

Proposition Four

- OPENING WORLDS INTO ECOSOMATIC ALIVENESS

Allow yourself to ...

Imagine and feel a dollop of honey on the tip of your tongue. Bringing your tongue in to your mouth, the honey warms and the temperature of the honey and the inside of your mouth become one; the honey melting, thinning, expanding, tenderly teasing each part of your mouth, sliding down your throat; transcending tissues into other body parts, leaving also your spine, tingling with pleasure. Oh, blessed honey sensation.

Wild honey from the forests around Adjab, the village where I lived with the Ivindo Baka, tastes like nothing else. In the Baka language, honey is *poki*. Poki is often collected and eaten directly, so my first glimpses would be of the honey combs gathered in whatever pot had been available for the task. The honey combs would be surrounded by the fluid honey slowly, regally, sensually oozing from one side of the pot to the other. The colour is a deep amber with golden tinges. The taste is woody, neither bitter nor sweet, a molecular explosion of all the earth's goodness and fecundity in your mouth. Sometimes dinner would be sucking on a honey comb and just a few mouthfuls of liquid honey were enough. At first, I was sceptical, but I quickly learnt that the honey is so rich that only a small portion leaves you satiated, and happy.

Dja mbo ka - The Opening of the World

Creation myths from around the world involve bees and honey, and the Ivindo Baka too describe their presence in the forest with the notion of having 'followed honey'. This is related to another tale about how the Baka enabled the *Fang*, a *Bantu* group migrating from the northern savannahs, to enter and

traverse the dense tropical forests. In order for this to happen, primordial Baka dug through a large tall forest hardwood tree with an adze, opening up the way into the forest via this tree opening. The Baka call this tree *Mabé*; in French it is known as *Moabi*; in English as *Pearwood*. The story of the *dja mbo ka*, the opening of the world via the Mabé/Moabi tree, is common knowledge, established in literature,¹ and was told me by the Baka and other inhabitants both along the Ivindo and in other parts of Gabon. Baka in Adjab described how:

The Fang were behind, the Baka were walking in front. The Baka had the axe. Everyone was behind us. Walking, walking, walking. When we arrived, there was a big tree, *Adzap* in Fang, what the Baka call *Mabé* and the French call *Moabi*. The tree was so big that people couldn't pass. So the Baka made a big hole in the tree, and waited whilst everybody, everybody who had been behind, passed through. After they got through, they arrived at a river, and [the others] stayed there. A generation passed, but the Baka didn't stop. It was the passage of all, including whites, blacks, and animals, the *dja mbo ka*, the opening of the world, which the Baka did for the others by cutting a door in the Moabi tree, making a safe passage through the deep ravines on either side.

Once they had enabled everyone else to pass through the Mabé/Moabi tree opening, the Baka were drawn into the forest by the sound of the bees and the *poki*. The Baka described this as 'following honey' in that:

Everyone stopped behind, but the Baka continued to walk to the point where we heard the bees. We followed the echo of bees. Following the echo, we went into the forest and saw the honey. Then we just contented ourselves with the honey. The others [Fang, whites, ...] remained in the village and we left for the forest. This is why we say that the Baka are in the forest. This is because from the beginning, it is the echo of the bees that makes the Baka be in the forest. We did not see what was in the village. When we continued into the forest and we saw the tree where there was honey, that's where we said, "that which we followed here, this is it." We began to gather honey. This is why the Baka stayed in the forest, because of the honey.

1 Cinnamon 1999

Oh, *poki* tropical forest honey, your taste and texture would make me walk far and forever too! Moving-sensing with the delicious taste of forest honey tickling our tongues, ...

how are the future worlds of bodying ecosystems? How are the sounds or other sensations we want to follow? How are the trees we want to open (not chop down), to emerge into more alive worlds?

Mythologies and Ecologies: Appreciating Cyclical Complexities

A primary question at the heart of initiatives to creatively rethink the human in more-than-human terms, is how to cultivate ‘narratives that are calibrated to the realities of our complex and changing world’.² Part of this complexity is that humans are not separate from one another, or from other beings. During many different workshops envisioning the future of mobility, urban development, higher education, or society in general, which I have participated in or offered, the overall ideas and dreams that emerged were always less about tech and more about human relationships. For example, in imagining the *World in 100 Years from Now*, the visioning included interplanetary travel, but participants’ burning questions revolved around what is ‘human’, how to define human identities, how humans communicate, and what kinds of bodies humans have.³ Generally, themes around communication, connection, and non-separation abound. Interweaving bodying as potential with narratives as part of how humans locate in the world,

what kinds of stories do we want to tell (ourselves) about present-past-future? Which stories do we inherit from the ancestors? Which of those narratives do we pass on to children and future generations? How are human - beyond-human relations portrayed in these complexity-acknowledging narratives?

One line of scientific responses to these questions and to the complexity of our worlds comes through *Systems Thinking*. Since about the 1960s, key thinkers such as Gregory Bateson, Lynn Margulis, Donella Meadows, James

² Rose et. al. 2012:3

³ House of Beautiful Business, a pop-up community during the Mobile World Congress (MWC), March 1, 2017, Barcelona.

Lovelock, Dorion Sagan, and many others have advocated and advanced a different awareness of human embeddedness within ecosystems, and the (detrimental) environmental impact of human activities within these systems.⁴ Generally speaking, *environment* includes everything that seems or is perceived to be outside of us: atmosphere, weather, colours, climate, infrastructure, technology; anything that humans associate with 'nature', so trees, animals, fungi, minerals.⁵ *Ecology*, on the other hand, emphasises the interrelatedness of all organisms. Ecological interconnectedness underlies long-standing, land-based, animistic ways of relating and living-with the land as much as contemporary eco-philosophies such as *Deep Ecology*.⁶ The literary response to the above questions comes also through the genre *Speculative fiction*. Speculative fiction encompasses imaginative, open, expanded types of writings ranging from science fiction to fairy tales to magical realism, so anything containing a fabulist or speculative element. It forms part of the work of critical thinkers and writers such as Donna Haraway, Robert Heinlein, Ursula Le Guin, and many more, who combine scientific research, especially on environmental topics, with creative fiction, asking *what if* and *what else*. This goes together with *Ecofiction*, a related genre considering the relations between humans and environmental issues. Both genres urge us to consider and re-consider themes around our relationship to the Earth, to the planet we live on, including practical questions such as the qualities of the water and soil we plant our crops in, thereby documenting also that we cannot think one dimension without the other. Employing fabulation and speculation as techniques, makes even more clear that smart technology design arguments hold little validity regarding human survival. In workshops aimed at stimulating a different bodily awareness and an open-ended networked sense of bodying, which I have offered or participated in, participants continued to emphasise that solutions to enduring (in urban environments) must be more than 'techno-fixes'.⁷ It is equally important to change the speculative qualities and intensities of the stories we tell when it comes to human + more-than-human futures.

Images of Earth taken from space, showing the 'little green-blue dot' during daytime or evidencing night-time light pollution, have become common-

4 For example: Bertalanffy 1968, Bateson 1972, Margulis & Sagan 2000

5 Brightman & Lewis 2017:12, Ingold 2011

6 Suzuki & Knudtson 2008, Næss 1989

7 Haraway 2016

place. We are familiar with plants transforming CO² into oxygen, which contributes to the blue layer of Earth, which in turn is at risk owing to the *greenhouse effect* around rising CO² emissions. The deeper entanglements of vegetal life, of plants and fungi, with human ongoingness and survival are becoming more researched, accepted and appreciated. The ground-breaking research by forest ecologist Suzanne Simard already showed many years ago, how mycorrhizal fungi interweave with plant roots to exchange information and chemical nutrients.⁸ Forests are connected not only through these underground networks of fungi, known as mycelium or the ‘wood-wide web’, but also above ground. The work of Natasha Meyers and others, has shown how global flows of oxygen and CO² go well beyond regional weather charts presented by smiling TV hosts.⁹ International bestsellers, such as *The Hidden Life of Trees* or *Overstory*, are bringing the fascinating facts about vegetal life into quotidian awareness, evidencing the intelligent global water and air management, which we then come to think of as ‘our’ weather charts.¹⁰ Trees and forest networks share with human fascias characteristics of web and fractal continuum as well as qualities of adaptation and elasticity. From a purely visual perspective, both mycelia and fascia networks are the ‘white stuff’, which was long ignored by science. Building blocks for human and vegetal forms are exactly not blocks, but curved structures. In the case of humans, these involve spiralled triple helix components and three-dimensional triangles termed ‘truss’, which create multi-directional layers.¹¹ Trusses and spirals, rather than blocks, allow for movement. Furthermore, the interplay and balancing of compression and tension in fascia connective tissue-systems is now known as *biotensegrity* following research by Stephen Levine.¹² Levine’s neurophysiological work extends Buckminster Fuller’s concept of *tensegrity* in architecture, to biological organisms. Curved structures and spiral layering enable moving-sensing in many directions, so that both trees and humans

8 Simard et. al. 1997

9 Myers 2018

10 Powers 2018, Wohlleben 2016. One effect of the Covid Pandemic has also been to make people more aware and appreciative of the plants they share their living spaces with.

