphonies and egalitarian politics. In Ivindo Baka dancing-singing, rigidity *and* fluidity of movement exist simultaneously, interweaving to make the event happen, paralleling the simultaneity of autonomy *and* connectedness in egalitarian social organisation in general. After learning about Baka female struggles, I became conscious of how the circular dance motions, the rhythmical three-step movement and the shuffling, go deeply into the ground. This can be explained as a bodily expression of the deep connective resonance Ivindo Baka feel with their forest environments. However, Baka female dancing and singing is not only concerned with females flaunting their femininity and fertility and teasing men into excitement or submission. It is more importantly an opportunity for the women to bond and share. On an affective level, the joys and sorrows with life and their men, are taken into and released both into the ground and into the collective female body in the dancing-singing. Overall, female and male energies join and disperse, shape-shift-slide until they have evened out again, on this occasion. And this is where and how things become and remain political.

**Singing-dancing is a bodily politics,  
grounded in the tensional dialogue between female and male bodying.**

Singing-dancing is an ongoing, dialogical movement, which extends beyond any individual bodying, always expressing through the gendered bodying

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30 Power 2017:197

collective, so through men or women as a group. The dynamic between the male and female collectives is likened to a 'pendulum model' with 'pulses or switches of dominance and counter-dominance'.<sup>31</sup> Social or ritual dancing-singing stirs up, or as Morna Finnegan writes, 'churns up', sexual energies into political power.<sup>32</sup> The verb 'churning' generally refers to processes of shaking or stirring up liquids with rapid and regular movements. Churning most commonly refers to stirring up milk into butter, or a fast boat will churn water into waves. The term churning evokes well how egalitarian bodyings move vigorously, stirring sexual energies into dialoguing gendered collectives, shifting biological and sensual qualities into political co-presence and power. The potential of bodying manifests as political power. The political aspect is that this powerful, vibrating energy must be continuously balanced as much as made to keep circulating. The ongoing circulation of power prevents particular (personal) interests hardening into authority, in ways familiar in hierarchical and capitalist systems.<sup>33</sup> No one side or person can dominate or 'win' the conversation. The aim is to maintain qualities of churning and stirring, and to sustain power as potential, to maintain power as something which is always in motion. This intertwining between bodyings and power is all about literally 'dancing it out'.<sup>34</sup> Humming away or singing, individually or in small groups, during any kind of activity, whether collecting nuts in the forest or washing clothes, is how women maintain a permanent readiness to engage in this conversation, this dialogue around power potentials. For the *Mbendjele*, this kind of hum or buzz as background noise to everyday life is 'the voice of power made audible'<sup>35</sup>, and my experience with the Baka evokes the same imagery. There was always that gentle underlying rumbling, and then somewhere somebody would start to sing-dance, and the humming-rumbling would develop into full-blown reverberations. As with all singing-dancing, this could continue for some hours, or not really take off after all, depending on what was necessary and alive in the people co-present in that moment.

Sensing into this permanent hum, I came to appreciate Baka genders not so much as rigid or fixed identities or roles, but as potential, as vibration, always ready to shape-shift and manifest through the gender coalitions. Also,

31 Finnegan 2013 and Lewis 2002 quoted in Power, Finnegan & Callan 2017:19.

32 Finnegan 2013

33 Finnegan 2015:88

34 Kisliuk 1998

35 Finnegan 2015:90

for other groups similar to the Baka, gender has been conceptualised as ‘an expression of original ritual power’.<sup>36</sup> This notion, as advanced by hunter-gatherer specialists Camilla Power and colleagues, assumes an original quality of *power potential*, and a *non-binary, single gender*. This single gender then expresses and performs as male or female gendered power through ritual activity. Through the singing-dancing and continuous resonant movements, these gendered poles are again transformed. They dissolve and melt into socio-somatic group bodying. This quality and intensity of relating, as I experienced and other researchers have written, means entering a realm of pure power and radical joy.<sup>37</sup> It is the experience of the ongoing, generative cyclicity of releasing and circulating social and sexual desire into practices of collective musicking. Desire and eroticism incite and shape singing-dancing as political practices towards powerful, radical joy. The somatic resonance of my immersion, into this ongoing dialogue and churning of power, vibrates in my cells. Nowadays, in situations of unease or conflict, I try to activate this felt knowledge of power as something to be continuously (re)distributed. It is an exercise of trying out how and where power potentials can shift, if moving-sensing with an awareness of tensional responsiveness.

