

## Introducing INTENSITIES of RELATING

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For much of human history, actively sensing and being in resonance with each other was part and parcel of social cohesion, was part of play, production, and reproduction. Such ways of deeply listening and attending to each other have been significantly reduced or changed by contemporary modes of daily life and social organisation. Moving from the deep tissues of our human bodies, this book suggests *Tensional Responsiveness* as a quotidian impulse towards *sensitively organising in relation to others*. In writing about this quality of tensional responsiveness, four *propositions*, understood as impulses with the potential to generate a curious response, emerged and became the structure of the book. What you are reading is an invitation to become alive with these propositions, and to find your response to them. All four are offers and contributions towards putting together the contemporary pieces of our human puzzle in novel ways. The propositions concern:

1. How we can perceive our bodies as vibrant potential for being social, for living in sensitive community with humans and all beings and qualities beyond-the-human
2. The future of work as continuously sharing in the joys and pleasures of relating
3. Fine-tuning singing and dancing together as practices for generating and maintaining good health and social happiness, and for circulating power
4. How attention to relational ecosomatic aliveness and non-violence offers different qualities to our storytelling on future worlds and human survival

One of the main inspirations for my storytelling around tensional responsiveness originates from my time of living with the egalitarian Baka. The Baka are a cultural group from the tropical forests of Central Africa, and I spent one year with Baka groups along the River Ivindo in Gabon. From observing and

sharing in their lives, the Ivindo Baka are a group of humans living life involving the usual joys and struggles with health, family, and economic issues. But there was also that special quality, the uniqueness and power of their *lived egalitarianism Baka style*. Moreover, it was not only the Baka, but just as much the aliveness of the tropical forests, the diversity of plant species, the infinite sounds, smells and hues of vibrant green, which enchanted me into sensing what living as part of healthy (eco)systems really involves. The intensities of this continuity of vibrating greens interwoven with Baka polyphonic singing-dancing, shapes my desire for sharing the wonders of egalitarian sociality.

Living with the Baka, was an experience towards cultivating deep systemic and ecosystemic awareness. Appreciating this interconnectedness underlines the importance of indigenous and local knowledges as part of a 'radical re-configuration of our understandings of the living world'.<sup>1</sup> However, sharing about the Baka is neither to follow the glorification or exoticisation of 'indigenous' people, nor to confirm stereotypes about people living 'in nature', far removed and where everything is peaceful and harmonious. Baka do not form part of mainstream discourses around 'shamanism' or similar tropes that penetrate much contemporary thinking and media. In writing about my time with the Ivindo Baka, I write about a group of humans I came to know very well, and who have a special way of being 'social'. In this form of sociality, *it is rude to tell other people what to do*. Yes, indeed, imagine! With Ivindo Baka, communicating and organising as a group happens in ways which are not necessarily visible but felt, by *sensitively organising in relation to others*. Even after many years, it is still a challenge to put these possibilities and qualities of human cooperation and communication into words. Pressing the experience into a linguistic framework detracts principal aspects and cannot offer the full picture. Finding the appropriate ways for expressing the sensorial intensities of egalitarian relating as part of deep ecosystemic awareness, of, to use Donna Haraway's term,<sup>2</sup> inseparable *naturecultures*, this book has grown into becoming over several years.

The entry point to the world of the Baka and the tropical forest magic, my rabbit hole if you like, came through my PhD in Social Anthropology. *Anthropos* is Greek for human and anthropology is the study of human cultures, shedding light on all the crazy and wonderful things we do as humans in this world. In doing anthropology, your aim is to understand the 'other', to try

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1 Rose et. al. 2012:4

2 Haraway 2003

and grasp what the world is about from the point of view of someone else. The ancestors of the Baka were nomadic hunter-gatherers, and my official research task was to find out about Baka nomadism and mobility in the world of today. This research was part of the larger Collaborative Research Centre *Our Way to Europe* (sfb806) at the University of Cologne, Germany.<sup>3</sup> The established paradigm of hunter-forager mobility considers that people moved only or predominantly to get food, so for economic reasons. Employing the concept of *motility*, meaning the *capacity or potential to move*, allowed me to bring together the conventional economic understanding of hunter-forager mobility, with my experience of the relational sensitivity underlying and shaping Baka ways of being social and their mobilities. Thinking through *motility* introduces a different temporal level into the analysis, by questioning what happens *before* movements become visible and observable. Considering potentials for movement through such temporal modes not focused on the visual, connects people, movements, emotions, desires, affects, time, and space in new ways. Like affect, motility touches on temporalities of the pre-personal or the pre- or para-linguistic. The question becomes: *what happens before we move?*<sup>4</sup> Looking at Ivindo Baka mobilities and what happens *before* they move or stay, highlights how in the past and present (which involves considerable lifestyle changes away from hunting and forest foraging), Baka prioritise egalitarian values and practices around sensitively organising social relations, over economic considerations.<sup>5</sup>

