

Doerte Weig

# TENSIONAL RESPONSIVENESS

Ecosomatic Aliveness and Sensitivity  
with Human and More-than

[transcript] Culture and Social Practice

Doerte Weig  
Tensional Responsiveness

**Culture and Social Practice**

**Doerte Weig** holds a PhD in social anthropology and research experience working with, for example, hunter-gatherers, contemporary dancers, corporate managers, citizen scientists, somatic practitioners, and fascia specialists. She aims to uncover how different facets of human physicality relate to socio-political transformation and ecological awareness. She believes that we cannot think-perceive the future of human societies, of education, health, or work, without taking into account the sensoriality of our moving-sensing bodies, and raising our ecosystemic awareness.

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To

*Jaki,*

*the Ivindo Baka,*

*and*

*the generative socio-somatic power of humour and heartfelt laughter*



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## Prologue

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I'm standing in circle with about 40 other people. Aida, the beautifully energetic woman guiding the workshop, asks us to close our eyes and begin with a breathing exercise. I enjoy feeling the intensity of my breath traveling through my body, down to my toes, into my fingertips. Exhaling-inhaling. Enlivening my fascias, the connective tissue-system which allows me to move and sense my body in the world. Aida asks us to open our eyes and to keep doing the same exercise. At first, I actively look across the room to the other participants, noticing how we are all swaying-shifting-sliding ever so gently. Suddenly, Aida again asks us to open our eyes! Without noticing, I had closed mine, and obviously the same had happened to other participants. Aida smiles as she is looking around the room into our perplexed faces with half-open eyes. 'That's the problem,' she laughs, 'You forget to attune to and sense the others. Breathing is not something you can do only by yourself'.

As she says this, the walls of the room shift to become tropical forest plants. I'm looking at the trees around Adjab, a small forest village in north-eastern Gabon in Central Africa. As I exhale-inhale, my lungs and fascias fill with the power and juiciness of the earth in this part of the world. My breathing deepens, and all my cells vibrate, sensing how intensely connected I am to everything else. From a small distance, I hear Lido, an egalitarian Baka woman, yodelling out a beautiful melody. Other women respond to her call, and I feel embedded and held by the network of forest with humans. This network is based on sharing, honouring, and rejoicing in the ongoing cyclicity that is life.

'No, we need modern technologies to live well', says the professor to me over coffee. I cough as my breathing gets all mixed up. How can I respond to this statement? How can I shape-shift the tension I sense into maintaining connection, in a responsive and non-violent way? How can I relate sensitively to this occasion, which for me is a complex intersection of egalitarian co-pres-

ence and ongoingness, corporate business, artificial intelligence, and planetary boundaries? How can we do a systemic song-dance, combining future-past-present human practices with the more-than-human? Is technology really the only answer? What else is possible? Which are the trees we need to open to enter into more alive worlds? What else matters in activating a larger collective intelligence towards (re)generative futures?

## 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

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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.



## Proposition One

### - BAKA EGALITARIANISM

### and GENERATIVE CONCEPTS OF BODYING

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What do we actually mean when we say social or being in community? For most of us, being social still has a lot to do with the physical proximity we share with people around us, unless we are communicating online via social media (which has of course been greatly impacted by the COVID pandemic). Being social in the UK, where I grew up, meant going to the pub with your friends, and having a good time. The *Baka*, a Central-African linguistic and cultural group, certainly love a good party, but social to them also means clearly sensing and feeling each other's ways of being and what is happening in the community, being actively sensorially connected with each other. This kind of sensing is strong in many tight-knit communities, but with the Baka what is special is how this way of relating and communicating is central to their egalitarian social system.

*What does being social mean for you?*

Baka egalitarianism means that the equality of wealth, power and status is not a given, but is continuously acted out, created, composed, and maintained through levelling mechanisms. In this kind of egalitarianism, there is economic and political equality, rather than merely the political equality at the centre of much of today's debate on the topic. For the Baka, what matters is *organizing sensitively in relation to what others are doing, without the existence of explicit leadership*. It is impolite to tell other people what to do! Having lived and experienced this with the Baka, this quality of social relation continues to guide my curiosity and research work. It has influenced my understanding of what

we mean when we say ‘body’, what a body *bodying* can do, and the importance of bodies singing-dancing together. Studying *fascia*, our bodily connective tissue, deepened this journey into our capacities for being social, by connecting social theory with our bodily ways of relating. A greater emphasis on systems thinking is advocated as crucial to responding to contemporary political, economic and environmental issues.<sup>1</sup> Interweaving systems thinking, social theory, and neurophysiology highlights that the real urgency of our times is that we cannot afford to not include more actively our moving-sensing bodies in considerations around our futures. Responding to critical issues, may become easier and more applicable not only through systems thinking, but through a nuanced and deeper systems *thinking-perceiving*, which combines cognitive knowing with the information we receive relating with other humans and the more-than. This is much easier than it sounds, and we can start by coming to understand and deepen awareness of our own bodies as nested ecosystems, which resonate with other or larger ecosystems in processes of *Tensional Responsiveness*. Nested here addresses the limits of bodying, not in the sense of bodyings as being contained *within* something, but as co-created, shaped and delimited through the continuity of processes of tensional responsiveness.

Working with the egalitarian Baka meant swirling with time-old questions of how to understand relations between individuals and groups, of belonging and exclusion. Many theories on society and its organization centre around or follow the divide between the individualism of *societas* and the holism of *universitas*. Diverging from these debates on ‘society’, the term ‘sociality’ refers to the human *capacity for the social*.<sup>2</sup> *Sociality* describes how people organise their social lives through a *quality of focusing attention* rather than by referring to rigid structures.<sup>3</sup> Sociality dynamics are guided not by strict societal boundaries, but by listening, attuning, responding to emergent, generative qualities of short-, medium- or long-term relating. Sociality aims to incorporate the polarities of individualism and holism, collectivity and subjectivity, norms and practices. Egalitarian groups are not just free, lawless societies. To maintain social cohesion, egalitarian groups place great emphasis on interweaving individual autonomy and group connectedness. Levelling mechanisms, singing and dancing together, and the important, invisible, sensorial

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1 Meadows & Wright 2009, Rockström et. al. 2009

2 Ingold 1999

3 Wilson 1988:50

qualities, are all part of making this moving-sensing sociality work for everybody. Baka' capacities for the social include a particular gentleness in sensing-communicating and organising in active relation to others, in ways which engender *independence within interdependence*. As anywhere else in the world, Baka groups also experience quiet disputes and loud open conflicts, stemming from lovers' quarrels, long-term family feuds, or many other reasons. Conflicts are acted out within the groups in visible or invisible ways, which again is the case not only with the Baka but everywhere. However, Baka egalitarianism challenges to move away from 'happy-flower' ideas of perfect social organisation and conflict resolution, by looking at how pressure and tension activate together with communicating sensitively and organising non-violently in relation to others.

Recent medical discoveries around fascia, the bodily connective tissue-system just beneath our human skins, give embodied depth to how tension is an active part of social organisation and process. Fascia tissues are continuously shifting-sliding in response to how we move through the world, and to the different kinds of tensions we are faced with. Drawing together fascia as one aspect of our neurophysiologies with capacities for being social, opens up to appreciating how these topics are not separate. At a deeper level, this also emphasises how detrimental it is to deny (eco)systemic and bodily impacts of social tensions, which side-lines strain and rigidity into individual and collective shadow spaces. Said another way, if we are not aware of and actively working with tension and pressure, we cannot develop capacities for the social, considered as organising sensitively and non-violently in relation to what others are doing.

Moving from the middle of these observations, allow me to introduce you to the Baka, and the magnificent forests of the Congo Basin in Central Africa.

## **Congo Basin Forests and Baka Groups along the River Ivindo**

The Congo Basin is a mosaic of lush tropical forests, savannas, rivers and wetlands, and with a total of 3.7 million square kilometres is the second largest tropical region in the world. It is also named the Green Heart of Africa, with approximately 10,000 tropical plant species of which an estimated 30% are unique to the region. It is home to a fascinating diversity of life, including forest elephants, gorillas, chimpanzees, buffaloes, hippos, over 1000 species

Figure 1 - Map of Western Central Africa, showing Gabon, parts of the Congo Basin and the approximate regional expansion of Baka groups.



Source: Doerte Weig

of birds and 700 species of fish, and humans, too, have formed part of this biodiversity for millennia.<sup>4</sup> Nowadays the Congo Basin spans across six different countries, and is home to more than 40 million people, coming from approximately 250 distinct ethnic groups.<sup>5</sup> The Baka, together with the *Aka*, *Mbendjele*, *Mbuti* and other similar groups, are the descendants of an ancient

4 [www.wwf-congobasin.org](http://www.wwf-congobasin.org)

5 The countries are Gabon, Cameroon, the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, and Equatorial Guinea.

hunter-gatherer lifestyle, which has been in existence for at least 30,000 years and maybe even up to 70,000 years.<sup>6</sup> Living in intimate interweaving with mosaic forests was key to survival. At a global level, Congo Basin' forests act as the planet's second lung and counterpart to the rapidly dwindling Amazon. They form part of global processes of photosynthesis, meaning that these tropical forests also affect rainfall across the North Atlantic.<sup>7</sup> The Basin acts as a huge carbon sink and is crucial to policies concerning future climate stability.<sup>8</sup> When I arrived in these magnificent forests in 2010, I simply fell in love with the stunning beauty of the region. The earth pulses in a way I have experienced in no other part of the world. These vibrations are powerful, seductive, and irresistible.

### **Baka Groups along the River Ivindo**

The Baka are one of the Central African linguistic and cultural groups, who have long been recognised and studied for their mobile way of life in rain-forests.<sup>9</sup> Overall, there are about 50,000 Baka in the forests in the border regions of the three Central African countries Gabon, Cameroon and the Republic of Congo.<sup>10</sup> I lived with Baka in north-eastern Gabon along the River Ivindo. Gabon, or in her official title *La République Gabonaise*, sits on the equator, and is one of the smallest countries in Western Central Africa.<sup>11</sup> About 80% of Gabon is covered by tropical forest and only just under 2% of the land are cultivated. What you see flying overhead is a sheer endless expanse of green, ranging from the canopies of the tallest trees to savannah grasslands and gnarly mangroves. The climate is humid and tropical, defined by wet and dry seasons. More than 40 different ethnicities make up the Gabonese population estimated at about 1.5 million, and the official language of Gabon is

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6 Verdu et. al. 2009, Grauer 2011, and see Power 2017:180–182 for a detailed discussion on shared population genetics with Khoisan groups dating back around 75-100,000 years.

7 Myers 2016

8 Hubau et. al. 2020

9 Crampel 1890, Bahuchet 1992, Weig 2013

10 Paulin 2010:61

11 Gabon is bordered to the north by Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea; by the Republic of Congo (to be distinguished from the Democratic Republic of Congo, known for extreme colonial abuse and current civil war atrocities) to the east and south; and the western limit is 885 km of Atlantic Ocean.

French.<sup>12</sup> The country is run by an oil-rich elite, whilst at the same time approximately 80% of the population live in poverty.<sup>13</sup> What struck me was that whether rich or poor, people speak about being in the ‘forest’, not about living in the jungle. The tropical ‘jungle’, perceived as wild, dangerous and impenetrable from a (European) distance, becomes a ‘mere’ forest from close up. The forest is seen by people as a fluid space, a place without borders. What I loved most during the initial phase of arriving in Gabon was how people listened and shared in whatever was going on in that moment, or as one Gabonese woman summarised the different dynamics, ‘we have time – you have the watch’. The caring, the taking an interest, the warmth at heart made for a different kind of witness. This intensity of life can be both serenely beautiful and sometimes nothing but unbearable. The physicality of being involved, touched, made to feel welcome, was something I was not used to in that way. After some time, I realised it is about becoming *Zen* not through being silent and still, but through being in the midst of a cacophony of sound and touch.

Officials in the Gabonese capital city Libreville were not necessarily aware that there are Baka people living in the eastern border zones of the country.<sup>14</sup> As I documented through my research, there are approximately 300 Baka living along the River Ivindo in north-eastern Gabon, and I use the term *Ivindo Baka* to refer to them.<sup>15</sup> They used to enjoy a nomadic life as forest foragers and hunter-gatherers, but nowadays live predominantly settled lives in very small forest villages, which is where I spent most of my year researching with them.

Travelling to meet these Baka whom I hoped to work with, was a wonderful adventure. I had heard that small groups of Baka live around the village Adjab, which lies about 3 kilometres from the border between Gabon and the

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12 In comparison with many other African countries, *La République Gabonaise* has enjoyed relative peace ever since its independence from France in 1960. Gabon is rich in natural resources, but there is practically no home-grown economy, and nearly everything on sale in Gabon is imported (Pourtier 1989).

13 Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) 2011

14 On September 4, 2002, at the Earth Summit in Johannesburg, the late Gabonese president Omar Bongo Ondimba had announced that about 11% of the Gabonese territory were to be turned into 13 national parks. Ivindo Baka groups live around one of the Gabonese national parks, namely *Minkebe*.

15 Weig 2013:62

Republic of Congo.<sup>16</sup> To get to Adjab, you start out driving from the provincial capital Makokou, a city of 12,000 inhabitants, and then continue along the River Ivindo in a dugout canoe. Trees or large plants often fall on the roads overnight, so if you are the first to travel the road in the morning, it is best to have a four-wheel-drive and strong men with you to clear away the 'natural' road blocks. Once at the end of the road, which at some point turns from bitumen into a dirt path, you continue your travel by dugout canoe to reach the villages like Adjab further along the Ivindo. The distance from Makokou as the crow flies is about 80 km, but the actual trip from Makokou to Adjab easily takes a whole day. The village Adjab is a small forest clearing in this distant area of eastern Gabon, and, in 2010, consisted of a collection of mud-walled houses, with no infrastructure such as electricity, running water, or network coverage (see Annex II for the village plan of Adjab).<sup>17</sup> More importantly, Adjab is the (current) home of around 30–40 of the Ivindo Baka and was unusual in that only Baka lived there. In most other villages, Baka live together with other ethnic groups. These neighbourly relations can be very conflictual when opinions and practices of hierarchical, sedentary farmers clash with those of egalitarian, nomadic hunter-foragers. At the same time, these neighbourly relations are deeply interwoven and manifest particular forms of caring and friendship, extending into interregional networks, which many ethnic groups form part of.<sup>18</sup> Adjab, with only Baka living there in 2010–11, was simply a beautiful and unique spot in the midst of the immensity of the magnificent tropical forests of the Congo Basin. On my first trip, I had arranged to travel to

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16 In a 2009 genetic study, a map of the Baka population in Cameroon, Congo and Gabon referred only to the population around the town of Mivoul in Northern Gabon, not indicating the Baka in Makokou or along the Ivindo (Verdu et. al. 2009). This fact stands in contrast to cultural and linguistic ancestors of the Baka being the very first to be "discovered" by the Europeans in the nineteenth century (Bahuchet 1993a:76, my translation).

17 See Weig 2013:94–103 for details of Baka dwellings.

18 Academic assessment of relations between Baka and similar groups and their neighbours, has often been simplified into binary classifications based on (presumably) opposed economic subsistence strategies, meaning farmers vs. hunter-foragers, and conflicting modes of political organisation, meaning hierarchical vs. egalitarian. More recent assessments and my research emphasise how these groups currently are and mostly always have been strongly interacting with and also caring for each other, rather than maintaining strict ethnic divisions. For an example of a study on Baka and others involved in interfamilial, interethnic, and interregional networks, which are social, economic, ritual, and political in nature, see Rupp 2011.

*Figure 2 – The image shows the canoe landing site for the village Adjab on the River Ivindo, Gabon.*



Source: Doerte Weig

Adjab with help from the Gabonese national parks organization. The assistant of the head of the national park obviously considered me a welcome source of income, a 'walking Euro', and quoted me an outrageous price to make the trip to Adjab with me. Concerned about my research budget, I then took a decision, which I still marvel at today: I decided to travel together with two Baka individuals, brother and sister, who were at that time living in the provincial capital Makokou. In 2010, the Baka were still not officially recognised as Gabonese citizens, so that a single White woman travelling alone with two Baka broke with all social norms. People were at a loss to find the right words to gossip about this. And so I entered the world of the hunter-gatherers of today.

### Inspirations from Hunter-Gatherer Studies

Exotic myths as much as negative clichés continue to surround the term *hunter-gatherer*. For example, the apparently unsophisticated ways of thinking of our ancestors, are used to underline arguments about advanced modern economic rationality and decision-making. Seeing examples of this also after my time with the Baka,<sup>19</sup> impressed on me the importance of shaking up such stereotypes. *Hunter-gatherer studies* began with the idea of finding out more about human origins and searching for what at the time were believed to be linear traces of human evolution from primitive bands to advanced civilizations. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, hunter-gatherers were often romanticised as *Noble Savages*. At the same time, many of the first accounts of hunter-gatherer lives were transmitted or written by European settlers or explorers. These settlers were sedentary, running agricultural or livestock farms, and they were simply biased against nomadic practices such as hunting and foraging. They viewed the lives of hunter-gatherers as short, harsh, and poverty-stricken.<sup>20</sup> This image of hunter-gatherers as primitive and impulse-driven, as something to look down on, remains strong even today. Alternatively, they are glorified as ‘indigenous’, living in remote locations untouched by civilization, as something to protect as a precious relic of ancient human history. It is important to move beyond this simplifying binary. Given the diverse ecological challenges we face today, it can only be beneficial to shift thinking about hunter-gatherers as a single, exotic category of people. We can instead begin taking into account the considerable differences in ‘hunter-gatherer situations’,<sup>21</sup> meaning that amongst hunter-gatherers groups, across space and time, we find huge diversity and ingenuity.

Research from around the world has brought to light the diversity amongst apparently similar groups of hunter-gatherers even within the same type of environments, as well as their deep adaptive capacities and different types of specialised knowledge.<sup>22</sup> Following many years of scholarly debate,

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19 See, for example, Dobelli 2011.

20 One notable exception is the Bleek and Lloyd Archive on |Xam in South Africa: [www.cca.uct.ac.za](http://www.cca.uct.ac.za).