With reference to the analysis also in Proposition Two, this ongoing tensional dialogue between male and female energies grounds the egalitarian intertwining of both politics and economics. Recalling the question around the future meaning of ‘work’ raised by Proposition Two, for egalitarian forager-hunters, ‘work’ is done for the opposite sex, as ‘part of a flow of complimentary effort between the sexes’.<sup>38</sup> Productive labour ‘is gender-identified’, meaning it is clear whether a task is to be done by a woman or a man, but ‘at the level of circulation the gender identity of a product is transformed’.<sup>39</sup> Recalling the cyclic complementarity of production-reproduction that we saw earlier with regard to larger cosmologies, persons as producers are systematically connected to desire, in a persistent ‘metaphoric relation between food items and sexual substances’.<sup>40</sup> It is easy to assume a distinction between egalitarian socialities, which negate status and property, and those where social status and hierarchy dominate and personal property is sacrosanct. However, both

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36 Power & Watts 1997:540

37 Finnegan 2015:99, referring to Sawada, 1990:189.

38 Finnegan 2017:146

39 Gow (1989: 571, 574), quoted in Finnegan 2017:146.

40 Gow (1989: 571, 574), quoted in Finnegan 2017:146

systems emerge primarily through and with bodying humans, albeit activating very different potentials of bodying. The suppression or channelling of *desire* through contemporary capitalist modes of production and reproduction has been variously criticised, for example, in the work of philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychologist Felix Guattari.<sup>41</sup> Bodily intensities of increasing alienation and separation are enforced through and uphold capitalism,<sup>42</sup> in comparison with the ongoing socio-somatic joy which shapes intensities of individual autonomy and group connectedness in egalitarian societies. There is a very different power in 'work', if 'work' is something enchanting you do for another human, or more-than-human being; knowing that whatever you have done becomes part of the collective, ongoing generation, coherence, and maintenance of the world you live in.

*How can we give greater creative space to these time-honoured powers of generative polyphonies in our direct social interactions and larger socialities of today? What would 'work' look like in hierarchically-structured societies, if socio-somatic joy lay at the heart of things?*

Considering how sexual desires are increasingly met by online apps such as *tinder*, or the ever-more extravagant products of the pornographic industry, suggests increasing not mindfulness but sensorial awareness around ways of moving-sensing with desire and tensional responsiveness. Working from the notion of bodying as social potential, which kind of bodying potential do we want to activate? Critical thinkers such as Audre Lorde or Franco Berardi argue to reclaim the power of the erotic in the struggles regarding socio-political and climate challenges.<sup>43</sup> Lorde's famous essay *The Erotic as Power* resonates with several aspects of eroticism and gender as power potential in Baka socialities. As with the Baka, Lorde emphasises the intertwining of erotic, power and sharing. The beauty of Lorde's words accentuates the importance of this intertwining:

The erotic functions ... in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding

41 Deleuze & Guattari 1977

42 Eisenstein 2011

43 Berardi 2015, Lorde 1984

much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference. ... The need for sharing deep feeling is a human need.<sup>44</sup>

This sentiment is echoed by Berardi's critique of how, nowadays, the erotic is predominantly reduced to aesthetic or visual (pornographic) qualities. Berardi, who is known as *Bifo*, challenges the historical processes which have caused the dissociation of love and eroticism and reduced compassion to a merely moral sentiment. He spotlights how 'the etymological root of the word [erotic] means *shared perception*'.<sup>45</sup> Personally, I cannot but think-perceive together these contemporary writers' thoughts on erotic, power, and sharing, with the age-old erotic power-churning magic I experienced with the Baka. What is addressed in both cases, is not something exotic from a mysterious forest tribe, or an obscure gender subculture – it is the deep human need to share, and to share in the enchanting beauty and ongoingness of life. Apart from the eroticism, qualities of play, fun, and laughter shape and generate dialogue in egalitarian dynamics. Collective dancing-singing, which feeds intertwined socio-political and socio-economic practices, never occurs without enjoyment and humour. It is exactly the amusement, joking, hilarity, and cheerfulness which serve as grounding structural dynamics and also make the quality of the ongoingness of egalitarian societies possible. Laughter, is political and sacred.

### Authority, Language and Music

Returning to the forests of long ago, the importance of vocal mimicry and polyphonic singing originated from basic survival practices, respectively as men attracted game, and women scared away predators through choral singing.<sup>46</sup> As Chris Knight and Jerome Lewis have shown (2017), these practices of making sounds within gender-based coalitions developed to serve two purposes. On the one hand, vocal mimicry was used to deceive outsiders, meaning people or animals not belonging to the group. At the same time, it built reliability into the communications amongst the group members. Especially the choral singing had the effect of harmonizing emotions and building trust within the group. In this way, it later became a way of supporting

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44 Lorde 1984:90–91

45 Berardi 2015:71

46 Knight & Lewis 2017

socialities, by allowing for creativity in human communication, rather than just the reliability needed for survival.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, human or non-human alpha-males may dominate their social group also through their individual body language and speech acts. The strength of communicating in community plays an important role in creating a ‘we-intentionality’, by creating ‘the prospect of a “coalition of everyone”—a “we”—against the spectre of the alpha male’.<sup>48</sup> As creativity developed in human communication, this novel inventiveness (in language) was used by the (female) communities also to resist the authority of an alpha-male.<sup>49</sup> This means that enabling a creative framework for musicking had and has considerable implications in negotiations around authority and leadership. As we see with Ivindo Baka, the interplay of conservative and creative qualities of singing-dancing facilitates the ongoing negotiation of egalitarian structures, which prevent any one quality, person, or group from dominating. Polyphonic singing highlights the differences between music and language and emphasises the bodiliness in both. In human interaction through language, it is only one individual, one bodying, which emits the sounds of speech. On the other hand, if you are singing in a choir, you as an individual cannot but express as part of the singing community. You are one of many bodyings musicking together. Though both are based on similar brain resources, music and language have adapted to provide human beings with different cognitive advantages: *music is biased toward long-term interaction and cohesion of social groups; language to the specifics of individual interactions*.<sup>50</sup>