After my PhD, I continued to research on ways of understanding potentials of bodily movement as well as temporal, spatial and social cyclicities. I began exploring, feeling, experimenting my way into the depths of what it means to be a human body that moves, and how this is theorised. The 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Baruch Spinoza already raised the question of 'what can a body do', and I sense and dance with contemporary responses. Firstly, the 'body continually transforms itself and is already not, at the moment when I speak of it, what it was a few seconds ago'.<sup>6</sup> Using the process-oriented verb *body-ing*, rather than the noun body, underlines this dynamic of continuous bodily transformation. Secondly, it is possible to distinguish between

3 [www.sfb806.uni-koeln.de](http://www.sfb806.uni-koeln.de)

4 In *mobility studies*, the 'before' focuses thinking on desires, hopes, and aspirations regarding potential movements, and equally on practical aspects such as whether the kind of transport needed is available, as well as the money to pay for that transport.

5 Weig 2013, Weig 2015a, Weig 2015c, Weig 2017

6 Laplantine 2015:13

considering bodies from inside or outside. In the field of *somatic practices*, the word ‘body’ indicates the phenomenon of a human body perceived from the outside by a third-person, whereas the term ‘soma’ refers to the body as perceived from within by first-person perception.<sup>7</sup> Especially the somatic perspective confirms that how we move impacts how we relate, and that moving and sensing are not separate but conjoined activities. These dynamics of sensing-moving-relating are influenced also by qualities beyond the human, generally referred to as the *more-than-human*, meaning a broad ontological scope including things, living beings, or physical forces.<sup>8</sup> The enduring questions around ‘what can a body do’ are:

*how is this moving-sensing relationship to myself and to other humans? How can I sense inside and around me, with ecosystems that are co-composed with more-than-human beings?*

Such questions address also the limits of what is ‘body’ and bodying, the relations of bodyings and technologies, and the interfaces with other more-than-human aspects. They take us below the skin to discover *fascia*, our bodily connective tissues. *Fascias* extend from the outer epidermis through all skin layers, enveloping muscles, organs, bones, and nerves, and thereby forming ‘a continuous tensional network throughout the human body’.<sup>9</sup> The fascia tissue-system is core to transmitting information inside our bodies and to how we are able to move physically in and with our worlds.<sup>10</sup> Fascias are permanently *shifting-sliding in Tensional Responsiveness*. Understanding this unique quality opens up new medical treatments, for example, for back pain and cancer.<sup>11</sup> It also offers novel potentials for a socio-political understanding of how we can and do respond to what we sense and experience, to how we feel flows or tensions, and our resulting capacities to move with these sensations.

Intriguingly, the more I learnt about fascia, the more I was able to articulate the organising-sensitively-in-relation-to of Ivindo Baka. The more I deepened my somatic perception, including the shifting-sliding of my fascia tissues, the more I was able to put words to my fascination of living egalitarian style, and how that has traced into my thinking and perceiving the