11 Lesondak 2018:29

12 *Biotensegrity* describes how the tensional members of human bodies (fascias, tendons and ligaments) pull up the compression struts (bones) against gravity through the tensile force (Levin 2002). With fascia, it has been shown how tensegrity extends even to the cellular level (Ingber 2003).

can absorb and transmit tensions, and trees can sway and stay standing in strong winds.

An example of how closely the vegetal world is interwoven with the qualities of human life, is the Mabé/Moabi tree which co-constitutes the *dja mbo ka*, the opening of the world. Its scientific name is *Baillonella toxisperma* and it is a key element of tropical forest ecosystems as well as a well-known timber species. It makes a very dense, dark green crown, and its fruits are eaten in particular by elephants. As trees worldwide are worth more in the form of wood than as living beings, the Mabé/Moabi too is being cut down excessively, leaving a physical and systemic vacancy in the forest.¹³ Both humans and non-humans lack the nutritious fruits/nuts, which results in all beings having to search for other food sources, which then causes new pressures elsewhere in forest-village ecosystems. Spinning further the mythological reading, the trees can no longer open into worlds of plenty and abundance. Bringing together contemporary environmental studies of forest ecologies with the *dja mbo ka*, suggests that the story tells of Baka migratory history as much as emphasizing the deep interweavings of human with vegetal life. Contemporary modes of cutting down the Mabé/Moabi trees upsets such felt ways of knowing-sensing embeddedness, and creates dangerously large gaps in the ecosystemic entwining.

When they tell their mythologies, Baka say that first the world was in a way where all living beings, including plants, formed one family. In this world emerges the god *Komba*, who is always walking in the forest to hear the sound, the buzzing, of the bees. *Komba* becomes annoyed with humans who make noises which prevent him from hearing his beloved bee' buzzing, and he turns these humans into animals, when they do not obey the laws of the forest. One of the stories is about a Baka man named *Cobra*, who went to the forest in search of honey.¹⁴ Once he found it, instead of returning to the village camp to share it with his family and all others, as forest law demands, he stayed alone, gobbling up all the honey all by himself. *Cobra* rolled himself in the honey, and began dancing and singing by himself. When *Komba* saw this, he transformed *Cobra's* human body into a long scaly one, with markings like honey-coloured stripes, and so there is today the snake known as *cobra*. Since then, *Cobra* lives alone in the trees, remaining invisible to others. *Cobra's* story reminds Baka that avarice does not pay off, and that the result of being greedy is to end up

13 Noutcheu et. al. 2016

14 Brisson nd (about 1980):22–25

all alone and miserable. The story also accentuates that you cannot ignore or override being part of the forest system.

Nemophilist is an old word for a lover of forests and woods, and I definitely shift-slide with nemophilic qualities. I love being in the forest, walking amongst the trees, seeing-smelling-sensing plants and other beings, experiencing the pleasures of the forest's beauty. From my European perspective, I also associated forests with solitude.¹⁵ Walking, laughing, singing in the forest with the Baka, solitude was not easily found. There was no spacetime for European-style urban escapism. Living in the Ivindo forests was about being in and *with* the 'environment' and all its beings and qualities, about moving-sensing as an active living part of the tropical forest ecology. It was a process of merging and melting, giving in and giving up (sometimes for me not altogether voluntarily) to the endless cycles of emerging and perishing, made evident, for example, by plant growth and falling trees, or by human births and deaths. This cyclicity is a quality of tropical forests, as much as any other ecology, and I find myself asking, with Deborah Bird Rose,¹⁶

How can we understand ourselves as humans to be members of multispecies communities, of communities of human and more-than-human, which emerge through cyclical entanglements? How are human identities and responsibilities to be articulated from this perspective?

Cobra, in the Baka story above, learned the hard way that you should not snub forest laws around sharing the space and the fruits of the forest. Cobra, as much as your and my bodyings, we all form part of the changing complexities and continuous cyclical adaptations of specific (eco)systems. All systems have norms and rules, which regulate or penalise movements that are incoherent with the complex whole. Co-inventing, not only new vocabularies, but new narratives calibrated to complex and changing worlds, it becomes important to also consider the existing (observable) limits of bodying. Such limits or norms are imposed or enabled, for example, by human legal systems. Speculating and articulating human ecological embeddedness in novel forms of storytelling, equally challenges the existing limits of political togetherness,

15 From Japan, we have learned to call such practices *Shinrin-Yoku*, meaning forest-bathing Park et. al. 2007.

16 Rose et. al. 2012:3

and the modes of doing authority in dominating ways of hierarchical *power over* others.

Legal Limits

Accepting the limits of socialities is not an easy task, and one human response has been to invent legal systems to balance out rights and freedoms of different groups. When it comes to, for example, smoking in public spaces, some people emphasise their freedom to enjoy an outside environment without being molested by breath-taking smoke. On the other hand, we have a smoker's 'right' to not be confined to smoking indoors, to be able to feel the sunlight on their face, whilst they inhale from their cigarette. Or take the effects of noise in the same house or neighbourhood, of children needing to play by running around and shouting loudly, or people needing to relax and enjoy themselves, to dance till the early hours of the morning to loud music; whereas the neighbour might want to be able to have a siesta, or sleep before midnight, and wake up early and start the day with a concentrated, peaceful meditation. In these cases, it could be said that no-one is right or wrong, and no need or claim is better or more important than the other. Arguably, no 'right' is more valid than the other, and this applies even more when it comes to the cultural practices and funky stuff people do all around the world, where often activities and values are seen as opposed and irreconcilable.

Studying *Human Rights* as part of my law degree, taught me to take a critical view on 'fixed rights systems'.¹⁷ Central European countries such as Germany or France have so-called *civil law*, from which derive clearly defined and written, constitutionally enshrined rights for citizens. The UK on the other hand, has for many centuries had a tradition of what is known as *common law*. In common law, court judgments establish legal precedents for solving issues that cannot be determined on the basis of existing legislation, and these precedents often later become incorporated as laws. Both systems have their advantages and disadvantages. One effect of European colonisation is that the colonizers brought with them their legal systems, so that versions of common and civil law and the questions raised through their implementation exist in many parts of the world. One aim of establishing *Human Rights* was to transcend such different legal systems and cultural backgrounds, and to define

17 Gearty 2006, Douzinas & Gearty 2014,

'fundamental rights to be universally protected as a common standard for all peoples and all nations'.¹⁸ Fixing such rights in writing is beneficial for applicants, offering security especially to minority groups, as they are accorded legal standing and provided support for their legal claims. Groups, such as the Baka, are routinely threatened with being evicted from territories where they have lived for a long time, and successful land rights claims, as a subset of Human Rights law, (can) protect the livelihoods and cultural practices of such groups around the world.¹⁹

Living in Gabon, my White skin gave rise to discrimination and I was expected to have solutions to the ramifications of colonial brutality in Africa. Postcolonial legacies come with an embroiled in-between of caring and non-caring, and they affect everyone including the descendants of the European colonizers. During one heated debate, with well-read and passionate locals in a restaurant in eastern Gabon, I hit the same dead end as I had done during my law degree: being 'right', having legal rights, is not and cannot be the only solution! Legal structures and concepts of *Justice* can only go so far! That night in Eastern Gabon, questions about the qualities of how we relate, how we activate our capacities to be social, to resonate in respectful and hopefully peaceful ways, took on a new urgency. Often, applicable laws will fail to address the complexity of a situation or cultural nuance, and thereby may even exacerbate existing flaws in the systems. These are situations where two individuals or groups have equally valid, but seemingly incompatible legal claims. The position of the parties under law does not give rise to a satisfying outcome or solution for either party, let alone both parties, and possibly merely perpetuates existing injustices.²⁰ This risk is particularly strong with regard to ongoing postcolonial and racially-motivated power legacies. The challenge lies with how to acknowledge the qualities of these power structures without becoming, or continuing to be, instrumentalised by them.²¹

18 <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

19 In Gabon and other Central African countries, NGOs such as *Brainforest* have worked hard to prevent for example mining companies from destroying prime forest, thereby defending local populations who may be considered invisible in the eyes of the local law (www.brainforest-gabon.org).

20 Something I explored more recently also during the online event 'The Wilds Beyond Climate Justice', May 31-June 4, 2020 (www.emergencenetwork.org/the-wilds-beyond-climate-justice-opening-remarks/).

21 Wynter 2006

It may be the biggest challenge to learn to accept and integrate our distinct human qualities, and to attune differently to the generative powers of diversity.