Studies of Baka, other Central African groups, and Southern African *San* groups, suggest that polyphonic singing may date back to 75,000 or even 100,000 thousand years ago.<sup>51</sup> Genetic studies trying to figure out whether the above-mentioned groups all have the same ancestors, have also served to

47 Knight & Lewis 2017: 442

48 Knight & Lewis 2017:439

49 Both echoing and nuancing the Palaeolithic Politics argument made in Proposition One, Power argues: ‘While there must have been variability in the degree of dominance or egalitarianism among human groups, we can be confident that those populations where male dominance, sexual conflict and infanticide risks remained high were not the ones who became our ancestors.’ [www.opendemocracy.net/en/gender-egalitarianism-made-us-human-patriarchy-was-too-little-too-late/](http://www.opendemocracy.net/en/gender-egalitarianism-made-us-human-patriarchy-was-too-little-too-late/).

50 Lewis 2013:64

51 Grauer 2011. For a detailed analysis of these fascinating aspects and shared population genetics dating back around 75-100.000 years, see also Power 2017:180–182 as well as Lewis 2013:64.

trace the musical connections between these groups. In debates on the links between the origins of humans and our development of language skills,<sup>52</sup> the extraordinary resilience of cultural musical practices takes a special place. As the work of Jerome Lewis and others has shown, music ensures and enables *continuity within change* and *change within continuity*, and this special capacity relates to music's aesthetic, incorporative, adaptive, and stylistic qualities.<sup>53</sup> On the one hand, the polyphonies allow for great variations as each woman continuously invents her tunes. At the same time, all singers respect and are bound by a deep structure, which limits the possibilities for variations. Through this quality of 'freedom within constraint', individual singers are held and supported to express however they feel or whatever is moving them, on that occasion.<sup>54</sup> The training in these aesthetic qualities, in shaping harmonious independence (individual song creations on that occasion) within interdependence (binding deep structure and group momentum), are essential to ongoing social cohesion. Coming to appreciate the intensities of aesthetic and socio-somatic response and resonance, is political education. In that way, and not only in egalitarian social organisations, does music assist in long-term cultural transmission and endurance of economic, social, and political orientations. These qualities and orientations survive irrespective of the language spoken, the technology used, or the geographical location where the music-dance participation takes place.<sup>55</sup> So,

*how could the creative-conservative intensities of musicking open up to alter-economic models, moving beyond late capitalist extraction practices and towards the idea that 'work' is something you do for a different nested ecosystem? How do the generative intensities of polyphonic singing synthesise with current socio-ecological challenges?*

## Healing as Whole-Body Group Process

Maintaining health or overcoming illness is an essential part of human sociality and survival, and the importance of music and dance in processes of healing are known and practiced around the world. The effects of the COVID

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52 Barnard 2012

53 Lewis 2013:64

54 Lewis 2013:61

55 Lewis 2013:64, Weig 2015c



pandemic may be allowing us to appreciate this in new ways, also drawing attention to the (anthropological) distinction between the pairs of terms *disease* and *illness*, and *healing* and *curing*.<sup>56</sup> In these pairs, *disease* is defined as a biological and biochemical malfunction. *Illness* is what the patient feels, within their cultural context. *Curing* refers to individually treating a specific condition, for example, a wound or case of diarrhoea. *Healing* refers to seeing and treating the whole body or person as an integrated system with both physical and spiritual components.<sup>57</sup> The argument goes that biomedicine focuses only on aspects or parts of the body, and therefore cures rather than heals; whereas alternative medicines, somatic practices, and specific cultural medical systems build on a philosophy of healing that holistically incorporates curing. An illustration for this comes from Fiji, where anorexia is considered to be a problem of the whole society. An anorexic body shows that there is something wrong in the social fabric; it is not the problem of one person or an individual family.<sup>58</sup>

Practices of *musicking* emphasise the *pleasure of producing* music and dance more than the production itself. In this verb form, musicking immediately becomes something that you participate in, that you are active in creating. You are not separate from the sound you are hearing or making; it is all one in the becoming polyphonic intensity. On a physical level, this includes the obvious aspects of breathing, voice, and gestural movements. Socio-somatic resonance also happens on a deeper physiological level. Human bodies contain many cavities or hollow spaces, such as sinuses or bone marrow, which act as natural resonance spaces for sounds produced through pleasurable singing, horror movies, or otherwise.<sup>59</sup> As is well-known, up to 60% of an adult human body is water, which also reverberates in some shape or form. Another way humans absorb music into their bodying, is through fascias.<sup>60</sup> To remember, *fascias* or the *fascial system*, are our bodily connective tissues, which form a bodily support structure and at the same time transmits information inside our bodies. This is only beginning to be explored, but by transmitting information and being relevant to our movement capabilities, fascias are an active part of how we receive and respond to stimulus through sound waves