21 Widlok 2016

22 Kent 1996, Lee & Daly 1999, Reyes-García et. al. 2016

it is now commonly accepted that hunting-and-gathering or foraging, can be defined as 'subsistence based on the hunting of wild animals, gathering of wild plant foods, and fishing, with no domestication of plants [or animals]'.<sup>23</sup> This means that hunter-gatherers do not intentionally plant and cultivate crops, and that they do not domesticate animals, except sometimes dogs. The reverse way of saying this is that there is an '*absence of direct human control over the reproduction of exploited species*'.<sup>24</sup> Another way of distinguishing between group livelihoods is the classification into so-called *immediate-return* and *delayed-return* societies, which concerns, as the terms imply, the immediate or delayed timing of food consumption, and the impact of this on social organisation and notions of private property.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, ethnographic fieldwork showed that not all hunter-gatherer groups live as nomads. There existed large semi-sedentary settlements from which people foraged for wild foods. This also means that past and present groups can be divided into more than just simple and complex hunter-gatherers, whereby 'simple' equalled equality and 'complex' involved having a political hierarchy resulting in inequalities. For example, some of the groups in Northern America, which you may know through the practice of *potlatch*, would alternate between different egalitarian or hierarchical modes of social organisation, depending on the season.<sup>26</sup>

By the 1970s, it had become clear that all the neat, clear-cut boxes for hunter-gatherers were inappropriate and inadequate, if you acknowledged the actually existing diversities. This included especially classifications of 'man' as hunter, and 'woman' as gatherer. At the time examples where woman hunt too, such as the *Agtá* in the Philippines, turned the strict evolutionary typologies on their heads. The division into 'man-hunter' and 'woman-gatherer' came to be seen as a misnomer, influenced also by the emerging feminist debates of that period. Research has since consistently shown how women, including Baka women, engage in subsistence hunting too, albeit in different ways than men.<sup>27</sup> Another transformative effect of hunter-gatherer studies came in 1968, when research by the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins showed that hunter-gatherers spend less time on 'work' than farmers or modern office employees, leading Sahlins to introduce the notion of 'the

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23 Lee & Daly 1999:3

24 Panter-Brick, Layton & Rowley-Conwy 2001:2, emphasis in the original

25 Woodburn 1982

26 Wengrow & Graeber 2015

27 Reyes-García et. al. 2020

original affluent society'.<sup>28</sup> This more creative view of our gatherer-hunter ancestors, and the necessary change of perspective, was introduced to a large audience also through the bestseller *Sapiens*.<sup>29</sup> In his book, historian Yuval Noah Harari stresses how studies of hunter-gatherers have shown, how hunter-gatherer lives are generally far more diverse than that of the average reader today, in terms of food intake and how people spend their days. Our daily diets are poor in comparison with those of our forager ancestors. With our work rhythms focused on efficiency and project milestones, we miss out on enjoying many distinct, entertaining activities, which they had time for. Doing different things, and emphasising fun and enchantment (not force) as modes of engagement helped our forager-hunter ancestors develop and maintain physical dexterity and sensorial ecosystemic awareness. Today, people still living like hunter-gatherers or at least in part like foragers, make up about 1% of the world's population. Within this 1% of people, there seems to be a higher variation of social organisation than within the rest of the world's population.<sup>30</sup> That means, that a European manager and an Untouchable from the Indian caste system potentially have more in common with each other than two persons from distinct hunter-gatherer groups.

One of the aspects which continues to fascinate me most, is how (our) ancestors adapted and changed their social organisations throughout time and as needed. Research by archaeologist David Wengrow and anthropologist David Graeber looks at what they called *Palaeolithic politics*. This emphasises the ability of hunter-gatherers to alternate – consciously and deliberately – between contrasting modes of political organization.<sup>31</sup> *Palaeolithic politics* concerns the period between 40,000-10,000 years ago, and the term 'institutional plasticity' indicates how various hierarchical and egalitarian forms of social institutions existed alternately, and with full political consciousness of the people involved.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the changes from one form of social organisation to another, could occur *within* one group, as groups would come together, or disperse, in relation to seasonal considerations. Generally speaking, groups would live dispersed into smaller family units during one season and come together for large gatherings during a different season. However,

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28 Sahlins 1968

29 Harari 2015

30 Kelly 2013

31 Wengrow & Graeber 2015; drawing on the work of Lévi-Strauss 1967, Mauss & Beuchat 1979 [1904-5], Lowie 1948, and Clastres 1974.

32 Wengrow & Graeber 2015:606

as Wengrow and Graeber document from their analysis of archaeological and ethnographic data, there is no universal pattern to relations between social organisations and seasonal periods. Different groups adapted their social structure in different ways. Within one group, for example the *Kwaikutul*, individual family units would live in a loosely structured way during one season, to then submit to a central authority during seasonal gatherings with other families from the group.<sup>33</sup> Whereas, with other groups, for example the Arctic *Inuit*, or the *Nambikwara* in Brazil, during times of dispersion, families would be lead and controlled by the man and father, but who would then have nothing or less to say during seasonal gatherings organised according to more egalitarian principles.<sup>34</sup> Sometimes the intricate adaptations of social structure and seasonality would be specifically related only to ritual practices.<sup>35</sup> As Wengrow and Graeber conclude, the continuity between these different ways of doing things ‘resides precisely in the fact that this shifting back and forth [between authoritarian and levelling types of social organisation] allowed mature and self-conscious political actors to be continually aware that no social order was immutable’.<sup>36</sup> What we see here, is that our ancestors were acutely attentive and responsive to the fact that everything about how we organise and relate as humans was and is potentially open to negotiation, subversion, and change.

## **Baka Egalitarianism: Independence within Interdependence**

### **Baka Sociality and Livelihoods**

Baka sociality is based on an egalitarian social system. This understanding of egalitarianism means there is a striving for an equality, which eliminates all distinctions of wealth, power and status, other than those between the sexes.<sup>37</sup> No-one is allowed to stand out unnecessarily. This equality of wealth, power and status is not a given, but is continuously acted out. It is created and maintained through continuous efforts and levelling mechanisms such as humour and mocking. Attempts at standing out of the crowd are frowned upon,

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33 Mauss & Beuchat 1979 [1904-5]

34 Mauss & Beuchat 1979 [1904-5], Lévi-Strauss 1967

35 Lowie 1948

36 Wengrow & Graeber 2015:613

37 Woodburn 1982

and people will make fun of you until you stop doing whatever is setting you apart from everyone else. This form of egalitarianism is an ongoing movement of balancing on a 'fine line between autonomy and connectedness'.<sup>38</sup> Sharing is a foundational practice for the Baka. Goods are shared immediately and equally on demand, and there is no developed concept of private property. So in this kind of egalitarianism, there is economic *and* political equality, which brings with it its own set of advantages and challenges. This type of egalitarianism is at least 40,000 years old, but most certainly much older, with some research suggesting that moral communities striving for egalitarianism can be traced back 6 million years.<sup>39</sup> Singing and dancing together is how egalitarian societies continuously regulate the only pronounced difference which is that of female and male powers. The male-female dynamics also form the distinction to *acephalous*, meaning headless, societies, which describe social organizations characterised only by the absence of top-down leadership or centralised power structures, and which lack relative gender equality.<sup>40</sup> The different energies of men and women in egalitarian societies are understood as gender complementarities and carefully expressed and managed through ritual practices. These aspects are often side-lined or ignored in discussions around the relevance of knowledge on egalitarian societies to debates of today.

The contemporary Ivindo Baka way of life is diverse, including the subsistence practices of hunting, foraging and honey collecting as well as actively managing their own plantations in the forest. Baka also take on waged labour such as acting as trackers for wildlife conservation projects, and they work in artisanal gold-mining. Therefore, classifying the Ivindo Baka as 'hunter-gatherers' is incorrect, and they can be considered as 'post-foragers' or 'forager-horticulturalists'. The term forager-horticulturalists evades the drawbacks of the term post-forager. As with any other use of the 'post' prefix, there is the assumption of a prior condition,<sup>41</sup> which in the case of the Baka refers to all the stereotypes around being the first inhabitants in Central Africa.<sup>42</sup> The lan-

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38 Finnegan 2013:701

39 Boehm 1999

40 Townsend 2018:2

41 Frankland 2001:248, Blench 1999:42

42 In common parlance, the Baka are considered to be the descendants of the first inhabitants of Africa, also termed 'pygmies'. I set the term 'pygmies' in parenthesis to document that it is a 'social construction of Euroamerican researchers, and does not necessarily reflect ethnic or social identities as expressed or experienced by the peo-

guage the Baka speak is also known as 'Baka', and the majority of Baka women and men are at least bi-lingual, if not tri-lingual or more. These extensive language skills are useful and necessary in order to be able to communicate with the various neighbouring ethnic groups along the Ivindo and further afield.<sup>43</sup> Baka multi-linguism may be due to their exceptional oral and auditory skills, which especially the Baka men learn as they imitate animal sounds when hunting in the forest. I experienced this not only in the forest, but also during English lessons I offered in Adjab. The Baka participants imitated my English accent perfectly, in a way which was like hearing myself speak. If they ever needed to appear sophisticated during a formal English dinner in the UK, it would not be for lack of language skills.

Along the Ivindo today, some Baka like to enjoy the benefits of town life in Makokou, whilst others remain deeply rooted in village life in Adjab. With the money they earn, Baka participate in the cash economy and acquire personal material possessions, such as hip-hop style clothes, radios, food, and alcohol.<sup>44</sup> Baka of all ages love using their mobile phones as cameras, showing each other pictures of family members and especially new-born children – one is tempted to say just like everyone else in this world. In dealing with rural-urban diversities, Baka populations are experiencing challenges and changes and, in many ways, what is fashionable in town, is

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ple [ ] themselves' (Rupp 2003:54). Explorers to Africa documented the existence of small people or 'dwarves' in Angola, Gambia, and Gabon as early as the seventeenth century (Battell, 1906: HSP2:6. p.56, quoted in Knight 2003:86), but nobody had spoken of 'pygmies' (Bahuchet 1993b:162). It was only in 1871, when the German explorer and botanist Georg Schweinfurth travelled to Central Africa and encountered the *Aka*, who are considered to be one of the 'pygmy' groups, and pronounced that he had found the *Pygmäenrassen*, the 'pygmy race', that the two became connected (Schweinfurth 1874). Schweinfurth is therefore accredited with being the person to confirm their general existence, and since then the terminology and its (derogatory) reference to short-statured people has remained. The ethnic groups generally classed as 'pygmy' today include the Baka, the *Aka*, the *Mbuti*, the *Twa*, the *Efe*, the *Asua*, the *Koya*, the *Bongo*, and the *Kola* (Bahuchet 1993a). Nowadays, Baka are deemed patrilineal (meaning descent is traced through the male line), but ancient Baka society was possibly bi-lineal (male and female descent) as lexical studies indicate matrilineal (female descent lines) elements, suggesting a 'matrilinearity undergoing mutation' (Paulin 2010:204).

43 Baka forms part of the Ubangian language family, namely the group *sere-Ngbaka-mba*, which includes 12 languages (Paulin 2010:33). Along the Ivindo the predominant fluency is with Baka and *Bakwele*, the language of the largest neighbouring ethnic group, in addition to which there is knowledge of *Fang*, *French*, and *Kota*.

44 Köhler 2005, Weig 2015c

frowned upon in the village. A classic example concerns women's attire: in the provincial capital Makokou, women wear jeans or skirts as they please; in the forest village Adjab, wearing trousers is disapproved of and women (including myself) were mocked for doing so.

Even with all the changes, what continues to fascinate is how music and dance play a central role in maintaining egalitarian dynamics. It is a more than powerful experience to be swept away by polyphonic singing at night surrounded by and in the middle of nothing but tropical forest life. Polyphonic singing brings bodies into resonance in a way, which is central to gender balance and group harmony, health, and enjoyment. This has been termed 'socio-somatic' as it involves the entire social body.<sup>45</sup> With regard to Baka and similar Central African hunter-forager groups, *somatic* is understood not simply in the general understanding as referring to body or corporality, but equally to 'the life that animates bodies', and specifically to 'activities that bring the body into resonance'.<sup>46</sup> The respective polyphonic sounds and dance movements of women and men are a dialogue composed of bodily, sounded and felt, exchanges. The process is a listening to, a feeding off and responding to others' sounds or movements, all of which results in a 'visceral inter-sexual conversation' between male and female energies.<sup>47</sup> This dynamic becomes and is non-violent political expression. It is grounded in how sensitive but powerful ritual activity has 'the capacity to churn up and circulate social power',<sup>48</sup> as I describe more in Proposition Three. By keeping power circulating, egalitarian socio-somatic bodying challenges and inverts relationships of power, dominance, and authority, in fun and enchanting ways.

### Independence within Interdependence

Researching on Baka mobility and migration, I learned how group focus wins out over individual concerns. Participating, observing, and sensing with the Ivindo Baka,<sup>49</sup> I continued to be intrigued by the inherent attention for and of the group preventing a detrimental development of individual self-importance. Sometimes, Baka individuals would come to me, bitterly complaining

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45 Rouget & Buckner 2011

46 Rouget & Buckner 2011:111

47 Finnegan 2013:705

48 Finnegan 2013:701

49 Laplantine 2015:2

about something they considered important only for themselves, but then when it mattered, they would put group dynamics first. During interviews, people would say 'I', although it was only very exceptionally a single individual. 'I' always referred to at least 2-3 persons, if not a larger group of more people. At the start of my time with the Ivindo Baka, all this was wildly confusing, especially as it is completely opposed to (our – depending on your situatedness as reader) capitalist ideas of competitive behaviour to win out over others. This focus on the group means organizing in relation to what others are doing, *without* the existence of explicit leadership, in a continuous effort, required from all members of the group.

*Can you imagine nobody ever telling you what to do? And that nevertheless you would always make sure that your actions resonate with the most coherent energy in that moment in the group situation?*

This kind of social organisation exists, and it demands a very special form of communication; a communication which often takes place without words.

**Communicating in an egalitarian way is  
an attuning to, a sensing, aligning, tuning into  
what others are doing and how they are moving.  
It is all about organising oneself in relation to others.**

During my research work, this meant that in the morning we would discuss plans for the day. The Baka would tell me the different activities they intended to pursue; only for everybody to then end up doing something different, sometimes a mere five minutes later. Place yourself in the position of a researcher with a research design and time schedule, and you can imagine my initial frustration. After a while and many moments of disappointment, vexation, and even tears, I began to tune into the Baka way of communicating. On the one hand, I realised I was dealing with classic bias - they were telling me what they thought I wanted to hear. At the same time, I saw how decisions formed and things happened as part of group dynamics. This mostly occurred without any grand discussion, and slowly I learned to relate to the felt sensoriality with which people organise themselves. I began grasping how to co-compose in the network of Baka reciprocal, responsive messaging to become part of the 'invisible' flow of communication. This was intensified by the fact that even after many months with the Baka, I had not mastered the Baka lan-

guage to a level of complete fluency. Baka is a tonal language, like many Asian languages, and, for example, the letter combination 'so' can be pronounced in many differently sounding ways meaning different things. I continued to struggle with these minute distinctions of sound, and the Baka and I often laughed at my funny expressions. However, when I noticed that I was able to communicate in relation and sensitive response to the system and network of people I was living with, to feel the flows of decision-making, and to vibrate, resonate, move with them - this showed me that I had mastered Baka 'language' in a completely unforeseen way.

Baka have an understanding and terminology of space, time and sociality as interrelated. Space is not conceived in relation to units of time. Instead, there is no differentiation between space and time, distance and duration are merged, and words often have both a spatial and temporal meaning (See Annex I).<sup>50</sup> Truly inhabiting their perspective, Ivindo Baka egalitarianism is an ongoing co-composition of qualities of ecologically grounded spacetime and nested sociality.

Especially those Baka who were helping me with my research on Baka migratory histories and contemporary mobilities, walking with me in the forest to, for example, document former villages or old burial sites, would really make an effort to stick with my planning. Sensing how important these (strange for them) activities were to me, they would try hard to adapt to my way of organising. And yet ... time and again we 'failed', entering into a beautiful experience of not being 'efficient', when it just wasn't the moment to 'work'. Instead as group dynamics and a larger intelligence took over, we would start to dance and have a party in the middle of the day, which sometimes lasted only one hour, or it might continue on into the night. I started to love these impromptu parties, noticing how each time I would return to my research activities refreshed. One or more bodies moving and/or singing together, resonating with socio-somatic energies, always restored a sense of balance and harmony to the entire group. Afterwards, research activities would not feel like 'work' so much, but became more creatively integrated into and moving from the middle of the people present. Activating the intelligent wisdom

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50 For example, the Baka word *tie* means place or time; *ndanda* refers to place, location or moment; and *belebele* (which is the doubling of *bele* meaning forest) means always or everywhere (Leclerc 2001, Weig 2013:92). Also, for Baka living in forest environments there are equivalences between social spaces and mythical spaces. See Annex I for detailed information.

emerging through attuned co-presence, the 'extra', the excess, meant things got done in an organic way, and exactly as they needed to be on that occasion.

It was the many small moments of this kind that opened up the big windows of understanding. This is part of the magic of any ethnographic field-work, but for me the added layer came when occasionally my thoughts would return to my corporate office days, and I visualised people standing by the coffee machine, desperately grabbing a few moments of freedom from work pressures and power plays. These moments when my lived experiences overlapped left me wondering ...

*whether in regard to questions of how to live together without destroying human habitats, giving more attention to the diversity and situatedness of hunter-gatherers could be valued differently? And especially whether or how the existence of people living and abiding by egalitarian values could be of greater interest?*

### **Tension**

Importantly, this line of questioning is neither about exoticizing or glorifying 'tribal' life, nor thinking in terms of maximising the economic efficiency of homo oeconomicus. Being able to articulate how the existence of people living and abiding by egalitarian social values could be of greater interest, has been a process gently percolating into my daily life and ecosystem. What remains unique is how intensity and tension pan out in Baka egalitarian sociality, and how that relates to and emerges as sensing, communicating, and organising in active relation to others. Tension or intensity here are not moral or emotional qualities. They are neither good nor bad. Tension simply describes the existence of connections, which can take on many different qualities and intensities, for example, from strong to weak, from beautiful to scary. Attuning to the tension, is acknowledging qualities of interconnectedness, of being always already interwoven, of humans never separate from their surroundings. This form of co-presence or co-sociality is always more-than, meaning it involves non-human qualities and elements. The co-presence is premised on and generated through qualities of sensitively and non-violently relating to others. This differs from analyses conducted around similar phenomena in dance or systems studies. Qualities of sensitivity and non-violence shape and ground not only the context for artistic research or analysing an economic question from a systems perspective, but *all* aspects of the egalitarian social-

ity. Most of all, the difference lies in how 'structurally non-violent societies'<sup>51</sup> manage to make being present with tension and complexity a mostly fun process. Recognising and attuning to the tension and connectedness, and the pleasurable mode of life that can come with it, is based in an unbounded and integrated understanding of human bodiliness. Living this non-violent tensional co-presence, necessitates shifting perceptions of what we mean when we say 'body'.