Legal redress and receiving compensation for a wrong or loss, helps to negotiate the complexities of human frailties and the derived systems. There are always people who don't play by the rules and those who know how to apply the rules to only their best advantage (something that has been sorely underestimated in the enthusiasm for Blockchain technologies²²). Systems of accountability, through legal or other structures, address, or at least attempt to address, these difficulties we continue to create with and for each other. In many complex situations, the legal 'answer' is nevertheless unsatisfactory, or simply fails. The need for novel input into our human systems of accountability, into how we address the gaps left by existing (legal) structures, is becoming more urgent. Leaving the gaps unattended, makes it near impossible to live in sensitive community with humans and beyond-human. Gaps and cracks can be generative and socially nutritious, where they allow new life to emerge – think, for example, of plant shoots pushing up through cracks in the pavement. However, qualities of organising in sensitive relation to others cannot be lived in a healthy, sustaining way, if the crevices and fissures in the system are too deep, too wide, and too dark. Such fissures rupture healthy, generative qualities of network embeddedness, and to a certain extent disable capacities of living in tensional responsiveness. Such fissures would, for example, engender permanent hick-ups in the future of 'work' as continuously sharing in the joy and pleasures of relating.

How can we ensure that gaps, cracks and ruptures are not destructive, but creative openings? How can we weave generative tissue-systems across painful fractures? Into openings which allow for people's legally competing or incompatible concerns to enter socio-somatic resonance ...

The Human Rights model emerges from an *anthropocentric*, meaning a human-centred perspective. This standpoint serves its purpose when it comes to legal issues involving only humans, but once we actively acknowledge that our worlds are more-than human, established critiques of the anthropocentricity of the model are intensified. In many ways, the Human Rights model

22 www.nytimes.com/2018/02/02/technology/cryptocurrency-puerto-rico.html

reinforces identitarian approaches, as the legal claimant must have a clearly defined, fixed, and legally valid identity to bring a case. The beauty of environments and ecologies, on the other hand, lies in their complexity, which obviously deny being limited to a singular identity. Moreover, this demand for a unique identity retains and maintains a subject-object distinction. Derived from this, many rights definitions are phrased as and substantiate the dualism of *freedom from* - *freedom to*. At the same time, overcoming binary subject-object distinctions has been one of the main aims of critical thinkers for centuries.²³ Such polarising dynamics simply do not correspond with continuously shape-shifting ecological complexities. From a systemic perspective, binaries are, simply, one of the multi-directional layers enabling complex processes of moving-sensing. Recalling how existing legal systems already have flaws and gaps, the divergence between the complex, continuous quality of ecologies, and the identitarian, singularising quality of legal systems, which need to parcel up and separate out to function well, seems particularly critical.

Why do humans think it is normal for a multinational corporation to have more rights than a tree? What kind of rights are we going to give to robots and forms of artificial intelligence?

'Nature' and non-human species are emerging as new groups of 'rights-holders'.²⁴ The prevailing paradigm has been to treat 'nature' as property, of land as capital which must be made profitable, thereby allowing for unfettered exploitation. Recent years have seen a shift whereby rivers and other ecosystems such as the *Atrato River* in Colombia and the *Ganges* and *Yamuna* rivers in India, or *Te Urewera* and *Mount Taranaki* in New Zealand, received legal recognition.²⁵ These are examples showing how 'nature' now has *environmental rights*. Endorsing the legal recognition of these 'natural' non-human entities, is part of a larger movement challenging how basic Human Rights cannot be secured in a degraded or polluted environment. Conor Gearty, lawyer and professor for Human Rights, emphasises how *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* 'presupposes a functioning, human-friendly planet when it asserts the various rights to which (rather blithely we can now see) it declares

23 See, for example, Spinoza & Curley 1985, Bourdieu 1977, Haraway 2003.

24 Higgins 2010

25 See for example, Magallanes 2015, or International Rivers 2020.

all humanity to be entitled'.²⁶ Said another way: What is the point of securing universal political freedom if it becomes impossible to exercise it for billions trapped in degraded and uninhabitable environments?²⁷ The 'human right to a healthy environment' clashes with the realities of soil degradation, deforestation, toxic waste, or contaminated drinking water. For the time being, human righteousness over 'nature' as property is still eminent.²⁸ Recognizing *environmental rights* of individual non-human entities, and according legal recognition to singular aspects of a landscape such as a mountain, may be a step towards growing deeper legal connections between ecosystems and their human inhabitants²⁹; but just maybe, humans can do a little more.

The urgency remains for human perceptions and bodily awareness to shape-shift-slide towards a greater appreciation of the ecosystemic complexities we form part of. One strand of systems theory suggests that nearly every systemic problem can ultimately be traced back to the difference between system and environment.³⁰ Expressed in the terminology advanced here, a systemic problem shows up where ongoing processes of tensional responsiveness have been ruptured in ways which unbalance the sensitive continuity and cyclicity of adaptive moving-sensing. The growing field of environmental rights can help humans develop a perspective of everything classified as 'nature' as *on par* with humans. I specifically use the term *on par* meaning *as good as*, as opposed to 'equal'. We have seen throughout this book that, grasped through Baka egalitarian practices, the dominant, contemporary understanding of equality is a (modern) myth. Equality, for the Baka and many others, is a quality of lived life which emerges and distinguishes itself as co-composed, interwoven, and ongoing process, in which sharing means continuously responding to each other's requests, and communicating with the beings and qualities of ecosystemic more-than. Thinking-perceiving

26 Gearty 2010:13. The teachings of Conor Gearty, a lawyer and professor of Human Rights, inspired my passion for thinking together human diversity and environmental complexity. <https://conorgearty.co.uk>

27 Petrasek 2018

28 A recent report, funded by the UK government, argues for the need to attribute economic value to nature. The report has been criticised by Kate Raworth and others as merely attempting to solve the failings of neoliberal capitalism by including accounting metrics which factor in "natural capital": <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/15/price-natural-world-destruction-natural-capital>

29 See for example <http://lawyersfornature.com>.

30 Luhmann 1986:225

of humans and more-than-humans as on par, as *as good as*, opens up new possibilities of response in-between these worlds, perceived today as separate and distinct. If we are not fighting to make things equal, identical, the same, we may be able to instead move-sense creatively, to generatively shape-shift-slide into difference and diversity, into interwoven response-abilities. Sharing our worlds with more-than-human 'others', may come to mean that we have simply learned to continuously respond to the capacities and needs of these (non-human) 'others', and to be accountable to the limitations which express themselves through tensional qualities. In this version of life (in 2050 maybe?), complex legal frameworks and machinery have become obsolete. We have transcended simplifying life into 'freedom *from* - freedom *to*' binaries, and come to understand such dichotomies as aspects of the layerings of complexity. The illusions of freedom and separation-from-social become dispersed by taking seriously the ecosystemic potential to continuously shape-shift. Freedom as 'a pillar of Western thought and value'³¹ has been unsettled by enlarging and enlivening human understandings of (legal) solutions and accountability with intensities of more-than-human. Collectively coherent interweaving holds the potential to shift-slide dangerous fissures into becoming generative cracks. Attuning to this shifting-sliding, generates and deepens response-abilities as qualities of time-honoured human storytelling.

Political Togetherness as Sensible Togetherness and The Alien Inside

Boundaries and restrictions in complex worlds not only activate legal systems, they also have a political quality. Anthropological or sociological research reminds us how, together with grand enduring structures, on a daily level, people have always also made it up as they go along. There are always tensions underlying human interactions, and not just the law, anthropology, or sociology but also the disciplines of history, economy and most importantly all types of literature describe and investigate human conflicts and how humans continue to attempt to both set limits and overcome their limitations. The notions of *response-ability* and *tensional responsiveness* suggest that negotiating the limits of human bodyings are ongoing adaptive processes. A diffracted opening into the social vibrancy and vitality of this ongoingness, and into

31 Rose et. al. 2012:3

ecosystemic embeddedness and connectedness, carries novel political potential. Fabulating with both the limits of human bodyings and the Baka *dja mbo ka*,

which and how can be the inspirations and tools for politically sensitive storytelling, which opens up contemporary global forests into differently embedded worlds?