56 Strathern & Stewart 2010. Both distinctions find their origin in part in the mind-body dualism.

57 Strathern & Stewart 2010:7

58 Becker 1995

59 Bainbridge Cohen 2015

60 Schultz & Feitis 1996

and vibrations, itself responding to how we move, by becoming more or less permeable or solid.<sup>61</sup> This affects Ivindo Baka, those people who spend much time sitting at a desk,<sup>62</sup> or musicians in a military corp. After much drumming and marching, the musician's body architecture, including the fascia, adapts to the repetitive and highly stylised movement patterns, often leaving the musicians in pain.<sup>63</sup> Taking all this into account, allows to appreciate why the pleasure of making music is as significant, or even more significant than the music as a result, an outcome, an achieved milestone. (Polyphonic) Singing, bodily shaking, or similar rhythmic movements are both pleasurable and generate healing qualities.<sup>64</sup>

For Baka, singing-dancing is a socio-somatic technique for living and surviving together well with human and more-than-human.<sup>65</sup> The aim of keeping power circulating is one aspect of trying to maintain health by avoiding people even becoming ill in the first place. Avoiding things becoming stagnant and eventually manifesting as sickness, suggests that healing too is a continuous and ongoing process. Socio-somatic practices activate a different temporality of healing which transcends linear understandings of from-illness-to-health.<sup>66</sup> Interestingly, Wikipedia offers a definition of 'socosomatic' with reference to medicine and psychology and as 'pertaining to physical diseases, symptoms etc. which have social causes'.<sup>67</sup> The 'social' is referenced regarding the occurrence of disease, but is not mentioned in relation to health and healing. The generative, powerful qualities of socio-somatic practices are not explicitly highlighted. These qualities are, however, present in contemporary practices such as the *5Rhythms* movement meditation, the dance *Contact Improvisation*, and many other similar movement activities. Participating in these practices teaches something amazing. In moving individually or with one another across a dance floor, sitting in stillness, or becoming with each other in manifold other ways, bodyings communicate their needs. Sometimes, if someone has a nasty knee pain or a severe headache, for example,

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61 Schleip 2012

62 See <http://dumit.net/sitting-academic-style/>

63 Nestvogel 1994

64 Low 2015

65 Rouget & Buckner 2011, Arom 1991

66 Recall here also the concept of motility, meaning the potential or capacity to move, as explained in the introduction, and how motility opens up different temporal understandings. See also Weig 2019.

67 <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/socosomatic>

just placing a hand wherever the ache is located, attuning to and following the flow of energy, is enough to draw out the pain.

Healing can be a simple process of carefully, gently, sensitively listening to the resonances of bodyings; into processes of adjusting, fine-tuning, giving, receiving, and restoring well-being. This need not necessarily be through touching; it can simply be through virtual extension towards the other. Neither, is it something that needs to happen in a guided class. It can be at home; with family or other people. Sometimes, all it takes is a tender hand-on-shoulder, for fascias and other bodily systems to return to healthy rhythms and continuous resonances of shifting-sliding. The particular fascial responsiveness to touch as a special quality of bodily dialogue, was echoed during my interviews with bodyworkers and fascia-based therapists. In working with the different and deeper tissue levels the 'body will direct you', you are 'directed by the *movements* of the tissue'.<sup>68</sup> Bodyworkers, recipients of fascia therapy, and (academic) participants in my workshops, confirm how getting in touch with your fascia is an experience which continues to infuse. Learning about fascia and sensing what it does, how it offers both stability and shifting-sliding movement, fasci(a)nates in powerful ways. It was also my personal experience that the deep work of fascia-based therapies supports (re)generation and agility in everyday life and encourages the body's ability to heal itself. Whether as specialists or lay people, if we listen-sense, bodyings direct us towards healing in every, to use Erin Manning's term, *movement-moving*.<sup>69</sup> This potential of healing is increased and multiplied if activated and practiced in (consensual) group dynamics.

In the tradition of egalitarian societies like that of the Baka, there is no specialised healer caste, and healing occurs through the intensities of co-presence, especially as musicking activates the balancing of power potentials. There are, however, *nganga*, a Baka term meaning healer and visionary. Ngangas are powerful female or male specialists, who are asked to treat specific illnesses and physical ailments, or to conduct certain forms of divination on important life questions or rituals, such as blessing the children of neighbouring ethnic groups. Ngangas share qualities with similar specialists engaged in processes of curing or healing, such as medical doctors or *shamans*. Shaman originally refers to a Siberian or Tungun *saman*.<sup>70</sup> The global success of the