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7 Hanna 1986

8 La Puig de Bellacasa 2017:2

9 Schleip 2012:xv

10 Schleip et. al. 2012

11 Langevin et. al. 2016

world in general. Importantly, this way of thinking-perceiving does not distinguish between body and mind, or body and world. It is a mode which highlights that moving-sensing bodyings and social worlds that include human and more-than-human beings, are always co-composing. The aim with my *Movement Research* work has become to emphasise that taking this shifting-sliding-interweaving into account in novel, diffracted ways, can help face pertinent economic and ecological issues.<sup>12</sup> It is time to make (more) explicit the intricate connectedness of the bodily, the neurophysiological and microbiological, with its environments, ranging from immediate surroundings to large-scale ecosystems. Becoming with tensional responsiveness, is a special and precious quality, which challenges and expands many current debates. Continuing to ignore the deep intertwining and interdependence of micro and macro is a form of (invisible) violence. As I invite with the four propositions, it is, firstly, about bringing awareness to how we always already move-sense and shape-shift-slide with qualities of *tensional responsiveness*. We may not be aware, but we already are bodying vibrant potentials for being social, and for relating more sensitively and without separating. From this novel awareness can emerge, secondly, a different aliveness for techniques and practices to interweave deeply and non-violently human and ecosystemic cyclicities and transformations. Non-violent here means neither denying nor resisting the interwovenness of both autonomy and relatedness, of separation and connection, of independence within interdependence. Such techniques deepening (human) awareness of ongoingness support, thirdly, developing and continuously adapting human social organisations and practices, as our ancestors knew how to.

Another way of starting this book goes like this: Once upon a time, I lived with a hunter-gatherer tribe in the heart of Central Africa ... .. and then I went to a tech conference in Barcelona, where a senior participant stated that humans today could not function and survive without online technology. Smiling inside, vivid images and sensations of my time with the Baka, and other situations of a good life without a limitless supply of electricity, flash before me. I experience this tech conference moment as a crack, a rupture, inescapably forcing me to think-sense together different fields of research and experience. My first degree was in law, and prior to officially becoming an anthropologist, I worked in the corporate world, heading an internal communications department for a multinational. For some of my time, I have re-

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12 See my website [www.movementresearch.net](http://www.movementresearch.net) for details

searched on *Sharing Economy* initiatives and platform technologies, especially regarding smart, shared urban mobilities.<sup>13</sup> All the while, my experience with the egalitarian Baka quietly hums away in my cells, vibrating with different intensities, as I listen to people speaking about how the latest app will revolutionise how we organise and do teamwork in economies based on sharing and gifting. Like many other cogs in the corporate system, I had fantasised about escaping to a world with less hierarchy, less pressure, less long hours, less redundancies in the work. Egalitarianism, understood as a mode of organising oneself in relation to others, is not this general, happy-flower, hippy-esque equality; it is hard work. It triggers and challenges any sense of self-importance, wanting to have, jealousy and all other human strengths and frailties. Having experienced and studied both of these worlds, the hierarchical and the egalitarian, the latest apps or models for lean management and flat hierarchies leave me unconvinced. Whether we dwell in air-conditioned corporate offices or fecund tropical rainforests, how we feel and understand our bodily presence as part of larger ecosystems makes the difference to our capacities of how we approach other people, to how we are or can be approached, and to how the diverse capacities for sociality can manifest in that particular moment or event.

We deeply know what's good for us. However, knowing what's *best*, is a question of 'we' and 'us', of group co-constituting what is the next step, the next movement in that moment in time. The notion of 'group' is here not grounded in or limited to humans of a particular race, creed, gender, nationality, or other classificatory logic. Rather, 'group' includes or can include all of human diversity and more-than-human entities. The notion of 'we' and 'group' refers also to how there is something *extra* that emerges when people get together, to how the group dynamic takes on a life of its own. It is this extra, the collective coherence, that I mean when I say 'best'. The process of all beings and qualities co-composing in that actual occasion, activates a larger wisdom. This wisdom is about what can be the most fitting movement, the next coherent intensity of relating, in that particular process. This magic of the extra, grounded also in the excess of bodily processes, emerges easily in situations of ritual, where people are prepared and primed to enter into experiencing this combination of community and wisdom. Apart from and even irrespective of the external (ritual or religious) frame, what matters and

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13 Weig 2019:8

affects is *that and how people attune to each other*. Whether it is with ritual or everyday household activities, powerful collective intelligence emerges, or can emerge, from the middle of a group. It emerges when there is a commitment to carefully engaging and listening to each other, and to that excess-extra, to the wise magic of that occasion. In (our) media- and commodity-saturated worlds, human survival seems more than ever to be about learning to live what is group and wisdom-emerging-from-group-process in different, healthier ways. In resonance with this, survival is here also understood as the human physiological capacity to adapt. With that, this book bypasses established debates on hunter-gatherers and human origins, or questions around whether our ancestors lived in permanent violent warfare, or in paradisaical harmony. This book is instead an invitation to putting together the contemporary pieces of our human puzzle in novel ways that move beyond the understanding of humans as separate individuals. The four propositions are a contribution to co-speculating life beyond dichotomies of mind-body, mobility-stasis, good-bad, black-white, nature-culture, human-environment, towards life as a novel commitment to group-as-biodiverse-process.