Attuning political storytelling to the ongoing vibratory hum of socialities, and to the potentials of sensitively organising in relation to others, may be helped by the following three notions. They are Bruno Latour's *kakosmos*; the *alien inside* drawing on the work of Joe Dumit, Kevin O'Connor, Karen Barad, and Robert Schleip; and *political togetherness as sensible togetherness* as written by Francois Laplantine. The first inspiration comes with Bruno Latour's notion that humans are currently journeying into *kakosmos*. Latour considers that after having moved from the closed *cosmos* (*cosmos* being a handsome and well composed arrangement), to the infinite universe, we are now moving back from the infinite universe into *kakosmos*, the 'cacophony of many' where there is no order (*cosmos*), no God, no hierarchy, no authority.³² Over centuries humans looked to the stars to provide guidance and solutions, but the dynamic of *kakosmos* is to return humans to the Earth, to the ground. It is clear that human star-gazing continues, as we search for water on the moon, and consider the practicalities of living on Mars. An example of this is the online series *Mars*, produced by *National Geographic*, about humans setting up the infrastructure they would need to survive on the red planet. Technically, the series is a great mix of fiction and documentary footage from the *Mars Rover Mission*, but in terms of social organisation and how the humans involved in the mission treat each other, it is pretty much the same old story of love and hate, power and domination.³³ So maybe this idea of the *kakosmos* holds more potential for (re)generative futures, than the escapist fantasy of setting

32 Latour 2014:4

33 Another example is the series *Sense8*, first released in 2015, which over-arching theme of global interconnection across lines of race, sexuality, gender and class, highlighting issues such as privacy, power, and social justice. The title *Sense8* is a play on the eight characters and the term *sensate*, alluding to the heightened sensorial capacities of the characters for telepathy and teleportation. When it comes to the actual storyline, *Sense8* disappoints as, after a promising start, it returns to the omnipotent (biblical) struggle between good and evil. A real-life example is the *Biosphere 2* project, where 8 volunteers lived together sealed inside a dome called Bio-

up human life on a different (inhabitable) planet? One way of reading the implications of the voyage into *kakosmos*, is that this development potentially not only takes people back from outer space to Earth, but necessarily into bodyings and questions around the physicality and materiality of being human; and through that to resonating differently with the more-than-human. As we saw in Proposition One, about half of the volume that we normally think of as (our) bodies is not human. Given that human bodying is co-constituted by diverse microbial beings, the journey into *kakosmos*, into the cacophony of many starts with 'us' as living-moving-sensing ecosystems; and with our fascias as the shifting-sliding matrix anchoring these ecosystems. Fascia, as our largest sensory organ, stimulates understanding skin as membrane and 'rethinking the relationship between depth and surface, inside and outside, self and other'.³⁴

In this kakosmic journey, can we delve beyond the epidermis into our connective tissues, to heighten capacities to perceive and appreciate diffractive connectivity with the more-than-human?

Shift your attention to your body. Where are you holding tension? How do you feel your skin quality? Whether you are sitting, standing, walking or lying down, can you drop your weight to the ground? Really sense the earth beneath you?

Emphasizing the indeterminate, generative qualities of fascia tissue-systems and the plasticity of bodying in timespace, encourages remaining open and attentive to the unexpected. Fascia allows us to conceptually and physically experience otherness, strangeness inside our own bodies.³⁵ What may at first seem like a rather outrageous proposition draws on related physiological and philosophical concepts. Firstly, research on alterity, on otherness, has shown that what we think of as the 'stranger' is not in existence as ontologically prior, but is *constructed* through social relations and as part of self.³⁶ The "other" does not exist, somewhere out there. We make up the "other"

sphere 2 from 1991-1993. They ended up starving and gasping for breath: www.theguardian.com/film/2020/jul/13/spaceship-earth-arizona-biosphere-2-lockdown.

34 Ahmed & Stacey 2001:4

35 This extends the suggestion to theorize fascia as a social network metaphor (Barcan 2011:140), also because the viscosity and elasticity of bodily connective tissues precisely deny being turned into a model or metaphor (Weig 2020).

36 Ahmed 2000

as we go along. This has important implications in politics, but for the moment I want to keep a neurophysiological focus, in which Joseph Dumit and Kevin O'Connor have led the way.³⁷ Joseph Dumit, anthropologist and professor of science & technology studies, and Kevin O'Connor, a multidisciplinary artist and then PhD student, created a movement research lab at the University of California Davis on academic and non-academic habits of moving and sitting. In the movement lab, participants worked with the so-called *myofascial lines*³⁸, the strands of thick fascia along the entire body which you can trace and activate with your hands and fingers. Participants' attention to these myofascial strands showed how the slightest shift in the fascial matrix is always a relational whole-body movement. Participants explored the different types of sensory nerve endings embedded in fascia, the so-called *mechanoreceptors*. They discovered that each activation of these mechanoreceptors creates a 'different kind of readiness for further movement, affecting one's future self'.³⁹ Breaking down specialist terminology, fascia is key to expanding and enhancing our capacities for *proprioception*, to how a person knows where their body is in space, and to *interoception*, meaning the sensorial relationship people have with their own body. Fascias intelligently respond to how a person treats their body, and this fascial capacity is described as and considered an other intelligence, a stranger, an *alien*. The idea of saying 'alien' derives from the experience that body parts such as fascias, stomach, or sinews are not ours, they are 'of a different order of being', like aliens right inside our own bodies.⁴⁰ Through the lab explorations, participants became more discerning about experiences of proprioception and interoception as multisensorial. Attempting to find linguistic expression for these sensing experiences, fascia was the "other" that one learned to articulate.⁴¹

Fascia therapy, equally, has shown that learning to feel the alterity within the self, in what is a 'testimony of self within self', enables you to feel the alterity of others in different ways.⁴² When you come to appreciate how many different layers, qualities, and movements make up your bodying, you are

37 Dumit & O'Connor 2016

38 Following the Rolfer and fascia specialist Tom Myers, *myofascial lines* are also known as *Anatomy Trains*. See 'A Brief History of Anatomy Trains' at <https://www.anatomytrains.com/about-us/history/>.

39 Dumit & O'Connor 2016:45

40 Dumit & O'Connor 2016:50

41 Dumit & O'Connor 2016:43

42 Bois & Austy 2007

more easily able to accept that other beings, too, do not have a rigid, fixed, everlasting identity. This is underlined by the work of physicist and philosopher Karen Barad, who brings together her work on quantum field theory, with the simple practice of holding your own hand, with the notion that touch never ends. Touch understood in this way can never be the actual contact of two points or surfaces. Touch is always an infinity of virtual and actual possibilities. In this infinity of possibilities, holding your own hand becomes 'an encounter with the infinite alterity of the self', as 'touching the other is touching all others, including the "self" and touching the "self" entails touching the strangers within'.⁴³ Holding your own hand is touching the infinite co-constituting of self-other, and acknowledging that these processes give rise to sensations of strangeness *and* familiarity. The 'alien' is not outside, waiting to be discovered or attacked, but qualities of strangeness, difference, unfamiliar, foreign, alien-ness, constitute part of (our) everyday nested ecosystemic bodying. Acknowledging these alien qualities of fascias becomes one way of acknowledging the more-than-human as part of what makes us 'human'.

Getting in touch with your myofascial lines and sensing what goes on below the skin's surface is one way of touching such experiences of alterity, of feeling the 'alien within', and becoming comfortable with these (tensionally responsive) sensations. The reflexivity of such processes is underlined by the so-called *CAKE technique* of body therapists, whereby the therapist, rather than either emotionally merging with clients or keeping a distance from them, focuses on a specific combination of self-sensing and kinaesthetic empathy.⁴⁴ Recalling *Doughnut Economics* from Proposition Two, both terms, Doughnut Economics and CAKE technique, come with suggestions of enjoyable foods, putting into words how economics, politics and bodyings can be delicious. CAKE stands for 'Constructive Anticipatory Kinaesthetic Empathy', with *kinaesthetic* referring to an awareness of bodying movement and the sense organs involved in this. Leading fascia researcher and therapist Robert Schleip explains the bi-directionality of the CAKE technique as:

Before touching my client on a new place I ask myself "Where is this same place in my own body? How can I be more present there? Am I able to anticipate kinaesthetically in my own body the particular state of release (or

43 Barad 2014:159

44 Schleip 2009

warmth, letting go, vitality, postural integration, connectedness ...) that I hope to induce in my client in this area?⁴⁵

This approach to fascia therapy underlines what is inherent in the physiology of connective tissues: there is no centre of authority, no single point which knows best, but only a continuously shifting-sliding matrix in tensional responsiveness to manual, biochemical and sensorial information. Bodyings are continuous dialogues on sensitive reflexivity and responsiveness, and it is timely to bring more attention to this in theories and practices of (human) social and political togetherness. Playing with becoming 'tensionally responsive' can no longer be merely an extra-curricular practice. Rather, we could become inspired by kinaesthetic intelligence (KQ), as detailed by Tom Myers in the Preface to *Anatomy Trains* in that:

We have long been familiar with mental intelligence (IQ) and more recently have recognized emotional intelligence (EQ). Only by re-contacting the full reach and educational potential of our kinaesthetic intelligence (KQ) will we have any hope of finding a balanced relationship with the larger systems of the world around us.⁴⁶

Or as Barad would have it: 'Matter is condensations of response-ability. Touching is a matter of response. Each of "us" is constituted in response-ability. Each of "us" is constituted as responsible for the other, as being in touch with the other.'⁴⁷ For most people, the term 'alien' probably conjures up images of beings very different to humans, maybe monstrous, and living in galaxies far away. However,

**truly acknowledging research from fields
such as neurophysiology and microbiology,
we can no longer ignore the more-than-human 'alien inside'
as shaping the bodying processes of our daily lives.**

The challenge lies with how we can instead activate this knowledge in creative ways, fabulating into being techniques and cognitive constructions which allow us to know, sense, feel how our bodyings are always already *more more-*

45 Schleip 2009:3. The reciprocity or bi-directionality of touch means that changes in the patient's body may produce changes in the practitioner's own body, as their energy fields intermingle and the process triggers bodily memories for both of them.