## From Body To Body-ing: Fascias and Microbiomes

Our human relations, and how, why, and where we relate and move in the world, involve our physical bodies. Whether we are hugging or ignoring a person, the gesture originates from a bodily presence. Whether we are walking on foot through forests or traversing city centres in autonomous vehicles, we are capable of doing this through the physicality of our human bodies. There are many explanations and theories of what we mean when we say 'body', but within this complexity two central but contrasting points of view stand out. The first emphasises the separation of mind and body, termed *Cartesian* following the philosopher Rene Descartes. This entails a notion of body or person as individualistic, measurable, quantifiable. The second view of 'body' speaks of the fundamental interconnectedness with and inseparability of a person or being from their surroundings. Such permeable and pervasive environments include other humans, ancestors, animals, plants, atmospheric phenomena such as sound or rainfall, and much more, nowadays also summed in the term 'more-than'.<sup>52</sup> Groups like the Baka as well as many others, for example, the *San* in southern Africa, the *Kaluli* in Papua New Guinea, or the *Arawete* of the eastern Amazon, adhere to this second view. For the Baka the forest is alive, and they are permanently communicating with the forest, also through polyphonic singing. Trees, animals, Baka persons, and other beings are all co-constituted as and through living social relations, as permanently becoming socialities. This sense of deep interweaving is commonly associated with "indigenous" groups. However, it is important not to stop there and fall back into exotic stereotypes that prevent appreciating how all humans live in such webs of inseparability, whether we are aware of it or not. The work

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51 Finnegan 2015:87

52 La Puig de Bellacasa 2017:2

of biologists and geoscientists reveals how current technologies are transforming humans ‘from individuals into specialised parts of a global more-than-human being’.<sup>53</sup> These transformation processes transcend (human) linear understandings of time. At the same time, these research fields underline how the technologically-enabled ‘metahuman being is inextricably bound to the much older biosphere, from which it arose’.<sup>54</sup> Both modern science and long-standing wisdom traditions evidence the non-linear interconnectedness of human bodyings with their surroundings.

My understanding of what is ‘body’ has been shaped through my scientific research as much as my passion for dancing, through all of which I learned that studying body is intimately intertwined with studying movement. This starts with embryology and infancy, and studies with infants have shown that the capacity to move and the capacity to experience are related.<sup>55</sup> We begin learning how to relate, how to move and be social, in the socio-cultural environments of our childhood. There is vast diversity in human movement styles, as ways of bodily movement are socio-culturally distinct and gender specific.<sup>56</sup> As adults, we continue to live in conscious or unconscious resonance to this socio-cultural diversity of people we move with, and also in ongoing and multi-sensorial resonance to the architecture and infrastructure of our daily lives.<sup>57</sup> Productions of sociality and how we feel for example belonging, happen also through culturally inflected notions of movement, which are directly related to our bodily physicality and awareness. After many years of investigating what bodies can do, with different groups ranging from hunter-gatherers to contemporary dancers and body therapists, for me, it has become impossible to think and feel one without the other: Body and movement go together as do capacities for bodily presence and socio-political-cultural context.<sup>58</sup> This perspective is further influenced by the field of somatic studies. Generally speaking, *somatic* is another way of saying body or physiology. The difference is that in comparison to the *body* as seen from the outside, so from a third-person perspective, *somatic* refers to a first-person perspective of the body’s internal workings.<sup>59</sup>

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53 Margulis & Sagan 2000:27

54 Margulis & Sagan 2000:27

55 Sheets-Johnstone 2011, Stern 2010:7–8

56 Mauss 1979 [1934], Manning 2007

57 Pallasmaa 2019, Hedley 2019, Zardini 2005

58 See for example: Weig 2019, Weig 2018, Weig 2015c, Weig 2015b

59 Hanna 1970

The conceptualization of 'body' put forward in this book is then not Cartesian, fixed, bounded, measurable. 'Body' is understood as emergent, ontogenetic, more-than, permanently moving-sensing-vibrating.<sup>60</sup> Using the verb *body-ing*, rather than the noun body, underlines how the 'body continually transforms itself and is already not, at the moment when I speak of it, what it was a few seconds ago'.<sup>61</sup> The work of critical philosophers Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, and others, accentuates how a 'body' is not something that exists and is somewhere in space or time, but is a process of constant composition, affect, movement, becoming. Manning's work especially highlights how (human) bodying is always about 'movement-moving', and the combination of moving and sensing, of *moving-sensing*, as co-composite practices.<sup>62</sup> Processes of moving-sensing with sensations such as sound, smells, joys, and pains, at the same time characterise what makes the body *excessive*. When I cry out, ululate maybe, I am co-composing, extending into space and at the same time being shaped by what the sound emerging with my bodying does with the space. In all the physiological and physical nuances of the co-composition of the sound being made and reverberating with the space, there is something extra and excessive, indicating those invisible, sensorial aspects which cannot be captured or clearly named, and which carry a potential for shape-shifting.<sup>63</sup> Research on neurophysiology, and especially the latest studies on the *fascia* tissue-system, emphasise this permanent becoming, vibrating, shifting-sliding in resonance with impulses from the qualities of our environments.

### **The Amazing Fascia Tissue-System**

*Fascia* is our bodily connective tissue, which extends from the outer epidermis through all skin layers into the depths of our bodies. Fascia tissues envelope muscles, organs, bones, and nerves, thereby forming 'a continuous tensional network throughout the human body'.<sup>64</sup> This extensive interconnectedness results in a fascinating three-dimensional network, a living matrix, which forms a bodily support structure, an internal 'soft skeleton'. At the same time,

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60 Manning 2007

61 Laplantine 2015:13

62 Manning 2016

63 Serres 2008, Manning 2007:51, Wulf 2007:126

64 Schleip 2012:xv

it transmits information inside the body as a communicative continuum. Said another way, fascia is the ‘white stuff’ in between layers of meat (think of skinning a chicken), or the fibres separating segments of citrus fruits. Anatomists used to cut away the fascial tissue, the ‘white stuff’, as useless. They were focused on the muscles, adhering to a medical view of the body as composed of 600 muscles.<sup>65</sup> Following intense research on fascia during the last 10-15 years, this view has been challenged and shape-shifted. Studies revealed how fascias are vital to a person’s sensing and movement capacities. Rather than pure muscle power, research has shown how fascial sliding is key to movement, and for example, the kangaroo’s leap is a release of fascial tension, not just muscular force.<sup>66</sup> The fascia tissue-system is now considered as our largest sensory organ, as for example, the fascial element of the muscle is innervated by approximately six times more sensory nerves than its muscular counterpart.<sup>67</sup>

The development of fascial tissues precedes bone development in an embryo, during the so-called gastrulation or embryonic folding in weeks 2-3, and together with blood, it may be seen as the ‘organ of innerness’.<sup>68</sup> In analogy with a tent, the fascias are the tent material, which is later shaped by the bones, the tent structure. Together with the nervous system, fascias form a body-wide mechanosensitive integrating signalling system.<sup>69</sup> Most importantly, the fascia tissue-system is an amazing viscoelastic continuum with *both/and* qualities. Viscoelasticity means fascia is both viscous, so resistant to deformation, and elastic, so able to adapt and resume its shapes after being stretched or compressed. *Both/and* means fascia combines qualities commonly perceived as opposites, as it is, for example, both liquid *and* solid, made of fibre *and* fluid. Fascias are predominantly composed of fibroblast cells and the extra-cellular matrix (ECM), of collagen fibres and watery, fluid ground substance and interstitial fluid.<sup>70</sup> Collagen is the main structural protein, and it is the collagen which enables fascias’ quality of tensile strength. Type I collagen (there are 15 in total) is stronger than steel.<sup>71</sup> The incredible diversity of

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65 Kuriyama 1999

66 Lesondak 2018:128. The (in part humorous) question asked by fascia researchers was: Are there really 600 muscles or only one muscle in 600 fascial pockets?

67 Schleip 2017

68 van der Wal 2017

69 Langevin 2006

70 Lesondak 2018:6, 8

71 Lesondak 2018:9, quoting Lodish et. al. 2000.

types of fascia tissues keep everything both separate *and* interconnected, and which is why it is also termed ‘fascias’ in the plural, continuously defying any singularising definition.<sup>72</sup>

Fascias are intelligent-adaptive and respond to the way a person lives and moves by becoming more or less permeable or solid. Healthy fascias are juicy, fluid and ‘wet’, moving, sensing, stretching and sliding back and forth. Imagine wearing a jumper or jacket which does not sit right, and which you have to pull at and to adjust so that it fits with your body shape, and you feel comfortable wearing it. Fascia tissues are permanently making similar adaptive movements, just below your skin. In specialist terminology, fascias are relevant to *interoception*, the sensorial relationship people have with their own body, and *proprioception*, meaning how a person senses where their body is in space. Understanding fascias’ unique qualities of shifting-sliding tensional responsiveness opens up new medical treatments, for example, for cancer and back pain.<sup>73</sup> In this view, it is not the spine, but fascias which hold up and connect the body parts, including the vertebrae. The both/and qualities, so not separating, but – in a healthy body – always interconnectedly sensitively shifting-sliding, is how fascias are continually becoming in *Tensional Responsiveness*.

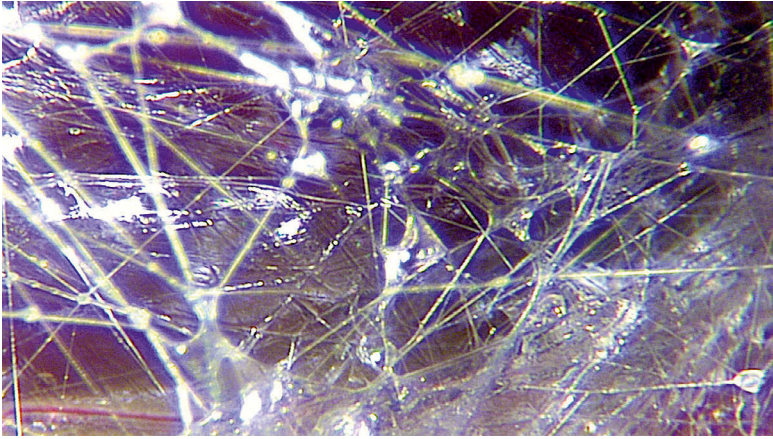
Words cannot describe or do justice to the fasci(a)nation of seeing and attuning to fascias. Take a look at Image 3.1 on the next page. This photo shows you the web-like texture of the tissue-system. The image is of the fibrillar network around the muscle and flexor tendon in the forearm. Each time you move your hand and bend your finger, the fascia tissue-system as you see it here is shifting-sliding in tensional responsiveness in the movement. The second image (3.2) offers you an impression of the quality of how the fascia tissues envelope and interweave muscles, organs, bones, and nerves, thereby forming a continuous tensional network throughout the human body. To get a sense of how fascia tissues are permanently moving just beneath the outer

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72 The outermost layer is known as the hypodermis or ‘superficial fascia’ and has a spongy quality and yellow colour. The second level is the filmy and ‘membranous fascia’ which is like gauze with stretchy, wet, slippery, gelatinous qualities. The third layer is known as ‘deep or dense fascia’ which is both elastic and grid-like, stable like strapping tape and white in colour. These descriptions were presented by integral anatomist Gil Hedley at the *British Fascia Symposium*, Worcester, June 25-26, 2016. See also [www.gilhedley.com](http://www.gilhedley.com), and an interview I conducted with Gil about fascia: Hedley 2019.

73 Langevin et. al. 2016, Schleip 2012

Figure 3.1 – The web-like texture of fascia tissues in the human hand and forearm.



Source 3.1 – EndovivoProductions, Jean-Claude Guimberteau

layer of your skin, try accessing some of the documentaries about fascia available online. Firstly, *Fascia In Movement: The Essentials Preview*, is a great clip by one of the leading fascia specialists, Tom Myers, which explains the properties of fascias in an entertaining way with everyday household objects. A next step would be the seminal documentary *Strolling under the skin*, made by plastic surgeon and fascia specialist Claude Guimberteau, when camera technologies became small enough to enter the fractal realms of fascias.<sup>74</sup> *Strolling under the Skin* explains the medical revolutions around fascias, and Guimberteau shows how the fibres of living connective tissue remodel themselves, moment to moment, based on the tensions of the surrounding structures. The documentary takes the viewer into the microscopic details of how fascia tissues are interconnected and permanently shifting-sliding (but beware, if you are squeamish). Try accessing these or similar moving images of fascia, which will hopefully allow you to get an impression of the textural micromovements and the particular rhythmic qualities of this amazing tissue-system under your skin. You can hopefully come to appreciate fascias' incredible *both/and*

74 The documentary *Strolling under the skin* was made in 2005 by Claude Guimberteau, a hand surgeon and former President of the French Society for Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery.

Figure 3.2 – Fascias forming a continuous tensional network throughout the human body.



Source 3.2 – With the kind permission of John Sharkey, Clinical Anatomist 2007.

qualities: to how the shifting-sliding fascial layers *both* maintain tension and structure, *and* allow for responsiveness and change.

The term *technogenesis* describes the understanding that humans evolved with their technologies. Said another way, our original technologies, *techme* in Greek, are our senses, our sensorial capacities. Types and practices of sensory perception are socio-culturally distinct and cannot be understood or defined universally.<sup>75</sup> For example, the five senses model (touch, taste, smell, sound, sight) dominant in Europe, Northern America and other parts of the world, is not universal. Most cultures have more than five senses, and cultures can have up to 29 senses,<sup>76</sup> including for example the above-mentioned proprioception and interoception, or a distinct sixth ‘sense of balance’.<sup>77</sup>

New information around fascia not only contests the dominant medical view of the body focused on muscle power, but, as our largest sensory organ,

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75 Classen 2012

76 Howes 2004

77 Geurts 2003

as one of our technologies, our techme, fascia further challenges how and what to think of as senses. Fascia research has evidenced the importance of bodily connective tissues, and the newly emphasized responsive shifting-sliding qualities of fascias can expand existing theoretical models and research methodologies.<sup>78</sup> It is timely to ponder how best to play and invent with fascias' both/and complexities. It has been suggested to theorize fascia as a social network metaphor,<sup>79</sup> but the viscoelastic qualities of bodily connective tissues, which are always moving-adapting and never the same, precisely deny being turned into a model or metaphor. As I suggest, both with regard to scientific research methodologies and fluid ontologies, and with regard to lived life, the fascial qualities of *shifting-sliding* and *tensional responsiveness* can become a deep, quotidian, processual inspiration, especially when asking *what if* and *what else*.<sup>80</sup>

### Microbiomes

Fascias are only one amazing aspect of many in our neurophysiologies, and it is also microbial ecologies which cast a new light on how we can think about 'body'. Studies undertaken, for example as part of the *American Gut Project*, have shown that, given the 39 trillion microbial cells in our bodies, in the volume which we normally think of as our 'body', only about 46% of that is human.<sup>81</sup> The rest are various bacteria, viruses, and other cellular microorganisms, which make up who we are, or think we are as this entity which we refer to as the 'I' or 'self'. From the genetic perspective, human microbiomes are actually only 1% human, and 99% other.<sup>82</sup> The 99% are other beings, living in the stomach, intestines, eyes, under toenails, or in the ear. This line of research has given rise to Donna Haraway saying that 'we have never been human', evidencing that throughout the entire existence of *homo sapiens*, we have always been 'more-than', co-composing with a mind-boggling quantity and quality of different organisms. This awareness occasions biomedicine shifting towards a 'molecular configuration' which conceives body or organism as an 'open-ended network whose boundaries are in constant flux and

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78 Weig 2020

79 Barcan 2011:140

80 Weig 2020

81 Knight et. al. 2017

82 Knight et. al. 2017

negotiation with its environment'.<sup>83</sup> In other sectors, mind-body dualisms remain firmly in place, but research from fields such as neurophysiology, fascia studies, and microbial ecology are helping to shift towards a holistic understanding of bodies as processes. Towards an understanding of bodyings as co-composing multitudes intimately involved in processes of growing and perishing, as ecosystems actively living and attentively weaving life into creative, generative becoming with larger ecosystems. For example, the research demonstrating our gut as 'second brain' also documents how most choices towards maintaining our lives do not engage the 'conscious brain'.<sup>84</sup> As microbial processes form part of what is considered human decision-making, the research evidences that when 'we' make decisions, it is indeed always a 'we', an 'us', never a lone 'I'. I introduce this aspect also because during my stay with the Ivindo Baka, my capacity to sense the quality of foods became highly developed. If not by sight or smelling, then always in that moment just before placing a food item in my mouth, I immediately knew whether it was still good to eat, or better not to. I was never sick during my time with the Baka (something the tropical disease specialists still find hard to believe), apart from once when I swallowed meat which had a bluish-green shimmer, smelt funny, and which every cell in my body and the Baka women were telling me not to eat.

### **From Body to Bodying**

The diversities of cellular and material compositions of bodies, as evidenced, for example, through fascia and microbiomes, emphasise that the human body is not singular.

#### **We can come to appreciate our bodyings as permanently co-composing ecosystems of human and non-human matter.**

Replacing the noun 'body' with the dynamic verb form *bodying*, or even using the plural *bodyings* as the new noun, are clear ways of acknowledging and activating new knowledge around fascias and microbiomes, and how bodying is always a process. The term *bodying ecosystem* attempts to combine these different constituents and ongoing movements, in what we normally think

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83 Sharon 2014

84 Wilson 2015, Kahneman 2003

of as the human 'body'. *Bodying ecosystem* draws together how the body is not fixed, but is a co-composing system in permanent movement. Importantly, even these *bodying ecosystems* are not singular as they are always nested in and with larger ecosystems. In the complexities of lived life, (human) *bodyings* are always co-composing, shaping, and shifting-sliding with and in response to other ecosystems. This idea has been termed *holobiont* within the field of microbial biology. Holobiont refers to how a host and many other species living in, with, or around it, together form a discrete ecological unit.<sup>85</sup> Holobiont derives from another term, namely *holarchy*. Holarchy is a word coined by the philosopher Arthur Koestler to express the coexistence of smaller beings in larger wholes, and in which the constituents are not merely parts, they are *holons*, meaning wholes that also function as parts.<sup>86</sup> Koestler's aim was to move away from the concept of 'hierarchy', and the notion that the constituents of a unit or system must necessarily always be bound up in dependent and hierarchical relations of control. The notion of *bodying ecosystem* is indebted to holobiont and the ways the concept has been developed. However, as the emphasis of the writing here is on the interrelations of bodily movement, somatic awareness, and socio-political-economic context, I use the term *bodying*. Using *bodying*, the verb form of body, aims to join up holobiontic microbial activity and other ways of how the body is continuously shape-shifting-sliding, with somatic experience and socio-political co-presence, as continuously emerging processes.