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68 Barcan 2011:126

69 Manning 2016, see also Levine 1997

70 Petrovich 2001

term shaman and the ways in which it has been adapted by the esoteric industry is a fascinating topic in itself. What the success of the term and its worldwide applications unarguably uncover and evidence, is the continued need for 'shamanism' and similar practices to provide people with guidance and access, to themselves and to more-than-human qualities and worlds. *Ritual reciprocity* underlies any such practice based on a power differential between the ritual specialist, or 'shaman', and the other ritual participants; whether it is dancing by the fire, going to a church or mosque, or attending a psychotherapy session. Ritual reciprocity refers to how, regardless of how are the contents or paraphernalia of the specific practice, the process is as important for the person or group offering or officiating it, as it is for the person or group receiving the treatment.<sup>71</sup> Both giver and receiver are in reciprocal relations to one another, in relations of mutually affecting bodyings. There may always be a place and time for specialist healers and visionaries, but it seems important to bring more attention to ritual reciprocity, and how the authority to heal does not necessarily sit with one individual, who has *power over* the participants. Groups like the Baka or the example of anorexia in Fiji remind us that healing originates and emerges from and can be a whole-body group process. As the entire social group enters into socio-somatic resonance, individual vibrations as much as the group's as a whole are harmonised, leaving everybody feeling happy. Healing becomes a practice that clearly includes and involves the entire social and physiological bodying, the skeletal, emotional, fascial, microbial, and all other bodily systems and structures. Healing is equally the awareness of how bodying with human group and more-than-human, may offer actual or virtual healing touches.

### Social Change and Baka Musicking Practices

Having described with such passion the power and beauty of Baka group polyphonies, it is only fair to also address the significant social changes along the Ivindo, where Baka are nowadays listening to and participating in many different musical worlds. Music is no longer predominantly created through socio-somatic bodyings. Choral singing takes place regularly, but equally often is replaced by electronically generated music. Baka nowadays have battery-powered radios with SD card slots, and you can buy SD cards with the latest

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71 Weig 2009

hits at local markets. These new sound sources and the increasing availability of electronically generated music all day long make it unnecessary to wait till evening and go through the laborious process of building up the dynamics for a *be*. It is much easier to just turn on the radio at lunchtime and have a great party far-removed from ritualised male-female interactions. Baka girls and young women chant the refrains of popular songs, and the younger boys form 'boy bands' with which they flamboyantly show off dance sequences copied from the latest music videos.

The new livelihoods, technologies, body movements, and sounds are impacting established egalitarian practices, which also raises questions around staying in or leaving the forest. We, the Ivindo Baka and myself, discussed these developments many times. Especially amongst the older Baka women and men, there is still deep knowledge of ways of becoming with the forest, of what it means to live in and with the forest. For example, time keeping is done in relation to the forest and I often heard the term *15 heures*, French for 3pm. *15 heures* signifies the two-hour period of daylight between 3-5pm, during which you can safely do a particular task in the forest, and return to the village before it gets dark around 6pm. On the equator, night falls with near immediacy around 6pm, and Baka and everyone else duly avoid getting caught away from village sociality and safety after dark. One Baka elder pointed out that the difference to today is that 'before people lived *in* the forest' (my emphasis). As he went to elaborate, other elders hushed him, telling him that 'No, you cannot explain; only our grandparents would really have known'. The Baka themselves are very clear about the significant changes in their ways of life.

Younger Baka are more easily leaving the forest, *ma ledji a bele*, which is a Baka expression to describe the physicality of coming out of the forest. *Sortir de la forêt* in French is also an idiom for social change, for the move from dwelling deep in the forest to living in villages along roads or rivers; or from rural villages to more urban locations, something which is happening not only within Baka groups, but generally in Gabon and in other areas of Central Africa. Younger Baka no longer necessarily look for food in the forest, and whether or not a hunter will pray before setting off into the forest depends on his age. Previously, Baka would only walk in the forest, but now they, like everyone else, will travel in motorised vehicles if possible. The biggest change that comes with leaving the forest was given as the loss of the knowledge of healing with plants, although plant remedies continue to be strongly used. However, pills are taken when available and when there is money to pay

for them. The contents of my medical kit were in high demand, leaving me at pains to explain that too much 'Western' medicine, i.e. taking too many painkillers at once, would amount to poisoning a human body, rather than curing or healing an ailment. In 2010-2011, young Baka men were away from the villages for long periods working in artisanal gold-mining. As a result, young Baka women had taken to starting a *be* by themselves, by both singing and drumming, breaking up gender roles. In 2019, the young couples were off gold-mining in the forests together, and it was obvious how much the women enjoyed this, but the trend favouring electronically generated music was unbroken. Lying in my *Hennessy Hammock* at night in the Central African rainforest in 2011, the vibrating intensities of Baka polyphonies resonating in my cells, bones, fascias and heart, I began pondering the larger picture of how musicking goes together with whole-body group healing, socio-ecological change, and the role of contemporary gender conceptions in all this.