46 Myers 2001:vii

47 Barad 2014:XYZ check page ref, and italics?

than-human, than human. This as much as felt experiences of how fascia as well as (our) organs and other body aspects have a life of their own that is 'alien', can become the qualities from which we speculate and narrate our political futures.

Fascias' *both/and* challenges not only persistent ontological dualisms such as mind versus body, but potentially infuses and feeds forward into the ideas of Francois Laplantine who promotes bringing together the political with the sensible. Laplantine has argued to overcome the dichotomy of reason versus sensation with regard to concepts of what is political, contending that 'the political and the sensible can no longer be considered in a binary and obsidional manner'.⁴⁸ To the contrary, he suggests that the political can be formulated with reference to our shared sensibilities in that:

If the question posed by politics is the question of *how to live together?* then a politics of the sensible, for its part, is concerned with experiencing together, that is, of *shared sensibility*. Put differently, political togetherness is also sensible togetherness.⁴⁹

In this, Laplantine's concern is how there exists a political and historical dimension to sensory experience, which exceeds what individuals can consciously experience.⁵⁰ He locates this bodily excess, which resists being said, in the term *sensible*, which is 'another word for designating the body in all its states and multiple metamorphoses'.⁵¹ Laplantine's formulation resounds with my experience of Baka political-sensible togetherness, although his lines of argument emerge from many years of research in modern day Brazil.⁵² Laplantine published his thoughts before more knowledge on fascia became available, so

what happens, if we bring together this position of politics as including shared sensibility with that of fascia considered as our largest sensory organ? Can we emphasise differently human neurophysiologies together with concepts of political togetherness and capacities for being social and organising sensitively in relation to others?

48 Laplantine 2015:83

49 Laplantine 2015:82

50 Desjarlais 2003, Stoller 1997

51 Laplantine 2015:84

52 See also Guattari & Rolnik 2008

Peering beneath our human skin, beneath the layer that supposedly separates us from the world, we can discover and sense fascias' living, shifting-sliding vibrational qualities as well as the diverse materialities of (human) microbiomes.⁵³ Attuning to these qualities and rhythmicities may help as one way of overcoming the rising commodification of human bodies and communities, and to moving towards thinking-perceiving in a non-identitarian, processual way with regard to human politics. Really appreciating (our) bodies as bodying ecosystems, shifts long-standing binary debates towards celebrating diversity: Political diversity! Cultural diversity. Gender diversity. Functional diversity. Microbial diversity. Ecological diversity! Alien diversity! Kakosmos! Uncertainty! More-than!

Intertwining these strands of neurophysiology, anthropology, sociology and philosophy and allowing for ontological indeterminacy, a radical openness, and an infinity of possibilities to take centre stage, unsettles notions of fixed identities and linear lives.⁵⁴ For human politics, Laplantine terms this moment *kairos* as the 'instant in which I am no longer with others in relationship of mere coexistence but where I begin to be disrupted and transformed by them'.⁵⁵ Activating radical openness and intertwining the research strands more deeply, animates the non-linearity of bodying as political potential, beyond egalitarian socialities. It encourages to truly give political credit to how we are continuously co-inventing the body in that 'what we are making and remaking at all times, are the very parts, and wholes and environments of and for our bodies, our selves, and worlds'.⁵⁶ Appreciating the varying intensities of these processes of continuous co-invention, offers a neurophysiological nuance to Sara Ahmed's socio-political argument that a 'stranger' is not in existence as ontologically prior but is constructed through social relations and as part of self.⁵⁷ Building on how the capacity to move and the capacity to experience are related,⁵⁸ getting in touch with the alien fascial self and sensing what goes on below the skin's surface, can be a direct visceral experience

53 To start with, it may be easier to attend and attune to fascia, as key to how we move-sense the world, also knowing that microbes can arouse aversion.

54 Barad 2014:7

55 Laplantine 2015:13

56 Dumit & O'Connor 2016:51 drawing on Bruno Latour's concept of the *articulate subject* as someone who learns to be affected by others, not by themselves.

57 Ahmed 2000

58 Stern 2010, Sheets-Johnstone 2011

of 'other'. For most people, including myself, engaging with and heightening physiological self-awareness, is an experience of fascination and joy. The enchantment of perceiving (your) bodying differently, also offers a different experience of what is alterity (for you). It becomes possible to consider otherness as a socio-political *and* a bodily quality. The joy and enchantment open up novel political potentials. Moreover, thinking-perceiving the 'alien inside' can infuse working differently with political or personal fears of being invaded or lost. Appreciating the intensities of (our) microbiomial bodying means already knowing 'invasion' as an everyday feeling. With the trillions of bodily cellular beings, there is always multispecies aliveness and tension going on 'inside' us.

These are challenging ideas, and already here I respond to potential critics in that of course experiences of alterity cannot only be had by growing awareness around fascia and microbiomes. However, given all the new information emerging in the fields of fascia research and microbiology, it begs the opportunity. What is additionally interesting, is how such modes of sensitive perception, further enable the potential of integrating knowledge based on scientific research with other ways of knowing. Specifically, for example, by bringing together the lived experience of Baka egalitarianism, as a long-standing and successful human group practice which involves sensing, communicating, organising in relation to others; with the latest research findings from the field of neurophysiology on fascia as our largest sensory organ; with research on rising eco-anxieties around environmental futures. Fascia's special qualities are its multiple forms of network, continuum, fractal; forms of both structure and unbounded aliveness through diverse spiralled collagen layers. Fascias' tensional responsiveness is a systemic quality of how we move-sense and become in the world. Like Baka gender potentials or the ground vibration of the forests around Adjab, fascias are humming, always ready to shift-slide infinite possibilities of sensitive relating into becoming and actuality. This humming power potential, emerging from spiralling structures, is capable of bringing forth and contributing to socio-political or legal novelty - through activating processes of tensionally responsive interweaving, across existing, separating rifts. With that, these qualities and intensities of humming, hold a dimension and potential that is social, cultural, political, and ecological, and that we would do best to no longer ignore. Vitaly, such a shift can never be imposed. Cultivating these kinds of sensitively listening and attuning to, and interweaving, is not 'a matter of conversion, but of produc-

tion'.⁵⁹ From small improvements to major transformations, these potentials can only ever be activated by joint processes towards 'a collective fabrication that creates the ability ... of becoming capable of thinking and feeling differently'.⁶⁰

Take a moment to exhale, to sense where is your field of tension in this moment. How is your tensional response, shifting-sliding as you read and breathe? Are you truly alive? From that space, how are the stories you would like to tell about the future?

Dominant Authority and Situational Leadership

As we saw in Proposition One, (our) ancestors appreciated 'institutional plasticity' as one way of shaping socio-political systems as needed. Engaging with the challenges of human and more-than-human complexity, social organisations were adapted to the form of leadership, or lack thereof, which was most appropriate for that event or season. The work of Donella Meadows considers what can be tools to dealing better with contemporary (human fears around) complexity. Meadows pioneered systems thinking and contributed to the report *The Limits to Growth*, commissioned by the *Club of Rome* already in 1972. We find some of her advice in *Dancing With Systems*, where she writes about how 'self-organizing, nonlinear, feedback systems are inherently unpredictable. They are not controllable'. She further emphasises that 'living successfully in a world of systems requires more of us than our ability to calculate [aspects of complexity]. It requires our full humanity'.⁶¹ Instead of being scared and fighting for control, she invites us to dance, and I join her in doing so! Part of this dance towards appreciating the tensional dynamics of complexity and adaptive cyclicities, is also a critical consideration of current ways of doing authority and leadership.

Equality of opportunity and flat hierarchies are proclaimed as socio-political and socio-economic goals we strive for today, and over the last 20 years, there have been successive waves, aimed at creating flatter hierarchies, flowing through all types of industries and institutions. I personally experienced the benefits of direct communication with and past a boss who was strong

59 Pignarre & Stengers 2011:50

60 Pignarre & Stengers 2011:50

61 <http://donellameadows.org/archives/dancing-with-systems/>

enough in himself to not control the information flow between the ranks, but trust in us, his employees, to tell him what he needed to know for his level of decision-making. These shifts in management practices are to be welcomed, but Baka egalitarianism suggests to look even further when considering how living (economic) lives as we please, is intricately linked to questions of authority and leadership.

Can we find ways for giving weight to authority and leadership as situational processes of bodily, relational, sensorial, attuning to? Can we allow for creative humming and not telling people what to do, to actualise as response-ability and accountability, coherent with the qualities of that occasion?