**Shifting-sliding from the fixed body to ecosystemic bodying,  
opens up different perspectives into what and how are capacities to be social.**

This awareness of bodying as process and potential, further supports joining up verbs into compositions such as moving-sensing and thinking-perceiving. We cannot move without sensing, and we cannot think without perceiving. There is nothing 'in here' or 'out there', other than to understand our bodyings as occasions of energetic concentrations; as resonant sound vessels; and most importantly as tensionally responsive to even the slightest impulse or shift. Joining up thinking and perceiving touches on debates from philosophy and in particular phenomenology,<sup>87</sup> which question whether there must be an 'I', a subject, which does the thinking and perceiving. When I write of thinking-

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85 Margulis & Fester 1991

86 Margulis & Sagan 2000:9

87 See for example Spinoza & Curley 1985

perceiving as conjoined, I aim to emphasise how thinking and perceiving, as two qualities of knowing the world, are looped and inseparable.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, the philosophical debates critically draw attention to how the nuances in these processes of looping cannot be adequately reflected in language. This concern has a broader context evidenced by the work of biologist and evolutionary theorist Lynn Margulis and others, whereby 'life is distinguished not by its chemical constituents but by the behaviour of its chemicals' so that 'life on Earth is more like a verb. It repairs, maintains, re-creates, and outdoes itself'.<sup>89</sup> So, let's keep playing around with the everyday language and terms we use, and invent new vocabularies and grammars to reflect and refract our bodies as bodying ecosystems, and give voice to the ongoing shifting-sliding and co-composing of human and more-than-human. In co-generating new vocabularies, we can draw on how Baka terminologies emphasise the inter-relatedness of space, time and sociality. Through the process of this writing, it seems particularly relevant to co-invent more terms and process-oriented verbs to express, for example, sensitive resonance; organising sensitively in relation to what others are doing; independence within interdependence; tensional responsiveness; or non-violence. Maybe, just as Eskimos famously have many words for different types of snow, we can co-invent more words for expressing the diverse types of sensations of tension and response that may emerge in daily lives.

Living and being with the Baka was equally the experience of the limits of resonant bodying, the limits of sharing life and lived space with people. To a certain degree this is obvious, as I am a person who has spent at least half their life in built-up environments, shopping in supermarkets, with daily habits and (travel) opportunities shaped by the rights, privileges and limits of a White woman educated in Europe. These practices differ from Ivindo Baka bodying, shaped by the intense qualities and challenges of tropical forest life, predominantly hunting and gathering for wild foods; where knowledge is not about what you learnt at school; and, most importantly, where attempts at standing out of the crowd are frowned upon or even punished. So the moments, where I sensed a deep resonance, where my 'I' disappeared, where I felt attuned with Ivindo Baka bodying, responsive to the rules and openings of Baka social dynamics, these moments were profoundly precious. This

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88 Ingold 2000:165 quoting Clark, A. 1997. *Being there: putting brain, body and the world together again*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

89 Margulis & Sagan 2000:14

growing awareness of bodying as lived process, brought out the specificities of how are the qualities of ongoingness constituting Baka social organisation, as much as its limits. Playing your independent tune-part in this interdependence means continuously generating and fine-tuning the potential for responsive bodying. This potential negates any sense of self as bounded, impartial subject. The capacities for such ongoing, deep, resonant intensities are this hum, gently vibrating, waiting to be lured or triggered to co-compose with other humans and more-than-humans; into co-creative social dynamics and bodily politics; into socio-somatic playing, sounding, enchanting, dancing, laughing.

### **Capacity-Building for Tensional Responsiveness: Beyond Breathlessness and Eco-anxiety**

... Which brings me to draw together the strands of this first proposition to ask whether or how knowing about groups like the Baka can shape-shift what we mean and feel when we say 'social' and 'being in community'. We already know that you cannot 'build' community, that you can only ever create opportunities for community to happen. Irrespective of the Baka egalitarian nuance, experiencing true community is organic and concrete, or as Martin Buber has emphasised qualities of immediacy and co-presence, 'community is where community happens'.<sup>90</sup> A separate term for expressing when the experience of group or community outweighs or negates individual experience, is *communitas*. *Communitas* has many definitions and hues, one of which is the 'pleasure of sharing common experiences with one's fellows'.<sup>91</sup> *Communitas* is a favourite and long-standing anthropological research topic, as it is said to occur mainly in situations of ritual, when people lose the sense of having a clearly structured, socially acceptable self. *Communitas* is also another term or aspect of this idea of bodying as potential, of capacities for the social humming away, waiting to be activated into different intensities. Living independence within interdependence with the Baka and becoming immersed in polyphonic singing at any time of day on the Ivindo, I experienced how is this potential hum of *communitas* as an ongoing quality, not as something limited

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90 Buber 1947

91 Turner 2012:1

to distinct ritual times. This continuity of potential awaiting activation, is paralleled by all the (new) information coming out of neurophysiology, molecular ecology and critical sociology research, from which, if we take it seriously, we know that the fixed, identitarian body as such is our human construct.

Agonies around being social and in community, around identity and belonging, are age-old human queries. Experiencing non-violent Baka egalitarianism enables to think-perceive these topics also as *intensities of relating*. Whether we feel connected or somehow separate from those around us, is strongly dependant on our *capacities for relating* and whether or how we can enjoy and revel in, or only just about tolerate, the intensities which necessarily spring from direct human interactions. Such capacities, like everything else, are shaped and fostered by the personal and socio-cultural frameworks in which we grow up and live our lives. Certainly, the Baka are not the only ones who have a non-individualistic, non-binary understanding of 'social'. The notion of the *dividual* is applied in philosophy and anthropology to describe and conceptualise how persons cannot be understood apart from the social relations they are a part of and formed by; *devisable individuals* become *dividuals*.<sup>92</sup> "I am you - you are me" was the shortest explanation given to me of how in Balinese Hinduism each and every member of a group is considered to be in relation with one another, and with everything else. The popular south African *Ubuntu* philosophy from the 19<sup>th</sup> century asserts that 'I am because we are', based in an understanding of humanity where 'a person is a person through other people'.<sup>93</sup> Critics of the individualist focus of present-day psychoanalysis have advanced concepts of 'collective subjectivity' moving us towards 'a new gentleness'.<sup>94</sup> Nowadays, dividual refers also to the increasing division of individuals into fragments of data which can be processed.<sup>95</sup>

The notion of *Palaeolithic politics*, as outlined above, also takes us back to ancestral capacities for relating with different intensities. As Wengrow and Graeber suggest, the seasonal alternations, between times of collective intensity and pragmatic, individualistic dispersal, are a general feature of human societies. Even more clearly, they give voice to how 'simply put, we are incapable, psychologically and emotionally, of living in constant awareness of our *full social universe*'.<sup>96</sup> Traditionally, Baka mobility practices also allowed for

92 Deleuze 1992, Strathern 1988

93 Eze 2010

94 Guattari 1989

95 Deleuze 1992: 5

96 Wengrow & Graeber 2015:611, my emphasis

getting away, when things got too tense. As I witnessed, the change to predominantly sedentary lifestyles, which means everybody in the same space most of the time, causes considerable social pressure. On a different note, despite today's increasing global material wealth, mental health issues are on the rise.<sup>97</sup> This suggests that - at least some - contemporary humans in industrialised and tech-dependant societies also struggle with being aware of and present with the 'full social universe'. During the many years in which I have attended and researched on different types of courses and methods for movement, meditation, or somatic practice, there were only few instances, where we were actively reminded to consider those around us or the more-than-human, the 'social'. It is not easy to learn to relate in an on-going, non-violent, sensitive, interwoven manner, and many approaches teach yoga or other movement and meditation techniques by focusing predominantly on the individual, the one person, self, ego. I know it is a great leap to take, but maybe the challenges that come with being continuously fully present with the full social universe, are a bit like a herd of great big elephants in our shared room of contemporary humanity.

The institutional plasticity involved in *Palaeolithic politics* shows how our ancestors adapted and shaped their socio-political organisations, shifting between contrasting hierarchical and egalitarian modes of relating as needed and in accordance with seasonal demands.<sup>98</sup> So, as humans, we have always had this capacity and power to adapt our ways of relating to each other to best suit what was necessary and/or possible at the time. What is preventing us from activating this power of change with regard to our current challenges? Importantly, this is not about drawing a direct, linear connection between archaeological ancestors and living people. It is an example of activating the 'what else', of thinking-perceiving-with the concept of *Palaeolithic politics* as a way to generate a curious response and a qualitative change. It is an example of employing speculating and fabulating as techniques, as ways of encouraging 'speculative fabulation',<sup>99</sup> to ask what can or does this information on cyclical adaptations of social organisations do? European and Northern American social thinkers from the 17<sup>th</sup> century suggested we could realise human happiness and fulfilment through establishing ideal social systems. However,

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97 Cunsolo & Ellis 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/feb/10/overwhelming-and-terrifying-impact-of-climate-crisis-on-mental-health>

98 Wengrow & Craeber 2015

99 Haraway 2016: 10, Manning 2016: 223

this pursuit of ideal societies is bounded by environmental determinism, as human happiness remains dependent on outside (environmental) factors including the realisation of the ideal social system. On the other hand, many different systems and religions emphasise people's inner transformation as the highest priority, arguing that social change can only be initiated by human beings who are not controlled by outside environmental factors. In today's societies, happiness has often become equated with consumerism, resulting in possessive secular individuals taking dependencies on outside factors to new extremes.<sup>100</sup> What these approaches seem to address insufficiently is how what we need to be happily relating, is not always one and the same thing; it shifts-slides in relation to the human and the more-than-human beings and qualities co-present on that occasion.

*Are we truly capable of appreciating ourselves as part of larger ecosystemic cycles? Can we activate capacities for the social in ways that enable and encourage shifting-sliding towards ways of relating with tensional responsiveness, with human and more-than-human? Can this then enable cyclical adaptations of socio-political organisations and socio-economic value systems?*

The dialogical framework towards considering these questions, as it presents itself following my various research strands, is that we cannot think the future of societies, of education, work, mobility or any other aspect of what we do and how we relate, without taking into account more the qualities and intensities of moving-sensing bodying ecosystems. The challenge should no longer be to overcome mind-body dualisms, but to theorise and act from a position of knowing that *we have never been separate*; that (our) societies are always a co-constitution of the minutiae of shifts of the volume body, together with the rules and norms of the social system in which that bodying is moving-sensing its daily life. Our ancestors were, necessarily, far more aware of and embedded in the ecosystems they nested in. They did not have the material possibilities to separate themselves in ways that are available to urban city dwellers today. Although the (urban) individualism appears to be real, research in neurophysiology and other fields negates this separation, opening up instead to how the constitution of the volume body is always a co-constitution with qualities of more-than. This suggests that in considering

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100 Berlant 2011

challenges and threats as serious as the possible extinction of humanity,<sup>101</sup> bringing unconditional awareness to this (new) knowledge which evidences body as nested bodying, is key to interweaving micro and macro perspectives. Our ancestors will have felt and known such intertwining, and now there is even scientific proof to validate such ways of knowing and sensing.<sup>102</sup> This enables further interlinking indigenous knowledge traditions with scientifically established knowledge in the search for ways to grow from humanity's predicaments. It is a question of growing human *response-ability*, as Donna Haraway has written.<sup>103</sup> The idea of *response-ability* emphasises a capacity to not simply react, but to *respond* to whatever is happening, to listen carefully and attune to which type and quality of action is called for on that occasion. Living in community in a globally connected world, is the challenge to generate capacities for the social and maintain social cohesion; based on approaches and systems-thinking-perceiving which focus not on one part but move from within an overall, holistic perception and appreciation of continuity; and the acknowledgement of how we are always already moving-sensing, shifting-sliding in tensional responsiveness. So how and when is this moment we construct ourselves and the separate other, negating the pleasure of sharing experience in community?

### **Acknowledging Invisibility and Fear**

Shifting from body to bodying, is also the process of appreciating how the limits of sharing life are not always visible. This more-than includes qualities and beings invisible to the human eye, beings which endure unasked, come unwanted, or to which we actively pray for help. It seems the aliveness of this invisibility has fascinated and scared humans throughout time. Apparently, many of us are (still) petrified of spiders, because our ancestors could hear, see or sense large animals coming, but were unable to defend and protect against small, potentially deadly creepy crawlies. The first time I placed my foot inside that of a gorilla footprint, my foot was just so tiny in comparison with the gorilla's imprint in the muddy forest floor. I was glad the gorilla was no longer around, and yet sensing the traces of this impressive animal gave me a unique sense of aliveness and connectedness. And I could thoroughly

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101 Berardi 2018

102 Margulis & Sagan 2000

103 Haraway 2016

enjoy this sensation, as I felt perfectly safe in the presence of three trusted Baka friends.

Today, as seemingly in palaeolithic times, one of the strongest 'invisibility factors' of human bodying is the love and fear of other humans. Modern psychology and other types of therapy advocate addressing such fears, which can result in a healing process, or in externalising these feelings as mistrust, betrayal or deceit.<sup>104</sup> In the latter case, a possible response is to create the 'other' as political group, race or nationality. However, as Sara Ahmed and colleagues have shown, what we think of as the 'other' or 'stranger' is not in existence as ontologically prior, but is constructed through social relations and as part of self.<sup>105</sup> Mostly, we are unaware of this, and this fear of the 'other' is aiding in and governing the current rise of neopopulisms. Franco Berardi, together with other critical thinkers, has advanced the argument that experiencing bodily limits to connecting beyond our known worlds is a strong contributor to contemporary neo-nationalisms.<sup>106</sup> Many people turn their frustrations into rejecting that which they could not connect with. Frustration and rejection become the new glue binding together groups around (old) topics of belonging, furthering exclusionist and divisive political actions.

*How can new awareness around neurophysiological movements be activated in ways which offer deeper insights into what it means to be social? How can such moving-sensing knowledge and bodying as potential be activated with regard to current societal challenges, such as neo-nationalisms and eco-anxieties? How can we shift education and politics towards sensitive, embedded ways of relating?*

Realms of invisible human perception also include gods, witches and other beings that we either honour or fight. In Gabon and other parts of Central Africa, they speak about and fear being eaten by bad spirits, known as the *vampire*. Pronounced in French, the term sounds something like 'voampiiir' to other language ears, and bears no relation to beings from Transylvania with fangs and long black overcoats. The fear of the *vampire* is a tangible, bodily reality that has the power to shape social order. Speaking to my closest Gabonese friends about this, I was surprised to learn that although we share an equal

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104 Berardi 2015, Levine 1997

105 Ahmed 2000

106 Berardi 2015

level of university education, they were wary of the *vampire*. They were conscious and respectful of how the (fear of the) *vampire* could impact day-to-day life, their own and that of their families. These invisible qualities shape the ways in which we body through our daily lives as much as social norms. Hidden realms are intensely affective in influencing and governing both bodily processes and group dynamics. Importantly, this is the same whether in the Central African *vampire*, German Catholicism, Balinese Hinduism, or large-scale political manipulation via *Facebook*. The notion of the invisible proposed here then bridges and embraces what we commonly think of as the distinct entities body - society - environment. Thinking-perceiving in terms of capacities for the social and bodying as social potential, 'invisible' includes what we think of as (un)conscious psychological factors in equal terms to psychosomatic factors and our physiological capacities to move-sense in tensional responsiveness.

### **Alive with Tensional Responsiveness**

Discovering and experiencing how the invisible fascial layers at the same time maintain tension and structure, *and* allow for responsiveness and change, in what fascia research terms *tensional responsiveness*, enables to think-perceive more deeply how tension and tenderness are active parts of social process and social organisation, everywhere. Fascial tissue-system plasticity, excites to be creative with the intensities and proximities of sensitively relating, and to generate novel capacities for the social around what is individually and collectively visible and invisible, from physiologies to fears. The notion of *bodying as potential*, as the capacity for sociality and for balancing out conflicts and re-establishing group coherence, continues to inspire when thinking about the challenging 'full social universe' (and the invisible herd of elephants). This clarity comes also through the setting of Adjab: living, being, experiencing, becoming in this forest clearing with hardly any human-made infrastructure. Opening into the immediacy of sensing the intensities of Earth, the beauty, magnificence, and sacredness of the forest, communicating and relating with tropical plants, animals and all other beings. And learning how the egalitarian dynamic keeping everybody together *alive*, in the sense of energetically co-present, must be actively maintained. And that our human capacities for creating or deepening social relations can be activated or left idling, at any moment, in any occasion.

It is the shared practices of working, cooking, and living together, as much as singing and dancing, celebrating and doing ritual together, which activate our capacities for relating. Taking pleasure in the *sharing of experience* is what creates togetherness, community, *communitas*. Whether in the intensities of daily life or ritual times, becoming aware of our social universe in a healthy way comes with entering into socio-somatic resonance and joint, joyful bodying. Attuning to the potential of relational intensity in each occasion, enables transcending individual concerns and harmonising group relations, also with surrounding forests or other ecologies. It is an attuning to the more-than. All the co-composing beings are vital to enduring socialities, in which conflict, tension, and tenderness are equally valid qualities, emerging with different intensities in the tensionally responsive social relations of that occasion. Such processes necessitate cultures of trust not based on monetary values. Egalitarian social systems function without the existence of explicit leadership, exactly because of the demand of people to participate not only in the visible sharing of material goods, but in the invisible ongoingness of sensitively relating to and sharing in the liveliness, vibrancy and richness of what can be co-constituted on that occasion with all that are present. This generative co-composition transcends distinctions of individual and society to include the more-than-human, to involve all the manifold and molecular qualities which make up this thing we call life. Whether we are talking or conceptualising body, community, or environment, this means activating bodying as potential for the social.

The proposition offered is to

**perceive our bodyings as vibrant potential for being social,  
for living in sensitive, embedded community with humans,  
and with all beings and qualities beyond-the-human.**

The proposition is to become bodying ecosystem not in relation to external signs, but by listening to qualities which transcend inner-outer quantifications; by activating capacities for being social through listening to intensities of tensional responsiveness. *Tensional responsiveness* refers to the adaptive viscosity which the fascia tissue-system allows for. True to its ever-moving shifting-sliding nature, fascia is not to be used as a one-to-one model or metaphor. Its vibrational fractal qualities rather enthuse a non-identitarian, non-binary, processual mode of, what we might call, *both/and presence*. From a theoretical perspective, fascias inspire moving beyond mind-body dichotomies and to-

wards ontological fluidity.<sup>107</sup> Fascial sensing teaches that tension need not relate to dichotomous, judgemental poles of, for example, good-bad, or stasis-mobility. Tension is present precisely because there is no separation of individual parts, because all types of tissue are interwoven. From within this quality of interconnectedness, tension is foremost simply a quality which asks for, demands, necessitates a response. A response in touch with the shifting-sliding movements of the entire (eco)system. A response to shifts in weight, pressure, sound, or other qualities. From this perspective, social cohesion is less about happy harmonies and ideal social systems, and more concerned with simply moving-sensing in response and accountability to the tensional qualities inherent in the socio-somatic bodyings of any actual occasion. Moreover, appreciating bodying as capacity for the social carries the potential for co-composing beyond class, gender, or racial constructions.