*How do the special intensities of music and musicking go together with social changes and conceptions of gender beyond male-female? Can or how can generative polyphonies become part of socialities, which allow for or encourage gender diversity?*

## Diversities:

### Third Genders, Transgender and an Ancient Single Gender

The majority of today's societies are not egalitarian, and (nightly) singing-dancing as part of ongoing processes harmonising male-female and group energies are not commonplace. Around the globe, we are rather experiencing an explosion around gender diversities and calls for such diversities to be legalised. Previously, in many cultures, sexual orientations and genders deviating from social norms and established gender roles have been accepted and recognised as so-called *Third Genders*. Third Genders often take over ritual roles in their respective societies such as dancing-singing at baptisms, weddings or funerals. Possibly the most famous are the *Hijras* on the Indian subcontinent, who are considered as neither completely male nor female, live in Hijra spiritual communities led by a guru, and who follow strict rules in their daily lives. Other examples of Third Genders are the *Muxes* in Juchitán, the *Two-spirit* of the American Navajo, the *Fa'afafines* on the islands of Samoa, or the *Sekrata* in Madagascar. Everywhere, these Third Genders are considered special, as different from 'normal' society, and they are both respected, honoured, and

discriminated against. With regard to homosexuality, the world can be split into countries in which it is a normal part of the social fabric and homosexual behaviour in public is accepted and legally supported; and into countries in which the options to openly express anything but clear male-female sexual orientations, remains a grey zone or is strictly forbidden.<sup>72</sup> In a study on the movement gestures of female and male orchestral conductors, it was possible to clearly distinguish between male and female young conductors. The highly trained and more refined gestures of older expert conductors, on the other hand, did not provide the human observers of the conductors with sufficient cues for gendered distinction. What emerged was a certain bias towards expert conductors being classified as male, showing up the (prejudicial) concepts of the observers, more than anything else.<sup>73</sup> Prejudicial attitudes around sex and gender remain strong and are everywhere bodied in mostly unconscious ways.

The movements towards social acceptance of gender diversity are being paralleled by a legal shift away from biological essentialism. Many countries have begun legally acknowledging people's desires to transform the gender identities they were assigned at birth. Designations such as *transgender* (feeling and living gender identity differently from assigned gender) or *intersex* (persons who are genetically and biologically both male and female) are new legal possibilities. In 2016 in the US, the first person legally changed their birth certificate and passport data to *intersex*. The former 'she' is now officially registered as intersex, as non-binary.<sup>74</sup> Since 2017, Germany offers parents the new category "X" for registering babies without 'clear gender-determining physical characteristics' at birth.<sup>75</sup> This blank box is not an official third gender, but offers a temporary solution for intersex cases. In 2014, a ruling of the Indian Supreme Court enabled Hijras official acceptance as a legal 'third gender' in Indian society. However, many Hijra transgenders feel uncomfortable being referred to as 'third sex', preferring to be classed by the gender they have chosen, as woman or man.<sup>76</sup> Old prejudices and new freedoms around bodying also include all forms of *functional diversity* (people with special needs,

72 <https://ilga.org/maps-sexual-orientation-laws>

73 Wöllner & Deconinck 2013

74 [www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/nation-s-first-known-intersex-birth-certificate-issued-nyc-n701186](http://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/nation-s-first-known-intersex-birth-certificate-issued-nyc-n701186)

75 [www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46727611](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46727611)

76 [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-27031180](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-27031180)

disabilities, impairments or handicaps), or *neurodiversity* (people with differences in brain activity regarding capacities for being social and learning).<sup>77</sup> Additionally, predictions are that biotech will impact human bodies in currently unimaginable ways as we receive, for example, brain implants containing all the information from *Wikipedia*.<sup>78</sup> Musicking may become more about algorithmic than rhythmic alignment.

After returning to Europe from Gabon, walking along the road in London as just another regular White girl in a big European city, the sight of two men kissing passionately in the street morphed into a kaleidoscope of images and thoughts around gender diversity. Fresh from my experience of dancing with light and shadow in the tropical forests, the giggling couple in front of me brought up all these different worlds and debates: those where non-normative gendered behaviour is a part of everyday life, or where it is limited and confined to distinct ritual spaces and times; and not least the analyses of links between gender and ritual in hunter-gatherer societies. The latter hold considerable potential to inspire contemporary discussions around 'sex' versus 'gender', of biological essentialism versus performative cultural constructs, of how we think-and-do 'woman' and 'man'. As already mentioned, the work by Camilla Power and Ian Watts introduces the notion of gender 'as an expression of original ritual power'.<sup>79</sup> In this model of

**gender as power potential,  
as a performance of original ritual power,**

there is, firstly, at the origin a *single gender*. Secondly, the binary structures around men and women, are not related to male-female biological sex distinctions. The binary concerns ritual power as either 'on' or 'off', in correlation with lunar cycles. When the ritual power is 'on' during the waxing and full moon, life is full of power, and humans can metamorphose into non-humans, and females into males.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, periods of waning and dark moon, are times of weakness, when things move within clear heterosexual qualities. At least for some of our ancestors, shape-shifting between performances of gender was part of the cyclicity of shifting between experiences and expressions of power and weakness, between dominance and softness. This research

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77 Manning 2016

78 Harari 2015

79 Power & Watts 1997

80 Power & Watts 1997



certainly carries potential to open up everyday physicalities and conceptualizations of (gendered) bodying to imaginaries beyond social representation and visual gaze. Maybe, it is even possible to develop societal spaces to feel and experiment with gendered and more-than-gendered churning of power in new ways. To actively incorporate cyclicities of power and weakness into today's bodyings. Like laughter, such churnings of power, could again become political and sacred.