For people working in large multinational corporations, government organisations, small family run businesses, universities or research institutes, esoteric cults, or art museums - daily realities predominantly consist of somebody having the authority to tell someone else what to do. The telling takes place in more or less rigidly structured systems made up of rules, hierarchies, egos and annual bonuses. Many corporate managers and scientists are busy battling over powers and privileges, what they think they are entitled to as their 'rights', within companies or academic institutions. Many fight and struggle to protect their 'departmental territories' as they remain firmly stuck in silo thinking. With regard to emphasizing profit and prestige, it is rarely the top executives or company directors who are the problem, but more middle and upper-tier managers who must compensate for not being alpha, for not being at the top of the social pyramid. Only a few are truly content with not being number One, and capable of moving-sensing with aliveness, in creative, generative, tensional responsiveness to the overall system. Similar dynamics apply in the academic world, with individuals traversing the ranks merely through successful political intrigue, and, sadly, also in the non-profit *Third Sector*, where profit notions are explicitly side-lined and yet people on power trips embezzle funds, as in any other industry.⁶² Consider, on the other hand, a small farmer. Many would look down upon this person with something like benevolence. And yet, this person, similar to any Baka female or male, is entirely responsible for their (business) decisions and must carry any positive or negative socio-economic impact, without having extensive health or life

62 <https://odihpn.org/magazine/corruption-in-the-ngo-world-what-it-is-and-how-to-tackle-it/>

insurance, or shareholders to pick up the results of faulty business decisions. This person, and all those, especially women, living off below-minimum incomes around the world, need to have much more than just entrepreneurial spirit to make their lives, and that of their families, a success of surviving well. The middle management of any multinational, considered as hard-working and respectable citizens, will mostly just follow orders from their superiors, vying to move further up the corporate ladder, playing it safe, rather than actually improving a work situation or product. How humans live or dance out questions of authority and leadership, relates to the qualities of the (eco)systems they are sharing and participating in.

Baka understanding of authority likewise emerges from and with their ecosystem, but how different is a lived experience, where leadership is situational and nobody can tell anybody else what to do. Returning to Adjab in 2019, one of the Baka men had been appointed as the official village chief according to Gabonese state rules, and in obvious contradiction to Baka egalitarian ways of social organisation. The imposition of a chief or headman by (well-meaning) outside authorities, leaves Baka and many other groups around the world struggling to try and match the rules and protocol of having a chief with the group's own values and practices which contradict and prohibit exactly such chiefly behaviour. In conversation with the new Baka 'village chief', whom I know well, he commented on how he suddenly had so much work to do. He did not use the word, but it would be a fitting description to say he was 'stressed' by not only having to share in his own family affairs, but suddenly being told he was also responsible for all the other Baka families. What was most striking, was the tension in his body as we were speaking about this topic. It seemed to me that the pressure of being village chief was not only weighing him down in ways familiar also elsewhere. The demand to control and be responsible for others is so contradictory to his values and to how this approximately 50 year old man has lived his entire life, that it is causing him physical pain. From the perspective of tensional responsiveness, his capacity to move-sense from his sensitive egalitarian responses to tension and conflict, has become so distorted that it is occasioning also physiological change. His aliveness and personal autonomy in connecting and limiting connectivity were gravely unbalanced. It was an occasion of deep grief, sensing how Ivindo Baka are having to give up their egalitarian ethos, their values, their socio-somatic ways of doing things; giving this up to be seen, acknowledged and officially accepted as citizens of Gabon, to be treated with basic respect. This was once again an event, where legal recognition brings certain benefits

to the people concerned, but where laws and rules do not address let alone shape-shift or resolve the underlying human tensional dynamics into more creative and generative patterns. It was an occasion emphasising the urgency for a 'collective fabrication',⁶³ for tensionally responsive, speculative storytelling that engenders radically different capacities of thinking-feeling how we relate as humans; or at least, how qualities of situational authority and leadership can be legally accommodated for.

Controlling the Hero

The experience of egalitarian sociality and bodily co-presence as non-violent power potential, also challenged and influenced my personal understanding around control: being controlled, controlling others, resisting control. It made me realise how incredibly subtle and thus even more painful and damaging these (everyday) control dynamics often are; and how mostly we are not even aware of how we do, or at least attempt to, control and exercise power over others. This sensitivity came partly through the reverberations of experiencing social change in Adjab, where socio-technological and ecological alterations are causing the joy and vibrancy of egalitarian sociality to be channelled into detrimental outlets. The echoes of the destructiveness of diminishing socio-somatic aliveness, and the resulting loss of healthy group intensities, continued to resonate. These echoes lured me into a deepening sensorial exploration of how we (meaning everybody) do authority and control, in the present and future. This is an exploration into the difference of *power over* and *power with*.⁶⁴ It is an ongoing discovery of how this essential nuance of *over* or *with* can create or avoid traumatic responses. It is a journey based on knowing-perceiving how qualities of hierarchy, self-centredness, and separation dominate the ecosystem which educated and formed my bodying, and that of most of the people I relate with. These values trace into the shifting-sliding of fascia tissue-systems, and into social moving-sensing. It is also a journey of acknowledging and honouring the egalitarian lure which brought

63 Pignarre & Stengers 2011:50

64 The emphasis on this distinction comes also through the work of Bayo Akomolafe, and the course 'We Will Dance With Mountains', hosted by *The Emergence Network* and Bayo, from October 2020 - January 2021. I am deeply grateful especially to Robyn Fila, and other members of the Fire #6 group, for our ongoing conversations around activating this shift in everyday experiences.

me to Adjab, to a social organisation grounded in sensitively communicating and organising in relation to others; to a mode of engagement where power potentials never settle, but are continuously churned and stirred. This egalitarian systemic lure is not an exotic, tropical nice-to-have, but was and is real, beautiful, powerful, and asking to be present in larger collectively coherent ways.

How or what shifts, if we think-perceive bodying as socio-political potential and as processes of aliveness, which can only be well-managed but not controlled? Can we tell non-violent stories, where any human authority is built on and grounded in as much as checked and balanced by global more-than-human perspectives? How would seasonal cycles, lunar ebbs and flows, and the land where that leadership or authority is being exercised, figure in these stories?

Many fairy tales can be critiqued for portraying and reifying gender stereotypes and fortifying patriarchy.⁶⁵ What is possibly of equal concern, is the 'happily ever after' bit; not from a sociological point of view, but from the ecosystemic perspective. In that final moment of the happy end, the tension driving the story has been resolved. It is implied, moreover, that the tension will never return. I appreciate the need for stories of hope as much as anybody, but pretending that tension goes away forever is not always helpful, and is contrary to lived life. Certainly, taking a global perspective, the world is fuelled also by enduring toxic tensions. Acknowledging and developing a different relation with 'tension' can potentially deepen capacities and abilities to respond, rather than to react. With regard to speculative ecofiction, it seems important to officially reinstate tension, as a productive, creative quality of human and more-than-human socialities. Tension in the sense and as a quality of opening into continuous movement, into ongoingness. Where moving from the sensation of tension, means moving-sensing from connectedness, and emerges from listening to the quality of response possible and/or asked for on that occasion. This process of listening-moving comes not from the controlling human, individual, ego perspective, but is an attunement to aliveness, to the ecosystemic perspective. It is a process of listening-moving with the *event*, as Whitehead would write.⁶⁶ It is a shift

65 Voss 2006

66 Whitehead 1978 [1929]:73

to authority not as something that can be eternally held or owned, but as a quality of the specific situation and event.

With regard to storytelling, attuning to qualities of ecosystemic aliveness is one way of challenging the dominant form of modern narratives focused on the individual human hero. As Donna Haraway amongst others has written, this narrative pattern involves the hero, or sometimes the heroine, undergoing a dramatic quest, to then return and re-enter their society with a changed and improved identity.⁶⁷ Admittedly, it is much easier to tell a hero story, if only because the reader or listener can clearly and easily identify with an individual hero or heroine. On the other hand, it is very difficult to narrativise collective, non-identitarian (meaning not focused on clearly bounded individuals) events. It is here that the sparks of fascia research, of neurophysiology and microbiology, can weave into speculative socio-political storytelling and ecofiction. In the fascia tissue-system there is no centre of authority, no single point which knows best, but only a permanently shifting-sliding matrix. The continuous small shifts and sliding readjustments in bodying ecosystems are ongoing, and in that way contribute, if not allow for, collective structures to remain standing. As we begin storytelling around *political togetherness as sensible togetherness*, away from dominant or violent authoritarian structures, these shifting-sliding intensities underlying collective configurations and networks, always involving the more-than-human, could become the qualities with which we speculate about the future. Coming from such an involvedness of attuned bodying ecosystem, allows to 'adequately address the [kakosmic] real in all its surprising complexity'.⁶⁸ Moreover, it enables attending to cultural and biological diversities, to 'multispecies communication', and to giving multiple sounds and spaces to marginalised, excluded or invisible entities.⁶⁹