### **Non-Violence and Non-Separation**

The fractal, non-binary, both/and fascia tissue-network offers endless lines and qualities of possible movements for moving-sensing from sensations of tension. The quality of relational engagement and response that are activated can be anything, from violent to non-violent, from nasty to tender, from rejection to living embrace. Acknowledging and attuning to the depths, varying qualities, and shifting-sliding intensities of this ongoing, incessant, complex relating and co-composing between humans and more-than, is what is associated with the notion of *Alive with Tensional Responsiveness*. Adding *Aliveness* suggests a sense of vibration, a bubbling, ever-ready hum, in meeting sensations of tension. Shifting-sliding towards ongoingness and continuity invokes more strongly qualities of tenderness and non-violence. References to violence or non-violence here do not chiefly indicate harmful physical force or abuse, or the lack thereof. Violence is mainly used and understood as referring to responses and practices which emphasise separation, and which deny or withdraw emotional or socio-somatic connection. Refusing to activate such rupture, withdrawal, or separation, can be refusing a core mode of violence. Attuning movement choices to ongoingness opens up non-violent, generative connectedness. This approach is supported by studies on the intricate connections between receptors embedded in fascial tissues, emotion, and self-

recognition. The research opens up how physical and emotional awareness are connected, including through fascia connective tissues, in that 'the physical response to emotion is through the soft tissue. The fascia is the emotional body'.<sup>108</sup> This concept, which the authors term 'meta-anatomy', shows how emotions have a physical component in that 'body-emotions travel through the fascial web. We then interpret the physiological sensation as anger, affection, love, interest and so forth'.<sup>109</sup> My curiosity remains with whether we can give more attention to this physical-emotional skill of shaping-shifting-sliding in relation to sensations of tension?

*Can we start listening to complexity and develop deeper intimacies with ourselves and what we think of as our 'environments' – until we cannot but make decisions by thinking and perceiving with the more-than? Can this kind of deep and ongoing sensitive relating and communicating be acknowledged as socio-political and socio-economic forces? Would all this change what we mean when we say 'social' into bringing relations between human and more-than-human into generative, tensionally responsive, creative resonance?*

Taking two steps towards this perspective would mean to, firstly, truly appreciate that humans are ecosystems composed of human and non-human qualities and genetic material. To leave behind ideas of fixed and bounded human beings, of rational homo economicus striving for the optimal social system. The second step would entail learning to grasp and move-sense with the knowledge that 'we', all our microbes and the bit that's actually genetically human, are always already nested in and with other ecosystems. Joint moving-sensing comes also through breathing not only for ourselves, but for and with each other, to *con-spiring*.<sup>110</sup> Appreciating oxygen as a gas which knows no boundaries, breaks down differences and distances between 'environment' and 'individual', between what you think of as your body and that of the other. We are always already connected through breathing, through the global systems permanently transforming carbon and oxygen, including the tropical forests of Central Africa or your local forests.<sup>111</sup> This, challenges also human life as the pinnacle of creation. Through the inevitability of breathing together,

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108 Schultz & Feitis 1996:49

109 Schultz & Feitis 1996:49

110 Berardi 2018

111 Myers 2016

of con-spiring, we are always already potentials ready to be activated in novel social co-compositions.

A practical way of playing with these ideas could be to, for example, use the term *bodying* instead of *body*. You could experiment with what happens, if each time you say *body* or something with a similar meaning, you replace it instead with verb forms, like *bodying*. You can apply this also to other nouns. After a period of one or two years, take a moment to see whether or how the perception of your 'self', 'body' and the world have, or have not, changed. Maybe this technique can help to develop an awareness and resonance between the both/and qualities of fascia, which underlie and are inherent to every move we make, and forms of social organisation which enable and generate independence within interdependence. Emphasising processes of *bodying* would then not result in searching for harmonious, everlasting equality, but instead open up to acknowledging the tensional ongoingness in shaping sensitively attuned capacities for the social.

Which would be your favourite activity to approach...

- organising sensitively in relation to what others are doing?
- moving-sensing-resonating within dynamics of tensional responsiveness?
- actively working with the intensities of ecosystemic tensional qualities?

The *Four Sparks towards Enchantment*, in the final pages of the writing, from page 167 onwards, offer some practical ideas to initiate explorations and experimentations around tensional responsiveness.

## Proposition Two

### - SHARING FOR ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ONGOINGNESS

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Sitting at my corporate desk, I would dream about being with egalitarian hunter-gatherers. At the time, I did not know that there really still exist groups living in this way. My dream undoubtedly had more of an escapist quality – and then it came true. In 2010, working for the Collaborative Research Centre *Our Way to Europe* at the University of Cologne,<sup>1</sup> I was given the incredible opportunity to spend one year with the Ivindo Baka in Gabon. As described in Proposition One, the Baka have an egalitarian social organisation, which includes economic activities such as hunting, foraging and artisanal gold-mining. These are grounded in so-called *demand-sharing*, meaning that people will clearly and assertively demand the things they want as part of sharing processes. Many people critiquing capitalist practices maintain that a properly functioning economy requires companies to see themselves as contributors to society, not merely as wealth extractors. From my experience with the Baka, I argue that a properly functioning economy requires, in addition, a stronger emphasis on *sharing*. However, this conception of sharing has little or nothing to do with ideas around gift economy, *sharing economy*, or purpose-driven economics, which are or have become mainstream. Sharing here refers to the ongoingness of creating, building and maintaining social relations. This kind of sharing, which interweaves socio-economic and socio-political dynamics, has been essential to the continuation of human social organisations. Finding new ways to put this mode of ‘work’, of sharing ongoingness, at the heart of our economic activities, may offer a deeper and more generative response to critiques of capitalism. If we are able to do this, we would, for example, no

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

longer have to distinguish between an ‘economy’ and a ‘social economy’. We would no longer differentiate between economic practices which are purely extractive and profit-oriented, and those which take into consideration their impact on society, on the social. Economics could become the term which acknowledges capacities for the social as the generative quality of our daily lives and global economic flows. And ‘work’ might come to mean nothing but the joy of relating.

## Economics and Economies in Crisis

Income inequalities continue to grow across the world. In Los Angeles in the United States, the region of dishwashing dreams and Hollywood wealth and fame, there are over 65,000 homeless people on the streets.<sup>2</sup> Critiquing the ever more extreme concentrations of wealth, the *Guardian* newspaper summarised the situation as ‘our economics is broken’ because ‘8 men own more than 3.6 billion people do’.<sup>3</sup> In 2020, for example, *Amazon* CEO Jeff Bezos gained \$ 74 billion during the Covid pandemic.<sup>4</sup> Acclaimed economists such as Mariana Mazzucato, Thomas Piketty, Kate Raworth, and Joseph Stiglitz, as well as the *World Economic Forum* have identified inequality as a grave threat to the global economy.<sup>5</sup> Such outcries and warnings seem to have little impact, as the pay of CEOs in the US in 2019 surged to up to 320 times as much as that of the average employee.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, investigative journalism has brought to light how these inequalities are exacerbated by systematic tax evasion by large multinational corporations and individual highly wealthy tax refugees. The *Panama Papers*, for example, shed light onto the hidden world of wealth production, documenting how Swiss, Andorran or Central American bank accounts continue to serve money laundering efforts.<sup>7</sup> The num-

2 [www.npr.org/2020/06/12/875888864/homelessness-in-los-angeles-county-rises-sharply?t=1614267048825](https://www.npr.org/2020/06/12/875888864/homelessness-in-los-angeles-county-rises-sharply?t=1614267048825)

3 [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/16/eight-people-earn-more-billion-economics-broken](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/16/eight-people-earn-more-billion-economics-broken)

4 [www.theguardian.com/business/2020/oct/07/covid-19-crisis-boosts-the-fortunes-of-worlds-billionaires](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/oct/07/covid-19-crisis-boosts-the-fortunes-of-worlds-billionaires)

5 Mazzucato 2018, Piketty 2015, Raworth 2017

6 Mishel & Kandra 2020, see also [www.theguardian.com/business/2021/may/11/us-millionaire-ceos-saw-29-pay-raises-while-workers-had-decreases-report-says](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/may/11/us-millionaire-ceos-saw-29-pay-raises-while-workers-had-decreases-report-says) on latest figures.

7 <https://panamapapers.sueddeutsche.de>

ber of people unhappy and angry with this state of affairs is growing, and for example *Occupy* became a persistent global protest movement.<sup>8</sup> Capitalist structures have contributed to world-wide gains in life expectancy and average income, but these benefits are offset by people suffering increased levels of stress, depression, and increasingly mental health issues such as *eco-anxiety*, meaning mental health problems related to people's concern about the future of the environments they live in. Awareness is growing that the joys of consumerism cannot fill the holes which have been ripped into processes of social support and cohesion. In the struggle against ever more perverse levels of inequality, this leaves us with simple questions, which defy simple answers:

*How does the concept of private ownership go together with economic sharing?*

*How do we want to shape relations between consumer choice, maximising profit and shareholder value, and environmental limits to human economic activities?*

*What is the future of 'work', beyond a world of algorithmic control?*

My understanding of the pertinent factors of economic activities has been shaped by my studies of law, my corporate years, and by participating in initiatives around the so-called *sharing economy*. During the corporate period, my (male) colleagues would obsess about getting the best deal for a company car with all the latest mod cons, whilst I became the celebrated 5000<sup>th</sup> member of *Cambio Carsharing*.<sup>9</sup> At the time, sharing a car rather than owning it was just coming up as a concept, and I was smiled down upon. People looked at me sympathetically, as if I had contracted some kind of 'sharing-disease'. Nowadays, a growing amount of (younger) people has no interest in owning very much of anything, and this idea of sharing rather than owning has become mainstream. The Baka and their ancestors have known about it for somewhat longer.

## Baka Egalitarian Demand-Sharing

The economic practices of the egalitarian Baka are grounded in so-called *demand-sharing*. For Baka and other similar groups, demand-sharing means that people will clearly or even assertively demand the things they want. This is not

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8 Butler 2011

9 [www.cambio-carsharing.de](http://www.cambio-carsharing.de)

an idealised general reciprocity, or generosity, which is commonly associated with sharing among hunter-gatherers.<sup>10</sup> It is not about polite smiles, being generous, and saying yes. The person demanding has the right to have, and people do not have the right to refuse or withhold items which they are not immediately using! In demand-sharing there is no bookkeeping of who gave what, where and when, and it is difficult to accumulate anything. It is simply about responding to demands as and when they are made. Refusing demands necessarily implies hiding, lying, or other secretive behaviours. There are sanctions for surplus production, and would-be hoarders are shamed without pity. The aim of egalitarian demand-sharing practices is not only to provide food distribution. The aim is equally to generate and maintain social relationships, whereby the practice becomes an interplay of socio-economic and socio-political factors. To recall, in this kind of egalitarian social organisation, both the equality and the demand-sharing are not given but are continuously generated and maintained through levelling mechanisms.<sup>11</sup> This way of intricately interweaving socio-economic and socio-political dynamics has ensured the stability and resilience of these systems over time.<sup>12</sup> Grounded in a deep appreciation and understanding of life as continuity and ongoingness, practices of demand-sharing guarantee, to use common economic parlance, the 'success' and a 'win-win situation' for all.

Arriving in and living with Ivindo Baka communities, I adhered to Gabonese custom and always brought gifts: rice; sugar and salt; cooking oil; *Pastis* (aniseed liquor); and tobacco leaves for the female elders and cigarettes for the men. Tobacco and alcohol were inevitably used straight away to have a song and dance, and these parties celebrating my return are some of my favourite memories of staying with the Baka. Attuning to daily practices of demand-sharing, was, on the other hand, less straightforward. I realised how deeply reciprocity was ingrained in my thinking and doing, and I became frustrated when I had 'given', or done 'something nice' and felt I was not 'given' in return. It took time to understand and get a feeling for how this mode of sharing is not about direct exchange, differing from the other two commonly accepted economic modalities: the giving of gifts and commercial dealings.

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10 Lavi & Friesem 2019

11 See subheading 'Baka Egalitarianism: Independence within Interdependence' under Proposition One for details.

12 Woodburn 2005

### From Obligation to Opportunity: Shifting Concepts of Sharing

In his recent book *Anthropology and the Economy of Sharing*, anthropologist and hunter-gatherer specialist Thomas Widlok examines sharing practices both amongst hunter-gatherer groups and as part of current economic models from around the world. Widlok shows how contemporary understandings of gift economy and sharing are based on somewhat contradictory readings of concepts derived from ethnographic materials.<sup>13</sup> Both *gift-giving and commercial transactions are two-sided transfers* creating obligations of and through exchange. Marcel Mauss in his famous book *The Gift*, summarises these dynamics of exchange as the *obligation to give, to receive and to reciprocate*.<sup>14</sup> Exchanges through gift-giving or commercial transactions are based on an expectation of reciprocity. This can be either immediate reciprocity, in the form of money, or future reciprocity in the form of a return gift. Sharing, on the other hand, is a *one-sided transfer* involving co-presence and co-operation. Sharing and especially demand-sharing is as much about the object in question, the material thing to be shared, as about creating and maintaining relationships between the person requesting the thing and the person responding to the request. Sharing is core to how individuals within egalitarian hunter-gatherer groups manage autonomy and relatedness, and one of the main dynamics of this type of sharing is to avoid creating dependencies. As Widlok has suggested, giving true heed to what is going on in a sharing event is not necessarily about the (Maussian) *obligations to give, receive and reciprocate*. It is a shift to appreciating sharing not as an obligation, but as an *opportunity*. As Widlok proposes,<sup>15</sup> and my research with the Ivindo Baka supports, a more attuned way to understand things, is to grasp how

**sharing is a process, which opens up opportunities  
to request, return and let go.**

My relational and fun way to start each day in the forest was making black tea with milk in the typical English way. As I later found out, the English explorer Mary Kingsley had also surprised locals with this way of making tea

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13 See Widlok's excellent summary on the critique of the gift economy: Widlok 2017:2.

14 Mauss 1954

15 Widlok 2017

during her travels in Central Africa in the 1890s. However, presumably differing from her, I always made a large cooking pot full of tea, somewhere between 2-3 litres, which I shared with my Baka host family and whoever was around on that morning. People observed from a distance what was being prepared, moving in closer if they were interested in obtaining a 'share', casually hanging around until they were given some tea. Being there, physical presence, bodying together with others, creates and constitutes the *opportunity to request*. Avoiding any kind of dependency is central to the egalitarian ethos and creating a time gap between request and response is one way of achieving this. To avoid even the semblance of dependency, another strategy is to request via intermediaries, so that adults would ask their kids to hang around me with some kind of pot capable of holding liquid. Once filled, the children would then take the tea back to their parents, thereby creating relation, but negating dependency. Those who are included in this form of sharing may be biological kin, so direct family members, and also classificatory kin, meaning non-biological kin and other relations. As opposed to the ceremonial of barter or gift exchange tied to specific timings, you will be included in the egalitarian sharing dynamic because of your being there at that moment in time. Your practical, bodily presence is important in giving you a share, resulting in the great openness and inclusivity of these types of sharing practices. Most readers would probably share with their direct family members without questioning. In Baka' and similar sharing practices, opening the sharing beyond direct family, means that you are extending and negotiating kinship and (emotional) proximity on that occasion. Life and all social relations form part of this on-going dialogue constituting, negotiating, and maintaining egalitarian values of autonomy and connectedness.

For the Baka, individual autonomy and freedom of association are two central values.<sup>16</sup> Coercion is frowned upon, and egalitarian leadership comes through authority and not through fiat.

**Leadership is situational, accorded when people think  
you are the best person to do the job,  
either because of charisma or expertise.**

Leaders are situationally accepted as such, as long as they remain modest and humble. The most common example is the best hunter leading the hunt; but

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16 Weig 2013, Weig 2017

the hunter will not share out the meat afterwards, so that they cannot abuse their position or skills to accumulate wealth or power. In that way, particular skills are activated for the community, without letting the skill-bearers derive personal advantage and power from them. The freedom to physically move, to be mobile and associate and spend time with the person or people of your choice, is also absolutely key. This freedom includes, that when you arrive in a new place, you become part of the ongoing sharing practices and social relations of that location. In Adjab, I was excited when (in attempting to) become part of the demand-sharing practices, I could *return* and respond to outright demands for small commodity items such as milk powder, cigarettes, or onions. Of course, I never lost my status as the (apparently) rich White woman, and I spent much time explaining the difference between an NGO representative who arrives with money to build houses etc, and a researcher like myself who conscientiously avoids creating any kind of financial dependencies.<sup>17</sup> Preparing for life in the forest, I had taken only very few personal possessions with me. My bags contained survival items such as a ceramic water-pump for filtering water, a portable solar panel, and other electronic gadgets such as camera and laptop. Demands for those items were tricky to negotiate, and when I left for Europe, I *let go* and left as much as I could with the Baka communities, in good researcher tradition. I was also asked to return soon, because who else would now make tea in the morning – but I don't think the Baka missed it half as much as I did.

During my travels around the world, I have often been privileged to receive exceptional Muslim hospitality, hospitality being one of the five pillars

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17 Conscious of the moral and practical obligations towards my Baka host communities, I wanted to do more and each time I returned to the Ivindo, my boxes would contain items I knew the Baka needed and could only acquire with great difficulty or not at all: bed linen; nails; all types of clothes including bras; fishing tackle; oil lamps. I also brought photos, laminated in the hope that the tropical forest would not destroy them immediately, and I offered English lessons. The capacity of the Baka to imitate my British English accent immediately and perfectly was simply incredible! For me, supplying the objects was an additional way of thanking the community for their support, but at the same time it brought on jealousy from the neighbouring village chief (from a different ethnic group) who was also trying to curry favour with the Baka. Interestingly, it was more members of neighbouring ethnic groups, who thought I should be giving away everything to them. The Baka were quite clear that I was struggling and would just laugh or smirk at my attempts to make it all work somehow.

of Islam. But again, food sharing with the Baka was an entirely different experience that had nothing to do with welcoming a stranger or guest with all the politeness and courtesy you hold in your heart. With the Baka, food sharing means that whatever food has been prepared and cooked is shared out equally between those who are present. Children are often given one plate, and they make sure that everyone from the group of children present receives their fair share of whatever is on that plate. Allowances were made for me in terms of which meat I was given, once the Baka women saw that I really struggled to eat very fatty meat. Previously vegetarian, I had reintroduced meat into my diet about six months before travelling to Gabon in order to prepare my digestive system for a life with hunters. Surviving in tropical forests takes a different kind of stamina than slurping a cafe latte in urban Europe, and I am often surprised by outright calls for 'No More Meat Consumption' by climate activists. It seems important to differentiate between areas of the world dependent on mass industrialised animal farming, and areas where hunting is the most appropriate thing to do. Eating freshly hunted bushmeat (bush being another word for forest) in the tropical forests is delicious, healthy and gives you the calories and strength you need to spend a happy but physically demanding day in the forest.<sup>18</sup> What fascinated me most with the Baka, were those moments when there was no food in the village. Three adults would equally share one plate of food, for example boiled *manioc* roots (known as *yucca* or *cassava* in other parts of the world) and some manioc leaves (similar to spinach). This is nowhere enough food for a hungry adult, and yet the practice of sharing makes it enough. This is not to say that low levels of food intake over a long time period do not constitute a serious threat to health. But there is something nearly magical in sharing food in this way; sharing makes it become more than what visibly seems to be only one portion. And

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18 The term *bushmeat trade* refers to the (illegal) commercial hunting and selling of wild animals for food. The expansion of the bushmeat trade to annually over 5 million tonnes in the Congo Basin, is largely due to the increase in commercial logging. Logging activities have opened up forests with new infrastructures, linking hunters and growing numbers of often luxury urban consumers for whom bushmeat is a status symbol. The bushmeat trade is rapidly depleting local animal populations to, or near, extinction, and even I could quickly tell the difference between meat availability in Adjab in 2010/11 and 2019. The extent of the illegal bushmeat trade is threatening the stability of forest ecosystems, the food security of local forest peoples, and public health, as forest diseases are able to move from one species to the next and reach the cities (<http://blog.cifor.org/congo>).

that's enough to get you through until your next food intake; leaving you with deep humility for the food, your fellow beings, egalitarian sharing practices, and the forest which has provided the food.