*How can recent developments of recognising gender diversity, functional diversity, and neuro-diversities intertwine with the incredible beauty and power stirred up through ritualised gender coalitions mediated by lunar frameworks, which have played a key role in perpetuating human co-presence?*

Personal desires and social changes are taking us into diverse bodyings, and bodily levels of communication are going beyond fixed and bounded gender roles in new ways. Developments around intersex and transgender are aspects of mainstream ways opening up to novel (legal) ways of looking at the potentialities of bodying. Interestingly, the densest fascia is in the genital area (which may not come as such a surprise, as it is where we experience a high level of sensoriality in intimately coming together with another person). We are only beginning to ask and understand the implications of the ways in which biotechnologies are shaping bodyings, and how online platform technologies are shaping social interactions and identities, and how these developments feed forward into legal systems. In between new legal support and old fears around diversity, extending beyond constructing and classifying the 'other' as our object of desire, blame, or punishment, lies an ocean of potentiality. The potentiality of bodies understood as bodyings, as nested ecosystems. In parallel with egalitarian polyphonies, if one bodily system continually stands out and sings badly out of tune, lacking the capacity to resonate with others, the entire ecosystem will become affected, slowly getting sick and dying. In the course of human evolution, pretend-play came to govern adult sexual life, and desire and eroticism equally shape the potentiality.<sup>81</sup> The potential of the ocean of diversity becomes limited by continuously ignoring the information provided through felt qualities of human social relations.

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81 Finnegan 2013

## Generative Capacities and Healing Social Cohesion: Sounding and Moving Together

It has become common to hear or read about the growing loneliness, alienation and other serious health issues.<sup>82</sup> Films like *Social Dilemma* underline the epidemic of mental health issues rolling towards, in particular, heavily industrialised and tech-dependent nations. The disintegration of neighbourhood support structures cannot be adequately replaced through constantly updating technologies. In many ways, new technologies are merely adding to inequality and fragmentation processes within societies, such as meeting potential sexual or relationship partners only via online apps, and conception through IVF rather than actual physical sex. What we seem to lack and what needs to be addressed is

*how do we give each other attention and care? how do we maintain social cohesion and group health? What and how is the everyday generative socio-somatic erotic hum of power, beyond social status representation and visual gaze?*

Being part of the Baka in Adjab trying to make a *be* happen during many nights, watching it sometimes succeed, and often fail, was an ever-deepening experience of the intensities of human generative powers. It was an experience of spiralling both the ease and the struggle underlying human creativity, and human continuity. Through working with contemporary dancers and other diverse types of performance,<sup>83</sup> I have practiced and studied this co-creative dynamic also in other contexts. In nearly all settings, creativity, improvisation and novelty involve a clear appreciation and working with physical (co)presence and the generative power of bodying as process. The uniqueness of Baka practices lies in how singing-dancing shapes the power potentials and creative spaces of their entire sociality. The communal musicking and the combination of bodily movement and polyphonic sounds are essential to nourishing Baka egalitarianism, and to the transmission of socio-cultural norms, values and practices. The generative power is at once conservative and stabilizing, and at the same time hugely creative and generating novelty. Baka musicking practices are also different as the socio-somatic singing-dancing dialogue is not just for and with humans, but always already involves the

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82 Eisenstein 2011

83 [www.mdkollektiv.de/works/golden-trash/](http://www.mdkollektiv.de/works/golden-trash/)

more-than-human qualities present, the ecosystemic intensities co-composing that particular occasion. Appreciating this, continues to activate my work. The moment where this became most public was initiating a workshop in Berlin.<sup>84</sup> I specifically greeted and welcomed the beautiful autumn-coloured trees outside the windows to join in the workshop and be present with us humans. A workshop participant later commented that this explicit gesture towards the trees had made a difference in their experience of the workshop, and how, if we (lovingly) acknowledge, address, honour Earth, the response is one of joy.

Experiencing Baka polyphonies shape-shifted deep traces into my bodying, cells, bones, fascial tissues and heart. I yearn for singing with others, for activating and shifting potentials of what can emerge in that moment. Whenever I hear pleasurable live music, my bodying resonates with tremors and other sensations at molecular level. It feels as if the ear drum is bending outwards, eager to engage my entire bodying in this sounding occasion, transmitting sound information into my brain and sensing vibrations through my fascias and other bodily systems, making all cells jiggle and quiver. Knowing that I am not the only one who senses and thoroughly enjoys the generative powers of musicking, of singing and dancing together, ...

*how can we generate the ongoingness of sharing and political dialogue, both between (ritually) gendered human bodyings, and between human and more-than-human beings and qualities? Can we afford to ignore this creative potential and quality, when we address our human futures on Earth?*

How we move, sing or dance influences how we relate to others; it is so much more than just a way to relax. If we are serious about shaping-shifting-sliding beyond established gender identities and economic norms, then attuning to terrestrial qualities becomes foremost a question of the socio-somatic intensities of how relating and communicating occurs; of generating and putting group sociality first, within and as part of ecosystems. Thinking-perceiving the interweaving of sound, societal dynamics and ecosystemic awareness in new ways, we can ask:

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84 'Weaving Speculative Fiction with Fascia'. BODY IQ Somatics Festival, Berlin, 2019. <https://bodyiq.berlin>.