We can start this process by coming to understand and deepen awareness of human bodies as ecosystems, which resonate with other ecosystems in processes of *tensional responsiveness*, and Proposition One accordingly challenges ideas about what it means to be social. The writing first takes us to the vibrant forests of Central Africa and introduces the Ivindo Baka. I try to bring alive some of the egalitarian magic, this secret of ongoingness shaped by attuning to and aligning with what others are doing and how they are moving. Such *sociality*, meaning the *capacity to be social*, is grounded in a different understanding of bodily co-presence. Cutting-edge research on the material composition of bodies, meaning for example microbiomes and especially fascia, our bodily connective tissues, underlines that the human body is not singular. We can come to appreciate our bodies, or *bodyings* to use the more appropriate, dynamic verb form, as permanently co-composing ecosystems of human and non-human matter. The notion from fascia research, of shifting-sliding in ongoing *tensional responsiveness*, underlines how we can perceive (our) bodyings as vibrant potential for being social. Proposition One inspires novel activations of exactly this potential of bodying, this capacity to be social, with regard to creatively engaging with contemporary challenges, and adapting ways of being social to what is needed, now, in this cycle of human activities.

Do you enjoy sharing? ... Really? Proposition Two examines socio-economic practices around sharing, from the worlds of hunter-gatherers to the so-called *Sharing Economy*, to question whether they have anything in common other than the term 'sharing'. Ivindo Baka practice what is called *demand-sharing* as central to their egalitarianism. This is not about being lovey-dovey and giving each other gifts for free. It necessitates work and effort. Bringing together socio-economic *and* socio-political dynamics, is a continuous process of opportunities to *request*, *return* and *let go*,<sup>14</sup> involving the people in each other's presence at that particular moment. For the Baka and similar groups, sharing obviously satisfies the need for food intake, but sharing is equally or even more importantly focused on establishing ongoing social relationships. At first the *Sharing Economy* model was hailed as an economic alternative to extractive capitalist practices, but the social return of the sharing economy to society remains debated. As we ponder the future of human work in the face of increasing machine automation and artificial intelligence, Proposition Two suggests to redefine 'work' as the everyday process of growing our capacities for the social, with a tensionally responsive ecosystemic awareness of cycles of abundance and scarcity, inclusive of human and more-than-human.

The success and generative qualities of egalitarian socialities like that of the Baka throughout human history, are firmly grounded in practices of singing and dancing together, of potent polyphonies emphasising *independence within interdependence*. This type of polyphony is both conservative *and* creative, enabling continuity *and* change, and constitutes one aspect of the development of human language. Proposition Three takes you into how this enchanting singing-dancing arises from and maintains male-female gendered coalitions, as the only permitted differentiation in egalitarian societies. As a group activity, it is socio-somatic and political, as it keeps power circulating within the group. It enables processes of harmonising and healing, as or before situations of conflict can arise (recall the differing temporality of *motility*). Amongst Ivindo Baka, socio-technological and ecological changes are challenging the regularity of singing-dancing, but the incredible social potency and power of these practices can still be felt. Proposition Three explores whether and how we can activate these *generative polyphonies*, and the qualities of play, enchantment, and the vibrancy of the erotic as shared perception, in novel ways fitting with urban lifestyles, in non-egalitarian and gender diverse societies. Grounded in and emerging from an ecosystemic

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14 Widlok 2017



awareness, it seems promising to define and practice singing-dancing for the joy and continuous healing of all fellow beings, as a primary value also in the dominant economic and political systems of today.