### **Aliveness of Situational Leadership and Levelling Mechanisms**

The immediate consumption of food means the Baka are an example of what is known as an *immediate-return society*, which contrasts with a *delayed-return society*. *Immediate-return* refers to the immediate consumption of what is hunted or gathered, with tools that necessitate a high level of skill but little labour to use them. Immediate-return also implies that there is no elaborate food processing or storage. *Delayed-return*, as the term suggests, exactly involves food storage and processing, and those who worked hard for this food, with labour-intensive tools, have specific rights over or resulting from the yields of their labour.<sup>19</sup> On more than one occasion along the Ivindo, food I had intended for another time was gone when I went looking for it. It was one of the challenges to learn to sense into how such occasions were examples of the unquestionable and absolute immediacy of Baka demand-sharing, where if someone asked for that food whilst I was away, the request could not be refused by the people I was sharing the kitchen with, as you cannot have proprietary rights over food. The difference between immediate-return and delayed-return is not just about the timing of food consumption or storage facilities, but also relates to respective ways of socio-political organisation. An immediate-return society emphasises individual autonomy and the lack of authority; in contrast to delayed-return, which is based on proprietary considerations and a resulting hierarchical structure. Eminent anthropologist James Woodburn, who first developed the concept after living with the egalitarian *Hadza* in Tanzania in the 1950s, has shown how the immediate-return model promotes equality and resists the development of inequality based on the interaction of five key mechanisms. These are 1) lack of leadership, authority and hierarchy; 2) individual and group mobility involving freedom of association 3) equal access to food and other resources; 4) sharing; 5) sanctions on the accumulation of personal possessions.<sup>20</sup> Woodburn argues that only the hunting and gathering way of life permits so great an emphasis on equality, showing how this mode of social organisation, considered to be one of the longest-standing

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19 Woodburn 1982:433

20 Woodburn 1982

in human history, intricately interweaves socio-economic and socio-political dynamics.

Given the need for a *lack of hierarchy and personal possession* for this form of immediate-return egalitarianism to be able to be practiced, it is seen as strictly opposed to a delayed-return model, such as the capitalist one. You can either have a lack of hierarchy and no personal possessions; or personal possessions are allowed, but then that immediately creates some sort of power dynamics and authority over others by virtue of having things that only one person or an elite group control.<sup>21</sup> This debate around the irreconcilability of egalitarian and hierarchical (capitalist) practices is a passionate one, and as Ivindo Baka increasingly become part of the cash economy, they themselves are faced with this conundrum.

Baka livelihoods, sharing practices, gender roles, music-making, and dancing are today affected by socio-technical and ecological changes.<sup>22</sup> There is considerable diversity amongst the Baka when it comes to embracing these changes. Amongst the older women and men, there is a clear commitment that the Baka still live off the forest and cannot survive without this connection. For example, their time keeping is done in relation to the forest and daylight hours. Amongst the younger generation, and those elder Baka engaged in artisanal gold mining, there exists the wish to enjoy the benefits of 'modern' life, technological inventions, and the sociality of towns. These Baka have mobile phones and radios. Such changes have fuelled outright claims to personal ownership normally related to delayed-return, for example of sacred objects, and resulted in increasing secrecy and hoarding regarding especially money.

Being able to observe and understand how the Ivindo Baka still practice the levelling mechanisms essential to the immediate-return society amidst all these changes, bearing down on individuals trying to live differently, was more than a gift for me. For example, one young man wanted to earn himself some extra cash by making and selling *beignets* (sweet, fried balls of dough) in the morning. With great frustration and sadness, he described to me how he had been forced to stop after just one month. Firstly, he had been faced with constant demands for the money he had made by other group members, and he could not refuse handing over part of it owing to demand sharing rules.

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21 Woodburn 2005:23

22 Weig 2015c

Secondly, extreme social pressure was exerted on him to stop and to not differentiate himself from the group through his individual practice of making the *beignets* and the extra money. Thirdly, he feared the social exclusion, which he would have risked, had he continued. In another case, a woman earned money with meals for (non-Baka) artisanal gold workers. She then built a house independently. This affronted egalitarian values and additionally undermined (changing) gender roles, as it used to be the women who built the house, but nowadays it is a man's task. Putting herself beyond the egalitarian levelling mechanisms and the gender roles proved fatal for this woman. For a Baka person, jealousy can have a political dimension. In a different case, an elder Baka man held singular possession of an out-board motor. Whereas the other two had worked only for themselves, this Baka man employed his skills and the motor for the benefit of his family and the larger community; and no forceful levelling took place. To the contrary, he achieved situational leadership, and was accepted as an authority on the topic of artisanal gold mining, according to Baka egalitarian values and sociality.

Returning to Europe after my year in Gabon, I was stunned by the following situation. A friend who is a kindergarden teacher expressed her outrage at one young boy using another child's blanket to snuggle under during story time. She explained to me that each child must have its own blanket for reasons of hygiene, and to learn the rules of individual property. More than during my time in the forest, I realised there and then how different my experience of Baka sharing had been – and quite how radical the concept of demand-sharing would be for most people in highly industrialised societies. The importance of a system like that of the Baka lies in the fact that sharing is not a form of exchange or reciprocity, but an imposition on the person by society. Sharing is not about generosity, but is linked to building and maintaining social relations and social values. It ensures redistribution of goods amongst the group and promotes egalitarianism and equality rather than hierarchies or dependencies between people. Being Baka can mean giving up everything to someone else. Standing out of the crowd, having a superior status is actively avoided, as it may result in jealousy. As humans, we have known the active repression of prestige-seeking behaviour for much longer than we have known the elbow society of today. So, is there any way we can find compatibility between egalitarian demand-sharing systems and capitalist consumerism, which, with all its obvious faults, offers us fabulous choices no one including myself would easily want to give up? The reason I keep returning to this conundrum are the pressing concerns we have about the sustainability of our

(capitalist) lifestyles, and what kind of world, shaped by modern economic models and practices, we are leaving for future generations to inherit.

*Is there a way to shift and change the inequality of the current system, where many choices are only available to a privileged few? Can we open up consumer choice in a sustainable way, which is compatible with environmental limits? Would that mean leaving profit behind, as some think-tanks like the New Economics Foundation have argued for years?<sup>23</sup> How would living without profit-making as the sacred goal of our economy look like? Or, have profit and avarice not become too ingrained to be sacked from their economic thrones?*

Going back to the Baka, what I want to emphasise again is the larger socio-cultural-political-ecological context of sharing which goes beyond asking your neighbours for milk or sugar. It is not about ideas of *Communism* or *The Commons*, meaning finding ways to share goods equally amongst a pre-defined and exclusive group of people, who have all contributed to the production of those goods in one form or another, and who share the same moral code.<sup>24</sup> Demand-sharing, as we can still find it with the Ivindo Baka, is different as it emphasises the continuity of opportunities for social relating. There is no concentration of property in one person, or private ownership of land. Neither is there a concentration or distribution in commons. Sharing is a form of generalised reciprocity in co-temporally co-present persons, so groups of people being face-to-face at a certain moment or period of time. This is not some kind of 'primitive communism'; rather this form of immediate-return egalitarianism is possibly the longest-standing mode of social organisation in human history, grounded in an ongoing balancing of the tensions between autonomy and connectedness. Generating and maintaining autonomy and relatedness, not telling people what to do, sharing on demand, not having the right to keep property as personal, being subject to levelling mechanisms if you try and stand out – all these characteristics of (Baka) egalitarian society are hard work! It is not about being lovey-dovey, or kind. It is an ongoing, as-assertive becoming of the egalitarian dynamic through continuous efforts which need to be made by everybody. And those are exactly the aspects and qualities, which, I believe, can truly contribute to queries and discussions around devel-

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23 <https://neweconomics.org>

24 Graeber 2011:95

oping *alter-economies*, to alternative ways of doing human economic activity.<sup>25</sup> The question is,

*whether or how we can (re)integrate a quality of ongoing-ness into our ways of thinking-perceiving economic activity, knowing that it cannot be about finding easy solutions?*

## Alternative Economic Models and Sharing

The economic model currently dominating local and global trade is that of *Capitalism* which entails the right to profit from your economic activities. This right to maximise your yields, earnings, profits is paramount. Private ownership of goods is sacrosanct and can be defended by law. Critiqued since its early days, in its current incarnation this human way of doing things is referred to as *late capitalism* or *neoliberalism*. The term highlights the extreme spread of profit thinking over the last 30 years, which, more than ever before, benefits only an elite few, a continuously decreasing number of people.<sup>26</sup> Marketing strategies reinforce models of ownership and identitarian thinking underlying such neoliberal success stories. International broadsheet columnists, (European Union) government reports, and critical thinkers such as Franco Berardi or Charles Eisenstein all emphasise the increasing social isolation, loneliness and other health problems resulting from these capitalist economic practices.<sup>27</sup> We can fulfil our individual desires with near immediacy, but we are losing our capacity for direct healthy social interaction, our sociality, as the foundation of our existence. Socio-economic changes resulting from capitalism, initially offered greater wealth and upward social mobility for many, but now bring mostly increased job insecurity and income instability, recently exacerbated by the *Covid* pandemic. The drive to develop established technologies and novel artificial intelligence in advantageous ways, in order to offer relaxation and more free time to many people, seems more utopian than ever. Working nowadays still entails working ever more hours

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25 I use the term 'alter-economies' with reference to the neurodiverse activities and explorations of the *Senselab*, headed by Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, around what might become postcapitalist economic practices, following what Manning terms 'Finance at the Limit' (Manning 2020:289) and Massumi has written on as the *99 Theses on the Revaluation of Value* (2018).

26 Klein 2008

27 Eisenstein 2011, Berardi 2018.

and has turned 'being stressed' into a global way of life. The gloomy outlook is heightened as these circumstances are becoming a continuous way of existence for an entire generation. Taken together with predictions on climate change and environmentally-rooted social conflict, these changes result in anxiety as a prime quality in the societies of today, manifesting especially as eco-anxiety or climate anxiety among children and teenagers.<sup>28</sup> Resultingly, many people have started to question relations between consumerism, possession, and identity based on social status, between wealth and health. Evidencing the sometimes-bizarre nature of humans, research has shown that even those who should be free of the above-mentioned fears, millionaires and billionaires, are assaulted by worries and anxieties around loss.<sup>29</sup> No amount of financial wealth and accumulated goods can protect you from fears around having to let go, of not being in control, of losing your personal autonomy.

The success of late capitalism is also based on the types of bodies it forms, and which correspondingly populate central business districts around the world. The *City of London*, for example, refers to London's central business district, a defined area of 1.12 square miles that is guarded by cast-iron dragon statues, the so-called *Griffins*. Walking through this area as a child and teenager, I was fascinated by the beautiful skyscraper architecture; the speed of everything; and how the predominantly men managed to look so important; the rush and purpose everybody seemed to have. People appeared to love and need it that way, building their lives and identities around working in the City, and especially around the unfathomable sums of money that can be made there. This dynamic replicates everywhere in the world, where the need to feel the rush of this mode of working in a vortex of energy dominates, sucking up human manna, spitting out triumphant winners or empty shells, permitting yet others to swim along with the tides, somehow. Central business districts come with incredibly high levels of (illegal) drug use such as cocaine. Everybody knows it, many people do it, and it is undoubtedly one of the greatest modern taboos. It has been suggested that many of those involved in the financial crisis of 2008/9 were high, as they took decisions affecting the lives and bank accounts of people in the UK, and around the

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28 Louv 2010, Cunsolo & Ellis 2018 [https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/nov/20/half-of-child-psychiatrists-surveyed-say-patients-have-environment-anxiety?CMP=Share\\_AndroidApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/nov/20/half-of-child-psychiatrists-surveyed-say-patients-have-environment-anxiety?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other); <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/feb/10/overwhelming-and-terrifying-impact-of-climate-crisis-on-mental-health>

29 [www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/04/secret-fears-of-the-super-rich/308419/](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/04/secret-fears-of-the-super-rich/308419/)

world.<sup>30</sup> So how can a much-loved place like the City of London, with all its thrills and joys, exist without having such a negative impact on those whose bodyings are not directly related?

There are many fresh ideas emerging around ‘economy’, which focus on social impact and community, rather than profit and individual ownership. Core innovations in this sector revolve around concepts of *Social Economy* or *Social Enterprise*, meaning that companies offer solutions to achieve not-for-profit aims and putting the planet before profit.<sup>31</sup> These ideas have given rise to novel legal company forms such as the *CiC* (Community Interest Company) introduced into UK law in 2005, the *Benefit Corporation* in the US, or the *gGmbH*, a non-profit company with limited liability under German law. Another key idea is that of the *Basic Income*, which means that a sum of money is given regularly and unconditionally, so without a means test or work requirement, to residents and citizens of a town, region or country.<sup>32</sup> The idea is being advanced in several of the industrialised nations, and political parties in Europe and further afield have adopted basic income into their party manifestos. Pilot projects testing the viability of a basic income have taken place in Namibia, Finland, and Scotland. The *Covid pandemic* has intensified the need for such alternative models, and variations on the pure basic income are currently being implemented, for example in Spain. A further and growing trend is that all types of companies, from SMEs (SME is short for Small to Medium-sized Enterprises) to large corporations, are seeking a new communion of business with *purpose*. For example, *Google* invited Buddhist spiritual leader *Thich Na Than* to act as advisor on developing ‘mindful business’. However, *Google*’s core purpose remains generating a profit and benefitting shareholders from the surplus, and this aim continues to outweigh any other considerations regarding *Google*’s business practices. *Google* is only one of many examples highlighting that the majority of current approaches and attempts to doing things differently are merely scratching the surface and making things look nicer. Questions around how we can get deeper into topics such as (in)equality, sustainability, and (re)generative cultures remain vibrant. Maybe the crassest example of things gone wrong was developing

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30 [www.theguardian.com/business/shortcuts/2013/apr/15/cocaine-bankers-global-financial-crisis](http://www.theguardian.com/business/shortcuts/2013/apr/15/cocaine-bankers-global-financial-crisis)

31 [www.socialeconomy.eu.org](http://www.socialeconomy.eu.org); <https://www.theguardian.com/social-enterprise-network/2012/may/15/myth-social-enterprise-profits-re-invest-community>

32 Werner 2008

the aim to be more 'social' into concepts of *sharing economy* and *collaborative consumption*.

For some time, the so-called *sharing economy* has been advocated as a more sustainable economic strategy than pure late capitalism. New technologies enable community-based online services, with the aim of people having mutual access to products or services, rather than having individual ownership over them.<sup>33</sup> These online platforms do focus on *peer-to-peer exchange*, meaning the exchange between persons presumed equal, but, however, not necessarily in order to share. Most of the platforms rather optimise the use of resources for profit, and the term sharing economy is now considered a misnomer by many. If there is a company or online platform acting as intermediary between consumers who don't actually know each other, and the consumers are paying to access someone else's services or goods for a defined period of time, then this is not considered to be sharing but a straightforward economic exchange.<sup>34</sup> For example, the best-known sharing economy platforms are *Airbnb* and *Uber*, which both started their existence with claims of sharing hospitality and travel mobility alternatives between equals, but nowadays clearly maximise profits for only some of the participants. In the case of *Airbnb*, cities like Berlin, Barcelona, and many others, have seen professional entrepreneurs buying up flats in city centres and turning these into short-term, highly profitable tourist lets via the *Airbnb* platform. This commercial activity results in soaring inner-city rents, forcing local residents to move to cheaper areas of the city, with knock-on social pressures and issues. City centres appear more like theme parks, and the original idea of private persons welcoming visitors into their homes got lost along the sharing economy way. At the outset, a central idea underlying the sharing economy model was that consumers would move beyond utilitarian profit thinking and focus on social values. The idea was that 'sharing' the excess capacity in goods and services would translate and lead to an exuberant growth of trust and social interactions. However, the sharing economy emerged and took force during a financial crisis, in times of need. In hindsight, it became clear that consumers were simply focused on lower costs and convenience; creating and maintaining social relationships with other participants on the online platforms was not their primary concern. It was not trust but sheer economic need or greed that led to people opening up their homes, or sharing car rides and other things with complete

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33 Rifkin 2000

34 [www.hbr.org/2015/01/the-sharing-economy-isnt-about-sharing-at-all](https://www.hbr.org/2015/01/the-sharing-economy-isnt-about-sharing-at-all)

strangers.<sup>35</sup> As sharing is still defined by writers on current economic models as ‘without profit’, it has been suggested to instead use the term ‘access economy’ to describe current economic practices of market-mediated ‘sharing’ such as with *AirBnb*.<sup>36</sup>

*Can platform technologies facilitating community-based online services, enable and promote values of social responsibility, accountability, and collaboration, which come before a derivative that we may still call economy?*

No writing on new economic (sharing) practices is complete without speaking more about the digital transformations rolling over, under and through human bodyings. On a hands-on level, we have the *Maker Culture* and the global network of MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) *Fablabs*, which use the latest technologies to invent, 3D-print, and take DIY (Do-It-Yourself) to new levels. We can now independently download instructions for mobile phone cases or underwear from the Internet and 3D-print or otherwise ‘make’ them at home. On a less tangible and more ephemeral level, alternative currencies and cryptocurrencies such as *Bitcoin* as well as the platform technologies underlying *Blockchain*, propose and were initially dedicated to revolutionising global financial systems. The original idea behind *Blockchain* is that it allows users to ‘transact directly without any third-party intermediary’, meaning transacting from peer-to-peer and cutting out all the (greedy) middlemen, including the banks.<sup>37</sup> *Blockchain* was all the hype, but in a way similar to what we saw with the development of the (access) sharing economy outlined above, what has become clear is that *Blockchain* technologies do not focus primarily on peer-to-peer interaction and community building, but do continue to enable companies to do or offer the best deals in no way different from established commercial profit-oriented practices. One example concerns the daily lives of Puerto Ricans following the devastating Hurricane Maria of 2017. An award-winning online documentary from the *Washington Post* illustrates how one year later, island locals were still facing life without electricity, water, and decent transport; whereas members of the cryptocurrency movement, many from Silicon Valley, had moved to Puerto Rico following the hurricane in order to set up

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35 [www.hbr.org/2015/01/the-sharing-economy-isnt-about-sharing-at-all](http://www.hbr.org/2015/01/the-sharing-economy-isnt-about-sharing-at-all)

36 Rifkin 2000

37 Swan 2015

‘Sol’, a ‘crypto utopia’.<sup>38</sup> One member of the crypto community referred to Hurricane Maria and the investment interest that has followed as “While it was really bad for the people of Puerto Rico, in the long term it’s a godsend if people look past that”.<sup>39</sup> In this situation, what was a continued and catastrophic state failure around life’s basic needs for locals, became a lucrative opportunity for members of the blockchain and cryptocurrency movement, enabled by that exact same state.