Speculating around sensitively shape-shifting (future) structures of control, nowadays extends to the (in)tangible algorithms of computerised data processing. Futures' storytelling cannot disregard these invisible *rhythms* that shape, govern and increasingly even define human lives. The recent movie *Social Dilemma* unambiguously portrayed how building authority of opinion on platforms such as *facebook* influences or even decides national and international politics. From teenage female suicides to fundamental democratic

67 Haraway 2016:52, Campbell 1988.

68 Grosz 2010:49

69 Haraway 2016

processes, everything is swayed not only by the 'invisible hand' of market economics but by invisible algorithms. As the film shows, even software programmers can no longer explain let alone really manage this kind of machine learning, which decides and manipulates who and what we come into contact with in (our perfectly individualised) online worlds. Artificial intelligence is an intricate part of daily life, and we cannot ignore the ever-growing number of artificial control-mutants turning us into marionettes of our own lives. The reputation of a Baka person can also spread and influence well beyond the locations where they live, in ways familiar and similar to global social media. However, the kind of levelling of authority in Baka egalitarianism, depends in many ways on physical proximity and face-to-face communication, and must be actively maintained. Sharing this type of co-presence and face-to-face communication with currently over seven billion people on Earth, is something bodying ecosystems are not designed to do. For example, *Zoom fatigue*, meaning the sense of exhaustion after spending hours in different online communication tools, is a clear testimony to limits of bodying online. In future, brain implants may give immediate access to, for example, all information from Wikipedia,⁷⁰ but ...

where will such embodied, algorithmic developments leave human ways of control and authority? Do we even still have time for fabulating into existence stories and practices of leadership emerging and moving-sensing from qualities of tensional responsiveness?

As things stand, we cannot know with any certainty where artificial intelligence will take the human control journey. However, it is possible to challenge dominant conceptions around authority, hierarchy and control that appear as eternally given, although they form only the current adaptive cycle of humanity. Already, there are myriad groups of people experimenting with and putting into place new forms of team organisation and leadership. The biggest issue with many of these initiatives seems to be that they struggle with losing the overall focus on a 'master' or 'guru'.⁷¹ *The United Nations Sustainable Devel-*

70 www.theguardian.com/science/2019/sep/22/brain-computer-interface-implants-neuralink-braingate-elon-musk

71 Following my research observations, there will often be one person (often a male) who takes the lead, and for those around this person, following this lead, even expressly seeking it, is entirely 'natural'. There seems to be little or no awareness of the inherent contradictions between the advocated flat, dynamic organisational structures, where everybody gets a say, and the one, unquestioned leader, who always takes the final

opment Goal 4 promotes 'lifelong learning for all'.⁷² It is curious to consider how developing such models of lifelong learning, goes together with appreciating and activating all the nuances of situational leadership both/and/or organising sensitively in relation to others, beyond the 'guru-shaman', and towards the 'alien inside'. Certainly, shifting attention to lifelong learning entails shifting attention to qualities of continuity and ongoingness. Taking the cue from our palaeolithic ancestors' institutional plasticity and from how the fascia tissue-system keeps everything both separate and connected, may allow for inventing social organisations and modes of leadership resonant with authority as a quality of situational, sensitive, non-violent tensional responsiveness. To share and participate in such ways of relating and doing authority, would necessitate a particular aliveness and novel presence with qualities of ongoingness.

Singing-Dancing out Ecosomatic Aliveness

Proposition Four suggests that deeper attention to relational *aliveness* offers a generative quality to storytelling on future worlds and human survival. Aliveness refers to various qualities. Most of all, it refers to becoming present and to showing up to whatever is happening in that situation, in that moment, on that occasion. Aliveness, together with non-violence, means not running away or separating, and acknowledging and working with the continuity of life. This mode of aliveness encourages speculating around interweaving the political, economic, and sensitive, into fabulations on surviving in a world of increasing environmental change and disruption, where often legal systems and leadership principles cannot appropriately accommodate for cultural or ecological perspectives. Instead of prioritising individual hero identities, this approach focuses on nested intensities of more-than-one and more-than-human bodyings. Egalitarian socialities like that of the Baka highlight that practices of self-limitation can be more easily accomplished, or even clearly necessitate,

decision, often completely negating hours of group work which took place without them. The ways these modes of hierarchical social organisation are deeply ingrained and embodied beyond cognitive awareness counter-acts all statements of intention to organise otherwise.

72 <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>

the group as a levelling mechanism. The idea of individually inflicted self-limitation is more of a myth, as the above tale of Cobra and the seductiveness of forest honey helps to illustrate. This mode of storytelling then draws together earthbound and artificial intelligence, with how moving-sensing, shifting-sliding, sensitively-relating bodying ecosystems hold the potential to share, meaning to *request, return or let go*, what is needed in that particular process or occasion.

Such storytelling practices would form part of the emerging field of *Ecosomatics*, which brings together *soma* as the direct sensory perception of the body, also termed proprioception and interoception, with the awareness and perception of the human body as ecological, as bodying ecosystem with Earth systems.⁷³ *Ecosomatics* joins up somatic practices with issues around ecological health, sustainability, and (re)generative cultures. It is particularly relevant to techniques designed to engender a different awareness for the importance of biodiversity in human survival, and to ease eco-anxieties. Eco-refers to ecology, and indicates how human presence is always a co-presence with the more-than-human, both 'inside' with the microbial and all the other bodily aliens, and 'outside' with all the beings and qualities we co-compose our worlds with. Bringing the eco and the somatic together into ecosomatic, underlines human ecological embeddedness, and how moving-sensing is an unarguable experience of gravitational forces, the terrestrial, the earth, the ground under our feet. Intertwining ecosomatic with capacities of how people are able to be present and alive, to sense and resonate with fellow beings in non-separating ways, offers the perspective and quality of *Ecosomatic Aliveness*. Telling stories about present and future worlds with tensional responsiveness and ecosomatic aliveness, is one way to shape-shift awareness around how we already move-sense and position now in daily life from the middle of the aliveness (or shadow and numbness) of our deep tissues, without necessarily being aware of it. Generating such awareness, in turn, carries the potential to transform the quality and content of the stories we can tell about future social transformations.

With Propositions One, Two and Three comes the notion of bodying as potential, of bodying as capacity for the social, humming away, waiting to be activated into different intensities and ongoing aliveness. Proposition Four adds and emphasises that experiencing this potential, this capacity for social aliveness, is not a particular seminar technique, or something reserved

73 Walla 2012:262

to a weekend retreat, away from the stress of the working week, in order to restore the work-life balance. This aliveness, and the potential for it to be activated with different ecosomatic intensities, is there 24/7. What makes Baka and similar groups stand out in comparison to capitalist consumer society, is the wisdom in generating and managing this aliveness, without needing to rigidly partition it off into 'safe' temporal pockets. In Baka sociality or otherwise, vitality, aliveness, vibrancy, resonance, are what make life and adaptive cyclicities, continuously. The diverse potentials for how such vitality and power can manifest is also a quality of earth, of the ground we walk on, the water we drink or swim in, the air we breathe and con-spire with vegetal life. The aliveness in human experience is sensing the reverberations of earth aliveness, and translating this, mostly, into joint practices with other humans. It is sensing and knowing independence within interdependence, meaning a diversity which is not equal but on par with, with other humans, and Earth, appreciated as complex processes and couplings of sheer incomprehensible more-than-human beings and qualities. Socialities like that of the Baka, attune to the joy of such ecosystemic participation, and the importance of enchantment and loss of ego for the pleasures of sharing to occur.

Aliveness as a bodily quality is power, is the potential for activating this power with different intensities, is this capacity for being social in a mode of independence within interdependence. Aliveness as power potential means it can create, and destroy. Aliveness is a quality which needs to be treated with care, and which needs to be carefully managed. Again, what makes Baka and other groups stand out, is that

**managing aliveness is not a question of control,
but of responding sensitively to the intensity of that occasion.**

Each of us knows these moments, when you get really excited about something. In that moment of passion, you may say and do things you might not otherwise. If someone tells you off in that situation, it hurts all the more. Punishments for expressing your aliveness and vitality are felt more deeply, and often cause some kind of withdrawal. What is special about egalitarian groups, is that they carry forward knowledge of how to let the power of aliveness manifest and find diverse expressions, non-violently, so without dividing. There exists deep wisdom of how to carefully manage aliveness, without causing extensive harm to an individual or the group. The magic lies with responding sensitively, with actively finding the sensations of tensions, and

moving in response to those tensions, without entirely excluding anyone. Living the power of aliveness is living tensional responsiveness. Living such an alive mode of social organisation need not be something special or out of the ordinary, or part of a neatly packaged course that you have to pay money for. Qualities of actively co-composing and sharing co-presence and ongoingness, are largely what can, do, and have made society 'work' for our ancestors, so that we can be here today. Weaving together Baka sensitive, non-violent ways of relating and managing capacities for aliveness with the notion of tensional qualities, opens up contemporary Mabé/Moabi trees towards novel ways of storytelling with ecosomatic aliveness.