Proposition Four begins with a Baka myth about opening up trees (not chopping them down), as an inspiration into storytelling for novel worlds grounded in human – more-than-human ecosystemic interweaving. We return to questions about the limits of bodying, imposed or enabled by legal systems; or by doing authority in dominating, hierarchical ways of *power over* others (as distinct from *power with*). Acknowledging the limitations of fixed, rigid (legal) systems, leads to suggesting that practices of bodying with *aliveness* and tensional responsiveness, can offer generative qualities and techniques for negotiating these spaces of the in-between that defy being pressed into legal and other constraints. Proposition Four considers that storytelling around the future of socialities and sharing, starts with politically sensitive co-presence, and a shift towards appreciating that what is politically strange or alien to human awareness, starts with the ‘alien inside’, with the composition of our very own bodies. Drawing together the alien inside with environmental topics of humans living beyond *Planetary Boundaries*<sup>15</sup>, offers to time-honoured storytelling a quality of what I call *ecosomatic aliveness*, for the everyday and for the future. As artificial intelligence is set to take over human lives, it also means figuring out the how of living sensitive community in an increasingly algorithmically connected and controlled world. As Ivindo Baka and leading systems thinker Donella Meadows would say, the best way is to *dance with the systems* we are nested in.<sup>16</sup>

Dancing my intellectual journey around Ivindo Baka egalitarian sociality and fascia connective tissues, I have been accompanied by great thinkers, and I here name those who have been most influential. Jerome Lewis and Thomas Widlok are both distinguished anthropologists and specialists on contemporary and past hunter-gatherer ways of life around the world. Thomas Widlok has devoted his attention especially to equality, property, and sharing in hunting-foraging societies, and his work on the conceptual shift regarding sharing not as obligation but *opportunity*, returns a share to Proposition Two. Jerome Lewis is a passionate specialist on hunter-forager music, dance, and ritual practices, and his work on how musical practices enable resilience, and long-term continuity *and* change, enchants in particular Proposition Three.

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15 Rockström et. al. 2009

16 Meadows nd

Erin Manning and Brian Massumi are renowned critical philosophers, whose research-creations around thought-in-motion, affect, and neurodiversity, shaped the shift from body to *bodying*. This shift is a movement carrying socio-political, alter-economic, decolonial potential, as developed in Propositions One and Four. The work of Manning and Massumi on *quality* and *intensity* underlies but is also distinct from how I employ the terms here,<sup>17</sup> whereby quality refers to the felt characteristics of experience and relational movement, and intensity to the unquantifiable potentials of relational form-taking, to how qualities carry an excess, a differential, towards how they can be and are lived. Employing the terms this way, enables to activate the concept of motility to explicitly include sociological criteria together with (capacities for) deeper sensorial bodily awareness.<sup>18</sup>

The *Process Philosophy* of Alfred North Whitehead, which focuses on process, event, and the becoming of continuity, further occasions many of the swirls presented here, in particular the use of the term *proposition*. Proposition comes with a dense analytic history in logic and linguistics around statements or judgements as either true or false. Whitehead advanced the debate by showing proposition as a 'lure for feeling', whereby 'it is more important that a proposition be interesting than true'.<sup>19</sup> I use proposition here in its common sense understanding as a synonym for idea or inspiration, and as impulse with the potential to generate a curious response and a qualitative change, by asking *what if* and *what else* is possible?<sup>20</sup> From Whitehead's process philosophy, I draw the emphasis on how a potential for curiosity and change emerges and realises in relation to the complexity and potentials of its environment. This emphasis on interdependence shapes my questions around how to activate with more awareness the momentum of motility, the *before*. Highlighting interdependence enables approaching how bodiliness and society are always already interwoven as capacities for the social. The gatherings of the *emergence network*, headed by public intellectual Bayo Akomolafe, and involving the call 'to fall apart/together', deepened my capacities for articulating how the more-than-human is integral to this way of understanding the 'social', as much as the (egalitarian) difference between *power over* and *power with*. From all these lived creative involvements and intellectual dances, emerges

17 See, for example, Manning 2009, Massumi 2015, Massumi 2018

18 Weig 2019

19 Whitehead 1978 [1929]:25, 259

20 See also, for example, Manning 2016

tensional responsiveness as one way of articulating the qualities and intensities shaping human and more-than-human co-presence, aliveness, and engagement.

True to the ideas advanced in this book, the part which in a linear reading would be the conclusion, offers no such finishing deductions. I briefly summarise the intensities of relating I have tried to draw out through my writing - on the egalitarian way of life and attuning to 'body' as bodying nested ecosystem. I then offer four sparks of enchantment around the notion of *Alive with Tensional Responsiveness*, which invite you to actively find your own response, and play with co-composing novel relational qualities with other human or more-than-human becomings; to explore how or where are processes of sharing ongoingness in (your) life; and to how that matters to possible group futures.