Economic models mirror and expound the socio-cultural values of their respective society and systemic context.<sup>40</sup> Current alternative economic ideas seem to circle around tensions between securities and freedoms, as most of us waiver between wanting as much autonomy and freedom as possible; and at the same time wanting and needing to be part of something bigger, to feel safe and secure. In that way, we are no different from Ivindo Baka, or the many other groups and cultures that have struggled with these issues during the course of human history. The potential of what technology allows for now-days is simply incredible, but for example Blockchain is replicating existing late capitalist values.<sup>41</sup> It seems that with all the excitement around the latest apps, we are not inventing at a deeper level. We take huge strides forward – only to then saunter straight back to where we came from. These movement patterns are comparable to traditional circular or line dance practices, based on taking two steps forward, to immediately taking one step back. For the time being, no matter the technologies, we continuously enact the movement patterns we have followed for centuries. A deeper shifting-sliding-shaping towards *alter-economy* practices, goes hand in hand with a qualitative reshaping of values, as critical philosopher Brian Massumi closely outlines in his 99 *Theses on the Revaluation of Value*.<sup>42</sup> As Massumi writes, it is time to take back the concept of value from being predominantly used to make possible economic oppression. The call ‘is to revalue value, *beyond normativity* and standard judgment’, and ‘to *uncouple value from quantification*’ so that it can become

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38 [www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/national/puerto-rico-life-without-power/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.ec784aac4dbb](http://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/national/puerto-rico-life-without-power/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.ec784aac4dbb)

39 [www.nytimes.com/2018/02/02/technology/cryptocurrency-puerto-rico.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/02/technology/cryptocurrency-puerto-rico.html)

40 Massumi 2018

41 People who want to see an emphasis on social responsibility, community, collaboration and sharing developed *Holochain*, in order to avoid exactly the appropriation of new technologies and their promises of more equality by big industry players: <https://holochain.org>.

42 Massumi 2018

'irreducibly qualitative'.<sup>43</sup> Online platforms built around user reputation systems as much as the overall market-system are considered to be self-regulating. However, what matters in these markets and who earns money for which activity, is related to the value system of the decision-makers, which suggests that there is no such thing as market-neutrality.<sup>44</sup> In his assessment of capitalist economics, Massumi, who was central to developing a relational understanding of 'body' and bodily excess through the field of affect studies, emphasises how capitalist practices can (detrimentally) mould and harness the potentials of bodily more-than. Bringing together value with the vitality of life as a way of countering oppressive economic practices, he suggests to '*make qualitative excess a postcapitalist virtue - beyond the myth of equal exchange, the fairness of the market, and the rhetoric of commensuration*'.<sup>45</sup> As the waves of scandals around the misuse of *facebook* data rise and fall, we are just starting to appreciate how the *like*-button and anonymous market algorithms are affecting our personal lives and economic livelihoods. On the other hand, the desire for personal encounters still emerges as a key value in ideas around sharing. Attuning to this continued valuation of bodily sharing and the power potentials of bodily excess, ...

*which are the postcapitalist values we want to shift-slide towards? Could these values be moved-sensed together with a notion of sharing as the ongoing creation and maintenance of social relations?*

## Tensional Novelty: Beyond Scarcity-Abundance Binaries

The damaging influences of mass tourism on sensitive ecosystems evidence, as one example, that unbridled economic growth is not sustainable. The abundance of amazing places to visit has been eagerly consumed, and nowadays impressive landscapes with human infrastructure like *Macchu Picchu* or cities like Barcelona are showing extreme signs of wear and tear. Nevertheless, the belief in the capacity of favoured tourist sites to magically bounce back unscathed from any amount of pollution and destruction, is unyielding. One

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43 Massumi 2018: 1-2, emphasis in the original

44 Massumi 2015, Raworth 2017

45 Massumi 2018: 6, emphasis in the original

might say that this unshakable fascination, perception, or belief in abundance, is something we share with our hunter-forager ancestors.

Most hunter-gatherers consider themselves to be living in a world of abundance, and they think-perceive their worlds in terms of profusion. In the case of forest foragers, surrounding forest ecologies are seen as giving and plentiful. In the forests along the Ivindo and in other parts of Central Africa, there is a particular type of nut called *mengoum*. It is about the size of a table tennis ball, and the edible part is hidden inside a solid casing, so it takes effort and a good machete to free the nut from its outer layers. As you move through the forest during the day, you munch away at these delicious nuts and other forest delicacies. Imagine for a moment a similar experience you might know from your local (temperate) forests: the delicious taste of wild berries, maybe brambles or strawberries, which you have just picked, and one after the other, you're enjoying the taste of these sweet forest gifts. The first few times when I returned to the village Adjab and somebody mentioned food, I was surprised to find that I did not feel hungry. Walking through the forest, chatting away, observing plants and animal tracks, we had often eaten enough, 'consumed' what we needed as a group during a joint activity. Even more than with wild berries in (European) temperate forests, it was clear that walking through tropical forests, most of the time there is always something to nibble or chew on.

This abundance is part of how Baka and similar groups share the forest, perceived as an ecosystem with human and more-than-human beings and qualities.<sup>46</sup> The forest is a permanently becoming sociality, where Baka, all kinds of animals, plants, mycelia and other beings form living social relations. Baka sharing practices derive also from a strong faith in the ability of the forest to provide abundantly. Singing-dancing in resonance with this abundance, but without asking for anything in particular, is one way to communicate and 'wake up the forest' in a happy state.<sup>47</sup> Addressed in such a way, the forest will provide whatever is needed. Baka love abundance and they say that a lot of any kind of thing is good, *djoko*; a lot is power, a lot is potency. Most importantly, the presence of *bo dadi*, meaning lots of people, is essential to having a decent party, and having enough women bodying volume into polyphonic tunes.

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46 Lewis 2002

47 Turnbull 1987:93, Rouget & Buckner 2011:105

Such a belief in *abundance* contrasts with an equally strong concept of *lack* in modern economic thinking.<sup>48</sup> For example, NGOs working in environmental conservation or similar fields, look at the world through the eyes of what is lacking. Concepts of scarcity govern NGO worldviews, and to a certain extent this is necessary to acquire funding, but it also means that conservation NGOs introduced 'lack' to the Baka and other forest foragers.<sup>49</sup> Importantly, the concept of lack is intimately intertwined with the concept of profit. Creating a (perceived) lack or scarcity makes profit-making easier, true to the market dynamics of offer and demand.<sup>50</sup> Correspondingly, if there is no scarcity (of animals or products), then no profit can be made, or at least only a smaller profit. The Christian view of 'nature' as a wilderness to be subjugated and exploited, rather than of land as spiritual home and the source of all good things, as a giving environment, strongly plays into this dichotomy of abundance and lack.<sup>51</sup> In the mythology of the *Anishinaabe* people of the American Great Lakes region, as Robin Wall Kimmerer describes in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, the *Windigo* is the 'name for that within us which cares more for its own survival than for anything else'.<sup>52</sup> This 'monster of overconsumption' is strongest during winter, when hunger rages as the earth is covered by ice and snow. Nowadays, *Windigo* stories tell of insatiable multinationals, whose commercial practices fail to respect the world as one of giving, with which we do and must live in reciprocity. How environments and ecosystems are perceived or constructed as either abundant or lacking, has a direct impact on the how of the economic practices which are able to take place. Depending on the region of the world you live in, learning respect for the finiteness of resources and seasonal scarcity may be an important story-telling. Additionally, animal and plant species are disappearing from certain regions or going extinct - we are losing fellow beings - and biodiverse ecosystems will 'lack' these contributors in keeping the respective systems healthy.<sup>53</sup>

*How can we learn to relate and resonate differently with these intensities, with the shifting-sliding-shaping qualities of systemic abundance and boundaries? Can we bring to-*

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48 Lewis 2015

49 Lewis 2015

50 Sahlins 1968

51 Ingold 2000

52 Kimmerer 2015

53 European Environment Agency 2020

*gether the generative emergent ongoingness of sharing as a way of life with qualities of sensitively responding to tension and limits?*

### **Achieving Equality as a Myth**

About thirty years ago, fields such as *Ecological Economics* pioneered a systems approach to economics, aiming to address the interdependence and coevolution of (human) economies and (natural) ecosystems. Unfortunately, the field became dominated by a narrow micro-focus on 'ecosystem services, monetary valuation and conventional economics',<sup>54</sup> highlighting nevertheless, how capitalism itself is based on a fundamental tension of 'nature' perceived as both finite and infinite. Humans live, and in many places today just about survive, somewhere in the matrix of this tension between qualities of abundance and scarcity, between finite and infinite. Geologists tell us that the Earth has been around for more than for 4 billion years, so one can safely say that 'nature' has been going on for a rather long time. 'Nature' knows neither endless expansion or growth nor infinite decrease or de-growth, only adaptive cycles of these phenomena. In ecology and systems theory, for example, the term *panarchy* refers to systems of nature and/or humans as interlinked in continual adaptive cycles of *growth, accumulation, restructuring, and renewal*.<sup>55</sup> So,

*how can we bring together perspectives of abundance and scarcity into economic systems which transcend sectorial, institutional, and regional specificities?*

Since 2009, the concept of the *Planetary Boundaries* has enriched this discussion. 28 Earth scientists led by Johan Rockström and Will Steffen, analysed the *anthropogenic*, meaning man-made, pressures on Earth System, during the *Anthropocene*. Anthropocene refers to the current geological epoch as shaped by human activity.<sup>56</sup> Rockström and colleagues identified nine categories, the *Planetary Boundaries*, with which to gauge human impact and destruction on Earth System beyond the limits of which human demise is certain.<sup>57</sup> Challenging restrictive silo-thinking, the approach analyses the estimation of safe (economic) spaces for human development overall. Biodiversity or freshwater

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54 Hagens 2020, Plumecocq 2014

55 Gunderson & Holling 2002, Lovelock 1979

56 Rockström et. al. 2009

57 Rockström et. al. 2009

cycles are two examples of the nine sector-transcending categories. Planetary boundaries and similar approaches serve as indicators of how contemporary ways of living will not sustain the human niche in Earth system, and are helpful in the effort to create awareness for these issues. Given current political and economic developments, however, humans, as apparently rational beings, are overstepping and not respecting the limits flagged by the various fields of Earth scientists.

A tasty step towards (re)generative futures within planetary boundaries are *Doughnut Economics*, as developed by Kate Raworth. As Raworth writes, the essence of the Doughnut is ‘a social foundation of well-being that no one should fall below, and an ecological ceiling of planetary pressure that we should not go beyond. Between the two lies a safe and just space for all’.<sup>58</sup> She critiques theories describing the economy as if it were ‘a stable, mechanical system’, emphasizing, by drawing also on systems theory, how it is far better understood as ‘a complex adaptive system, made up of interdependent humans in a dynamic living world’.<sup>59</sup> Beyond the myths of *rational economic man* and unlimited growth, Doughnut Economics underline moving towards a new shape of economics which requires building a system that meets all humanity’s needs without exhausting the planet.<sup>60</sup>

Calls to cut and redistribute the excessive wealth of the richest to invest in and support social goods such as affordable housing, universal healthcare, education, equality, and more recently basic income, have been strong since the earliest days of capitalism. Different areas of the world have given importance to such calls in different ways. Many are wilfully ignoring how human activities affect Earth System in order to continue pursuing short-term commercial profits. As things stand today, the focus cannot be merely on social freedoms and constraints; the debate unquestionably extends to considering more openly ecological concerns and ideological movements around abundance and scarcity. The Doughnut Economics approach recommends itself to appreciating adaptive cyclicities also by advocating to move away from the human obsession with equilibrium. However, as do many other economic textbooks and theories,<sup>61</sup> the references to hunter-gatherers underlying Doughnut Economics seem to insufficiently portray or theorise the di-

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58 Raworth 2017:29

59 Raworth 2017:243, 266

60 Raworth 2017:177, 208

61 For example, Dobelli 2011

versity of our ancestors ways of doing things. Thinking-perceiving together planetary boundaries, with the rich diversity of 'hunter-gatherer situations'<sup>62</sup>, with the contemporary requirement for a new shape of economics, opens novel paths of inquiry. Building also on Proposition One ...

*can we find spaces of encounter for thinking-perceiving together the intricate relations of economic needs and ways of bodying in the world? Can we join up capacities for institutional plasticity, with achieving equality as a myth, with sharing as ongoing processes of relating to human and more-than-human, in order to attune contemporary economic practices to larger seasonally adaptive cyclicities?*

The questions are grounded also in the notion to move beyond 'use' and 'output', to adopt modes not of 'finding' but rather of continuous shifting-sliding and moving-sensing, with emergence and aliveness. *Emergence* refers to the formation of collective self-organisation, in which the formation generates and follows its own rules of forming as well as its modes of connecting and organising. Emergence is an invitation to explore the unknown, allowing diverse ways of being, knowing, doing, relating to emerge through process. *Aliveness* adds to this how true wisdom and potential for shaping change arise in social organisations that enable and accord social value to ongoingness, allowing space and time for bodily excess and the wisdom of the 'extra' and more-than-human. Allowing for qualities of emergence and aliveness, which characterise also egalitarian systems, can be helpful in shaping our journeys towards ongoing processes of generating and maintaining which are no longer caught in the binary of abundance-scarcity. This further supports widening our human transactional understanding of how the world works, as advocated by Widlok, Massumi,<sup>63</sup> the international movement around *Regenerative Cultures*,<sup>64</sup> and here. However, you may have noticed that I have vari-ously put the 're' of regenerative in brackets, as moving beyond predominantly transactional thinking-doing, also involves leaving behind the idea that there is anything to 're'turn to. Moving-sensing emergent alive bodyings are never quite the same.

As we saw with the *Palaeolithic politics* outlined as part of Proposition One, the adaptation of human social organisations to whatever was best at the

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62 Widlok 2016, and as described in Proposition One.

63 Massumi 2018: 131

64 Wahl 2016

time, egalitarian or hierarchical, has always been possible.<sup>65</sup> So, if we take off the rose-tinted capitalist spectacles of limitless extraction and consumerism, and move-sense with the irreducibility of the ‘qualitative excess’, as Massumi would write, we hold the potential and the power to change the shape, quality and values of our current social organisations and derived economic practices. Learning from our egalitarian ancestors and contemporary egalitarian groups of today such as the Baka, we can come to appreciate that both political and economic equality, as promoted nowadays, have a strongly mythological quality. Such ideas do not correspond to the lived egalitarianism which has characterised much of human history. Egalitarian systems do not foster equality as a stable, enduring fact, as personal or group identity, or as moral harmony. Equality can never be ‘achieved’! It must be continuously generated and maintained, through levelling mechanisms, which necessitate work and effort, and which are mostly entertaining, becoming very serious only when necessary. Equality, like the bodyings involved in creating it, is not a concept of fixture, but one of movement and ongoingness, of tension and resonance.<sup>66</sup>

### Socio-Ecological Modes of Economic Practice

One aspect of this tension-and-resonance, is how sharing ensures (re)distribution of goods at the same time as enabling and demanding the creation and maintenance of healthy, vibrant social relations. Another inspiring *what else* aspect is to think-perceive concepts of social and sharing economy truly as a richness in people equal to and beyond material goods, and to develop ‘social economy’ into including the more-than-human.

Maintaining a share in the continuity of social process includes both relations with humans and equally more-than-human beings and qualities. It is a sharing of the cyclicity of seasonal abundance and scarcity. In the temperate regions of Europe or Northern America, cyclicity is evidenced by picking berries in summer, or fearing the Windigo in winter, and even within the

65 Wengrow & Graeber 2015

66 Whether we think about equality or inequality, their maintenance is permanent work. As example of systems of inequality, we can take slavery in the Americas or concentration camps in South Africa, and how it took a tremendous amount of force to keep these systems going. Nowadays, the *Cambridge Analytica* scandal, for example, showed the (invisible) financial power needed to maintain the unequal power structures in the US.

perceived plenty of tropical forests, each delicacy has its season. Our socialities and those of our ancestors cannot be understood without attention to these larger cyclical intensities. Nested hunter-forager bodyings perceived, organised and evaluated ecosystemic information to adapt to changing circumstances. The impact of the Industrial Revolution, where ‘economic and technical abstraction conspired to remove the body from its sensual relationship with the environment’,<sup>67</sup> is exacerbated today by the globally operating algorithms of online platforms. The distance between our online and offline ecosystems (if we can even make that differentiation) and our (in)capacities to perceive, organise and evaluate information from those diverse ecosystems, is possibly growing faster than the exponential growth curves of Moore’s law. And yet, humans hold, as part of their microbial ecologies and cellular make-up, the memory and the potential to transform, to shape-shift-slide socio-economic systems towards equality and sharing as qualities which are never achieved, stabilised, finalised; but always remain as yet-to-come, ongoing, continuous, infinite, fractal, emerging processes. How can this type of knowledge become part of values and modes of adaptable social organisations for a future of humanity within planetary boundaries, towards something we might call *socio-ecological* modes of economic practices? As we ponder such complex challenges, we can begin by bodying forth not only socio-somatic, but eco-somatic tools and techniques. Such techniques would emerge from spaces of thinking-perceiving and generating novel capacities for the social inclusive of the more-than-human, from the middle of that dynamic universe of tensional responsiveness.