*Can we take this generative dynamic to enable and maintain community without focusing merely on identity politics? How can we shift to creating a generative spirit between people; no matter where they come from; no matter what their gender is; no matter what they do in life? Which qualities and values would underlie such processes of healing? Which can be the sensory awareness techniques and somatic practices for such processes towards radical socio-somatic joy?*<sup>85</sup>

Entering into such questions and approaches is facilitated also by new vocabularies. New ways of addressing each other are, for example, emerging in non-binary communities. Transgender or intersex people are asking to be referred to and addressed as 'they', in order to avoid the classificatory 'she' or 'he'. A step in a more open direction, 'they', as it is used today, still carries the connotation of 'other', of difference preventing engagement with the wild diversities and materialities that make up human and more-than-human bodyings. Which other vocabularies can we invent as ways of shaping-shifting-sliding socialities into clearer socio-somatic intensities on daily levels? Fascias' viscous qualities inspire towards a non-identitarian, processual mode of aliveness. The term *tensional responsiveness* from fascia research activates qualities of elasticity, viscosity, support, and adaptation in bodying towards connecting in complementarity to other humans around us, and to the terrestrial ground beneath our feet. Putting music into practices of becoming tensionally responsive, can help build bridges between language as how we negotiate predominantly individual interactions, and music as unequivocally biased towards long-term interaction and cohesion of social groups, and the specifics of human survival. Extending communicative skills to non-human entities in our environments may be a processual technique towards being in touch with and responding to shifts in weight, pressure, sound, and other ambient vibrational qualities, on par with appreciating the multiple potentials of bodyings to co-compose within complimentary gendered coalitions as much as beyond any type of gender constructions.

Poetically said, our ancestors have been musicking to stay healthy and happy for 70,000 years; singing-dancing to keep us fit as individuals, and alive as groups. Ritualised gendered sounding helped shape the history of human development away from a single (male) source of authority and leadership, towards people being able to live modes of strong and healthy personal autonomy, of living independence within interdependence. Grounded in the

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85 Johnson 1987

traces of such socio-somatic resonancing, speculating on the future begins with becoming resonant with 'my' ecosystem and those 'I' am nested in and with, and sensing how and what we can co-compose, co-constitute, co-create together.

The proposition is to

**fine-tune singing and dancing together as practices  
for activating bodying power potentials,  
for circulating power in gendered and non-gendered modes,  
and for maintaining good health and social happiness.**

It could become mainstream to learn to communicate differently, in a polyphonic way of independence in interdependence; to engage through a more vocally modulated way of sharing and interacting, through something that looks and sounds a bit like singing with each other (but please not because it is chic to do something considered an ancient human cultural practice from 70,000 years ago). Singing together in private and public social interactions, should derive legitimacy from its socio-somatic generative qualities. If generating and maintaining harmony and happiness remain overall social aims, it is what bodyings can do and have been doing to keep their particular ecosystems and those around them healthy and happy for aeons. The proposition may seem weird, because we are not taught, educated, trained to do this. Most of us do not grow up being told to move-sense following an impulse, a hunch, an intensity, to activate the vibrating potentiality of singing, just like that, whenever it feels right and pleasurable to all. Suggesting such a practice, challenges ideas about how to move and behave in private and public spaces. But 100 years ago, it was not normal to drive a car. 20 years ago, using a mobile phone in public was a rarity. Speculating the future, maybe we will activate bodying as social potential in different ways and begin communicating in public with a vibrational intensity similar to singing with each other. It is one possible choice, one possible way of activating the potential, that is open to us.

The fact that we as humans can ponder our futures, comes through our ancestors' ongoing processes of harmonising tensions and inequalities. The ways they shifted the invisible levels of humanness into creative socio-somatic continuities, allow us to have emerged as the living-breathing beings of today. Sounding, musicking, resonating with others, was and continues to be a possibility to generate happiness and even to heal yourself and fellow

bodyings in that moment. Appreciating 'ourselves' as complex ecosystems, might make it easier to follow and extend the excitement and enchantment of generative qualities and energies into public spaces, and into closer circles of friends and at home. Grounded in and emerging from a novel awareness of (human) ecosystemic awareness, we could simply define and practice singing-dancing for the joy and continuous healing of fellow beings as a core value also of human futures. This intensity of complimentary moving-sensing bodying activates not necessarily through physical touch, but occasions also through virtually vibrating with others (As the Covid pandemic has shown, this is much easier than previously acknowledged). Becoming in resonance with other bodying ecosystems, stimulates rhythmic vibrations to give and receive whatever is needed as part of that occasion. Which might be completely different five minutes later, for a different occasion. Speculating the future, (public) polyphonic tensional responsiveness can inspire and open up the generative framework, vitality, and creativity we need to deal with the social and environmental challenges we are faced with. Bodies are resonant sound boxes, so we might as well play some good tunes.