Fascias are part of (human) responsiveness to earthbound aliveness in particular through their importance in how they enable human sensing and moving with gravity. Attuning to shifting-sliding fascias can deepen the appreciation of ongoingness, and the capacities for not resisting continuity, which also distinguish Baka bodying as power potential. Within capitalist consumerism, the fairy tale happy ending looms large. The conditioning that we will get to that point, where everything will be alright, if not perfect, is deeply engrained. Expectations arising from linear time constructions, suggest there is a reward for all the hard work. We will reach that moment, when the tension has balanced out forever. Experiencing aliveness as potential is not that. Living-sensing-moving aliveness as power, is appreciating the permanent creative hum which emanates from earth, from the ground beneath our feet; from the shifting-sliding of fascia tissue-systems, and the microbial activities beneath human skin; and the humming with the nested socialities we form part of. Whether or not artificial intelligence and robots will take over and decide on how to run what is human in life on Earth, we – as humans – can activate and manage well that creative hum, we can be alive. The question we can ask, is ...

how to shape AI to make it possible for aliveness as social potential to manifest not as a weekend get-away, but as something which is a humming, bubbling potential of our every-day, every-moment lives?

Ecosomatic aliveness connects with non-linear, cyclically adaptive qualities. Researching with the Baka on their migratory history, revealed how particular values guide their mobilities. The heart, *buma*, is essential to Baka mobility decision-making, and *me* spirits take care of the living by sending messages on how to proceed in difficult situations through *keta*, through

dreams.⁷⁴ Baka emphasise good social relations with neighbouring ethnic groups, and as the research interviews showed, decisions to leave or stay in a particular place often come only after a time period of approximately two years. This notion of relational, sensitive decision-making interwoven with a two-year time period was referred to as *ntumbu*. *Ntumbu* indicates a level of emotional attachment and desirable relational quality with a certain location, and with the neighbours in that location. The assessment of these relational qualities is ongoing. After about two years, if there is relational continuity, there happens a shift in the intensity of how people, with ecosystem, are relating. Baka *ntumbu* adds to concepts of Baka interrelatedness of sociality, space, and time (as described in Proposition One), the quality of *how is the relating with a particular group or location during a time period of two years*.⁷⁵

Around the world, there are an increasing number of so-called *Intentional Communities*. These are groups of people who have chosen to live with each other (or residentially near enough) to carry out their shared lifestyle or common purpose together.⁷⁶ The term *Intentional Communities* describes groups, who are building up ecovillages, or similar co-living projects aimed at being in close connection with nature, and who aim to organise processes of decision-making and other organisational aspects in less hierarchical and more egalitarian ways. Interestingly, only about 10% of these projects really get off the ground or make it past the first two years of their existence.⁷⁷ It seems there is something in the period of two years, which makes or challenges things with respect to continuing socialities and group dynamics. A socio-somatic reading of this could be that the first year is an experience of first cyclicality; everything, all activities, qualities, and intensities, are done and experienced for the first time. This first year comes with both novelty and neutrality.

74 Weig 2017:82, Weig 2013:138

75 Moreover, it seems that the following temporal steps are between 3-10 years, then from 10 years onwards. There is an interesting temporal parallel here in that a Baka person is considered a human being once they have reached the age of two, have been weaned, and can walk in the forest on their own. During the first two years, Baka refer to children as *bimi na bo*, as half a human. After about two years, they are considered as *yande*, as children and a 'whole person'. This suggests that Baka have a notion of basic maturity occurring after two years (Gallois 2017). Mbiti also describes 'African time' as having no conception of future beyond two years, although he is, of course, writing about Bantu perceptions (Mbiti 1969). See Annex I for more information on Baka interrelatedness of sociality, space, and time.

76 Leafé Christian 2003:xvi

77 Leafé Christian 2003:2

The second year carries with it the potential of both repetition and change, ranging from sensitive shaping-shifting-sliding, to dramatic clear-cut making or breaking. It is striking that the *how* of the second year, seems to carry this importance for Baka groups and for intentional communities. The uncertainty and unpredictability of the second year *how*, takes us one step further to *trickster* qualities. *Tricksters* are mythological figures, who cause disruptions through tricks and play. They defy conventions, offend and upset norms, or turn things into the opposite of what they appear to be.⁷⁸ Trickster qualities open up and alert humans to gaps, cracks, and ruptures, which carry transformational potential. Bringing trickster qualities together with the importance of the second year, ...

can we include these two-year (rather than standard economic five-year) transformational rhythmicities into shape-shifting futures' storytelling?

It would certainly be one way of actively playing with and weaving together speculative storytelling, terrestrial qualities and adaptive cyclicities, with the diverse non-linear temporalities of bodying as potential. An initial resonance between two bodyings or more, may be immediate and strong, but creating and maintaining sociality with fellow bodyings, or rejecting such community, is this process of continuous small shifts and sliding readjustments. As we begin storytelling around *political togetherness as sensible togetherness*, as referred to above, the non-linearity and untimeliness of bodying ecosystems, reminds us how the creative potential of occasions is never entirely exhausted, and remains available to shape-shifting into novel continuity.⁷⁹ Accessing this kind of bodily temporality, this motility, we may be able to attune more easily to the deep qualities that engender, co-compose, co-create, and motivate movements and capacities for generating ongoing sociality. This is an attuning to the *before* of visible movement, to micro-movements. Going into kakosmic chaos necessitates not only a different mind-set, but a different 'body-set' that includes the 'aliens inside', towards multispecies communication beyond constructions of self-other.

The storytelling towards Proposition Four is then composed of: firstly, knowing *and* sensing, thinking-perceiving how 'I' or 'self' is always a bodying more-than; secondly, how one of the key aspects of this bodying more-

78 See for example, Guenther 1999

79 Whitehead 1978 [1929]

than is fascia, permanently shifting-sliding to propel, stabilise, or transform our bodying shapes; thirdly, how really appreciating these qualities together with knowledge on the microbiome opens up into a thought and felt sensation of the 'alien inside', which means we do not have a fixed, distinct human-only identity; to how, fourthly, this kind of perception, knowledge, and awareness truly complicates many of the simplistic political narratives which continue to govern our lives; to fifthly, fabulating and speculating on whether or how this can take us deep or wide enough into ecologies of sensitive more-than, to enable rethinking our survival as 'humans' on planet Earth, Mars or elsewhere. Fabulating with Spinoza, the questions are ...

what can we do with the incredible potentials of nested bodyings? Can we shape-shift how we relate to each other as humans, and to more-than-humans relations, in a shift from I to we, from ego to eco, in ways we cannot even think possible right now?

Sensitively attuning to the potential and qualities of tensional responsiveness and ecosomatic aliveness, I sense my feet on the ground of the forests around the village of Adjab. I sense the quality of vibration emanating from the ground, how the intensity and power of this vibration is so great, greater than anything I have experienced before, and I sense no boundaries. There is only connectedness of (my) bodying with environment, only the permanently shifting-sliding nestedness of differently sized ecosystems. Resisting or separating from the movements of this vibrating abundance, means illness, pain, and destruction. Every day, in Adjab or wherever else since, is the process of learning and appreciating a little bit more about trusting and sharing, about requesting, returning and letting go into these qualities and intensities of the *becoming of continuity*, as Whitehead writes, into ecosomatic aliveness and adaptive cyclicities. Our ancestors knew well these intensities of living completely in these continuously adaptive qualities of ongoingness, more-than, vibration, tension, boundedness, profusion, limitations, abundance, resonance. So, let's follow the sounds of the bees and find some delicious contemporary honey, or as Ivindo Baka and Donella Meadows would say, it's the occasion for ...

**Singing-Dancing the vibrant, joyful ongoingness
and adaptive cyclicity that is life.**

With this call to sing-dance emerges the tensionally responsive contribution towards the challenges of our current and of future generations: To bring together with the highest awareness the intricacies of human physiological shifting-sliding, moving-sensing; with storytelling and narrative based on how we make it up together and coherently with the more-than qualities in that event as we're going along; with a radically different ecosystemic awareness which goes beyond current legal and political limits, acknowledging abundance-scarcity dynamics and planetary boundaries in response-able, cyclically adaptive ways. If there is nothing challenging in this idea, and it can be easily discarded, you will be able to dance with me on the spur of the moment, bodying creatively in broad daylight, in a public space – because you are fully aware that you are already doing that the whole time anyway. Everything that makes up “you” as nested bodying ecosystem, is always already cellular jingling-jangling, tensionally shifting-sliding in response to the ground you walk on and the emanations of fellow organisms, dancing with the universe in all its beautiful, astonishing, and enchanting qualities and actualities.