## What could The Future of Work mean?

Imagining human futures, there are two clear trends we cannot ignore: the changes in our planetary system and the changes to ‘work’ through automation and artificial intelligence. Neither of these have nicely predictable or quantifiable outcomes. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and non-human algorithms are making our worlds faster and (seemingly) more complex; be it the trading systems of global stock exchanges, or *facebook* news feeds. Automation has long revolutionised especially Fordist style production lines, and today robots are taking over mundane occupations such as filling the fridge as well

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67 Ellen 2017:62

as increasingly most of what we still label ‘work’. Not just jobs requiring hard labour from factory line employees, but professions from doctors to lawyers will be replaced by robots and artificial intelligence.<sup>68</sup> For example, in the US, in the first 10 years of the 21st century, nearly 90 percent of manufacturing jobs were lost to technological automation, with a predicted further 40 percent disappearing within the next 15 years.<sup>69</sup> The argument goes that new AI technologies will enable the majority of people to do what they want with their time and engage in lifelong learning. Working less and having more time for family, friends, and other interests, is surely a dream shared by many people around the world. This dream was part of what made ideas around the *Original Affluent Society* famous, whereby affluence in hunter-gatherers societies is understood not only as material wealth, but more importantly as wealth of time and quality of human relations.<sup>70</sup> More recently, the book *Sapiens* has again made these ideas accessible to a large audience, evidencing that most of the time a hunter-gatherer lifestyle is much more relaxed and certainly offers more ‘leisure time’ than that of people in highly industrialised nations.<sup>71</sup> However, in most contemporary societies, ‘work’ and employment are still what gives people and their lives meaning.

*How are people going to experience meaning if ‘work’ and most things related to it progressively disappear?*

The uncertainty around ‘work’ colours societal horizons, and, for example, *Microsoft* owner Bill Gates has advocated for a tax on the robots that take over the jobs.<sup>72</sup> Alternatively, basic income models have been suggested as buoys and buttresses for the rocky path ahead, with not only politicians worldwide, but even *Tesla* owner Elon Musk arguing in favour.<sup>73</sup> However, these approaches seem predominantly focused on economic uncertainties, giving little or no attention to the ‘socio’ part of socio-economics, and even less to intertwinings with socio-political dynamics relevant to creating and maintaining stable (eco)systems. In his last posts, physicist and cosmologist Stephen Hawking advocated wealth redistribution as the only way to stem the

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68 <https://hbr.org/2016/10/robots-will-replace-doctors-lawyers-and-other-professionals>

69 PricewaterhouseCoopers 2018

70 Sahlins 1968

71 Harari 2015

72 [www.cnn.com/2017/06/02/bill-gates-robot-tax-eu.html](http://www.cnn.com/2017/06/02/bill-gates-robot-tax-eu.html)

73 [www.businessinsider.com/elon-musk-universal-basic-income-2017-2](http://www.businessinsider.com/elon-musk-universal-basic-income-2017-2)

inequalities that come with technological advances, especially as the powers derived from these tech advances have become somewhat frozen in the hands of the GAF A tech elite (GAF A refers to the ‘Big Four’: *Google, Amazon, Facebook, and Apple*). Given how this power freezing worsens inequality, and acknowledging automation and AI as part of (human) daily lives, the tech imperative could become focused on the need to learn to shift-slide *with* algorithms and growing complexities. Environmentalist and futurist James Lovelock, famous for co-creating the *Gaia Theory*, argues that if we do not, the machines may know how to make good use of us. Lovelock suggests that AI machines will need organic life to keep the planet at a habitable temperature for (easily overheating) machines, so that human with all other (microbial) organisms may have no choice but to put some new magic into their bodying relations to ensure mutual survival.<sup>74</sup> From a current bodying perspective, ‘socio’ involves knowing how much personal information *facebook & Co* have, and how that feeds into *Surveillance Capitalism*.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, the workings of the human body are still so little understood that machines just do not come close. Take for example the seemingly simple act of a robot walking. It took *SONY* many years to copy basic human steps, and it will take many more before true 3D-movement like that of dancing can be emulated by a machine.<sup>76</sup> Another example concerns automated vehicles driving in heavy snow. In such conditions, human drivers will drive in-between lanes, to avoid getting stuck in the ruts of the normal lanes, and hence drive more safely. Automated vehicles, on the other hand, stick to the prescribed lanes, as they have no common-sense response to snow. Blindly following their programming, they cannot adapt to unforeseen weather circumstances, thereby endangering human drivers. Devices or algorithms simply cannot truly copy or control human bodyings. Maybe it’s a question of ‘yet’, but for a long time to come, *Angst* energies could be focused on thinking-perceiving how to bring more sensorial awareness into how we relate and spend the ‘working day’, and to what we think of as ‘work’.

The proposition is to

**Redefine growing our capacities for the social  
inclusive of human and more-than-human  
as what we mean when we say ‘work’.**

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74 Lovelock 2019

75 Zuboff 2019

76 [www.sony.net/SonyInfo/News/Press\\_Archive/200312/03-060E/](https://www.sony.net/SonyInfo/News/Press_Archive/200312/03-060E/)

This is not a romantic argument for ‘back to nature’. Many technical inventions are just fabulous, and I bet, there is no woman who would want to give up her washing machine, in order to go back to spending hours scrubbing clothes clean. The same goes for healthcare. Many Baka couples have lost children to illness and disease (in one case that I documented three children in four days), and no matter the differences in terms of livelihoods, the grief over losing a loved child is the same for parents everywhere. If Ivindo Baka could protect better the lives of their children through access to biotech healthcare in addition to traditional medicinal practices, they would. Overall, few people would want to give up the machinic and algorithmic niceties of life in order to return to the daily chores of how for example Baka supply for life’s basics. In neoliberal terms, the concern is how to reallocate the large amount of labour energy freed up through automation. A different way of phrasing and perceiving the situation would be to say that what we have erased for a large part, is the effort involved in what in demand-sharing practices concerns the material aspects of goods. Leaving aside planetary boundaries for a moment, getting food and ‘stuff’ is easy. What remains open, is a different appreciation of labour and ‘work’ as the ongoing process of building stable, reliable social relations (supermarkets still don’t sell love). This calls for techniques towards shaping and creating *alter-economies*, which lessen the effect of gaping inequalities and anthropogenic factors, and align humans with larger imperatives of coherence. Such techniques invite becoming tensionally responsive also in relation to ‘work’.

*Can we learn to un-separate social lives and economic livelihoods, to do away with notions of Work-Life Balance, because we are always in the process of negotiating relational dynamics?*

Such an open re-evaluation of what is ‘work’ could possibly challenge the successful grip of capitalism in maintaining the illusion that contemporary humans do not need to do this ‘work’ of deeply engaging with other beings and qualities. Moreover, it could give a different ring to what David Graeber has called *Bullshit Jobs*. The theory of *Bullshit Jobs* contends that there exist many meaningless jobs which cause societal harm, exactly because they are pointless.<sup>77</sup> Considered from a purely economic perspective, I certainly agree

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77 Graeber 2018

with Graeber about how the activities of, what he calls *flunkies*, *goons*, *duct tapers*, *box tickers*, and *taskmasters*, are mostly futile and destructive in the sense that they serve to keep the system running, but are devoid of any economic viability. Especially, *flunky jobs* are those that exist only or primarily to make someone else look or feel important, buttress up egos and in other ways give people a sense of purpose and status.<sup>78</sup> Another way to look at these Bullshit Jobs is that they are the most obvious examples of how the intricate intertwining of socio-economic and socio-political has been manipulated and pushed out of view in contemporary industrialised and high-tech societies. Can we not shift the bullshit quality of the Bullshit Jobs, if we give awareness to how what is going on, no matter which elaborate economic or political framework has been found for it, is simply humans relating? *Flunkies*, *goons*, *duct tapers*, *box tickers*, and *taskmasters* are predominantly involved in processes of giving other humans attention, or even love and affection. However, in most cases, they will consciously or unconsciously be under an *obligation* to do so. Recall here the shift in the theory of sharing, where previously sharing was considered as the *obligation to give, receive, and reciprocate*, and where a more fine-tuned perspective is to understand sharing as the *opportunity to request, return and let go*.<sup>79</sup> Imagine cracking the *obligations*, and shifting the potential of people in bullshit jobs into qualities and intensities of *opportunity* for requesting and returning attention, and for letting go when the moment is right.

*Can we imagine full awareness being given to how working is about the how of relating? How can such novel ways of attending and attuning to 'work', bring about a shifting-sliding towards (economic) futures grounded in generating and maintaining human capacities for the social in resonance with planetary boundaries?*

Such a shift would necessitate especially those deciding on internationally applicable economic regulations learning to move-sense from a different mode of being present on the planet they live on (aka doughnut rings). Contextual awareness, design thinking-perceiving and a transdisciplinary approach are grounding activities for a sensorial awareness of ecosystems and alternative modes of economic practices including more-than-human beings. An awareness where economy is always 'social', defined not by the striving for equality but for a shared ongoingness at the heart of socialities. Rather

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78 Graeber 2018:46

79 Widlok 2017

than separating between a 'normal' and a 'social' economy, bodying sensorial awareness becomes constitutive of and integral to business practices as much as law-making. Towards a world, where 'Earth has a seat at the boardroom table';<sup>80</sup> where concepts such as *Corporate Social Responsibility* and corporate accountability have become of a different quality; where we simply implemented new norms and laws which limit extractive profiteering. We made the company form of CiC, the Community Interest Company, the dominant legal form. We were able to do this, because we came to appreciate that the economy is not really about money; it is all about relating and enacting our values,<sup>81</sup> about energy flows, and visible and invisible vibrating resonances with what is around 'us' as nested ecosystems. We came to appreciate the different economic temporalities: the immediacy and finiteness of monetary exchange in daily life, and that of generating ongoing capacities for novelty and becoming more-than-humanly social as potentially infinite. We forgot to be scared of qualities of abundance, and welcomed the flows and tensionally resonant universes undulating in cycles and spirals of profusion and scarcity. Leaving behind our fears around limits, resulted in withdrawing the hold of marketing strategies over profitable, identitarian individuals. We learned that moving-sensing limitations is not about chastising each other with norms, rules, restrictions, and punishments. We absorbed how the best life comes through generating and sharing life with other beings, not through external force.<sup>82</sup> Sensing limits and limitations is knowing-perceiving exactly the tensional field resonating with qualities of lack, abundance and all other hues. Sensing-knowing when is the moment to move and act to create a new business relation, not because we as humans think it is the best moment, possibly driven by an egotistic individual purpose, but because it is the right moment, occasion, event inspired by a larger collective coherence and (planetary) intelligence. Can we as humans learn to not abuse the power that comes with such knowing which is equally a sensing in relation to others? Or are we only capable of this if we live in tropical regions, in immediate-return societies? Another way of phrasing the proposition around redefining 'work' is to say that the future of 'work' is the process of searching for intensities of ongoingness in social relations.

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80 This phrasing emerges from an ongoing discussion with lawyer and tree-lover Thea Connolly.

81 Massumi 2018

82 Widlok 2017:80

**‘Work’ can become the bodying awareness and attunement to learning what, where, and how are movements of shifting-sliding-shaping with qualities of tensional responsiveness.**

The response to this proposition lies not with corporate, top-down ‘innovation’. Both Baka demand-sharing and my later work with contemporary dancers highlight the importance of socio-somatic presence in generative processes. True creativity comes in these moments, when we merge with and move from the middle of the intelligence of the group we are in; and even with an intelligence larger than the group, involving the more-than, when we stop trying to plan. ‘Innovation’ can be understood as one of the semantic tropes which keeps capitalist dynamics firmly in place. With its individualist competitive focus, devoid of connecting-with group, let alone honouring planetary boundaries, the ‘innovation’ discourse prevents exactly the necessary changes it claims to initiate. ‘Innovation’ keeps people in a constant loop of breathlessness, precluding any appreciation and perspective around ongoingness. If tackling problems like climate change is more than rhetoric and keeping the relevant designated climate institutions busy, then the problems of trying to find adequate answers through planning and structured means have become painfully evident. Letting go of cognitive dominance in those moments of looking for (economic) alternatives, could mean activating more clearly socio-somatic dynamics of bodying together. Maybe, instead of innovation, we could say we are bodying novelty. *Novelty* meaning creative advance, in the terms of *Process Philosophy*, is a creativity which is ongoing, excessive and without ‘outcome’, is an *adventure* that can never be fixed and pinned down into workplans and milestones.<sup>83</sup> The adventure of bodying novelty, creativity, continuity, and change, entails doing the opposite of what productive capitalist individuals should: relaxing, singing, dancing, and aligning to the group of people you are co-present with, to enjoy each other and the more-than of the occasion, to share and celebrate right here and now the beauty and preciousness of the continuity of life.

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83 Whitehead 1978 [1929]:21

## Proposition Three

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

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

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

The questions to explore are

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

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

## Socio-Somatic Polyphonies

### Polyphony

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

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1 Lewis 2014:80

2 Rouget & Buckner 2011:111

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

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

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3 Lewis 2013:58

4 Olivier 2007:106

5 Rouget & Buckner 2011:111

6 Hanna 1970

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

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

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

### Enchanting the Forest with Sounds

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

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8 Manning 2013

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

10 Lewis 2013:61

11 Feld 2012:10, Lye 2021

12 Feld 2012:xxv

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

## Ritualised Gender Roles and Egalitarian Politics

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

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13 (Lewis 2009:252)

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

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

16 Small 1998

17 See for example Tsuru 1998

18 Woodburn 1982

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

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

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

### Baka Gender Concepts

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

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19 Finnegan 2013

20 Fürniss 2005

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

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

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

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21 Gallois 2017

22 Fürniss 2005

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

### Production, Reproduction, and Lunar Cycles

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

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23 Lewis 2002:157, Kisliuk 1998:131

24 Power 2017:195

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

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

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

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26 Joiris 1998, Leclerc 2001

27 Knight & Lewis 2017:437

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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30 Power 2017:197

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

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

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

32 Finnegan 2013

33 Finnegan 2015:88

34 Kisliuk 1998

35 Finnegan 2015:90

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

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

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36 Power & Watts 1997:540

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

38 Finnegan 2017:146

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

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

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

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

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

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

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41 Deleuze & Guattari 1977

42 Eisenstein 2011

43 Berardi 2015, Lorde 1984

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

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

### Authority, Language and Music

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

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44 Lorde 1984:90–91

45 Berardi 2015:71

46 Knight & Lewis 2017

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

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

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47 Knight & Lewis 2017: 442

48 Knight & Lewis 2017:439

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

50 Lewis 2013:64

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

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

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

## Healing as Whole-Body Group Process

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

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52 Barnard 2012

53 Lewis 2013:64

54 Lewis 2013:61

55 Lewis 2013:64, Weig 2015c

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

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

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

57 Strathern & Stewart 2010:7

58 Becker 1995

59 Bainbridge Cohen 2015

60 Schultz & Feitis 1996

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

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

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61 Schleip 2012

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

63 Nestvogel 1994

64 Low 2015

65 Rouget & Buckner 2011, Arom 1991

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

67 <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/socio-somatic>

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

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

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

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68 Barcan 2011:126

69 Manning 2016, see also Levine 1997

70 Petrovich 2001

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

### **Social Change and Baka Musicking Practices**

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

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71 Weig 2009

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

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

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

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

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

## **Diversities: Third Genders, Transgender and an Ancient Single Gender**

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

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

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

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

73 Wöllner & Deconinck 2013

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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77 Manning 2016

78 Harari 2015

79 Power & Watts 1997

80 Power & Watts 1997

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

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

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

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81 Finnegan 2013

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

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

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

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

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82 Eisenstein 2011

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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85 Johnson 1987

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

The proposition is to

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

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

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

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

## Proposition Four

### - OPENING WORLDS INTO ECOSOMATIC ALIVENESS

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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,<sup>1</sup> 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.

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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’.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> *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*.<sup>6</sup> 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'.<sup>7</sup> 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-

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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 CO<sup>2</sup> into oxygen, which contributes to the blue layer of Earth, which in turn is at risk owing to the *greenhouse effect* around rising CO<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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 CO<sup>2</sup> go well beyond regional weather charts presented by smiling TV hosts.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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

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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.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> 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

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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.<sup>15</sup> 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,<sup>16</sup>

*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,

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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'.<sup>17</sup> 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

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17 Gearty 2006, Douzinas & Gearty 2014,

'fundamental rights to be universally protected as a common standard for all peoples and all nations'.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup>

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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup>

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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](http://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/](http://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 technologies<sup>22</sup>). 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

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22 [www.nytimes.com/2018/02/02/technology/cryptocurrency-puerto-rico.html](https://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.<sup>23</sup> 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'.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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'.<sup>26</sup> 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?<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> 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 inhabitants<sup>29</sup>; 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.<sup>30</sup> 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

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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/commentifree/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'<sup>31</sup> 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

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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.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> So maybe this idea of the *kakosmos* holds more potential for (re)generative futures, than the escapist fantasy of setting

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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'.<sup>34</sup>

*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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> The "other" does not exist, somewhere out there. We make up the "other"

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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](http://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.<sup>37</sup> 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*<sup>38</sup>, 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'.<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup>

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.<sup>42</sup> When you come to appreciate how many different layers, qualities, and movements make up your bodying, you are

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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 & Austry 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'.<sup>43</sup> 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.<sup>44</sup> 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

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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?<sup>45</sup>

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.<sup>46</sup>

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.’<sup>47</sup> 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'.<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup>

In this, Laplantine's concern is how there exists a political and historical dimension to sensory experience, which exceeds what individuals can consciously experience.<sup>50</sup> 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'.<sup>51</sup> 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.<sup>52</sup> 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?*

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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.<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup> 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'.<sup>55</sup> 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'.<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup> Building on how the capacity to move and the capacity to experience are related,<sup>58</sup> getting in touch with the alien fascial self and sensing what goes on below the skin's surface, can be a direct visceral experience

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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'.<sup>59</sup> 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'.<sup>60</sup>

**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'.<sup>61</sup> 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

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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.<sup>62</sup> 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

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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',<sup>63</sup> 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*.<sup>64</sup> 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

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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.<sup>65</sup> 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.<sup>66</sup> It is a shift

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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.<sup>67</sup> 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'.<sup>68</sup> 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.<sup>69</sup>

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

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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,<sup>70</sup> 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'.<sup>71</sup> *The United Nations Sustainable Devel-*

70 [www.theguardian.com/science/2019/sep/22/brain-computer-interface-implants-neuralink-braingate-elon-musk](https://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'.<sup>72</sup> 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,

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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.<sup>73</sup> *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

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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.<sup>74</sup> 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*.<sup>75</sup>

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.<sup>76</sup> 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.<sup>77</sup> 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.

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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.<sup>78</sup> 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.<sup>79</sup> 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-

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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.

## Towards Aliveness - WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSE?

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How can we activate more resonant, vibrant, and response-able ways of human and more-than-human relating? Thinking-perceiving differently what and how are qualities of human bodying beneath the skin, together with qualities of ecosystemic vibrancy and adaptive cyclicity, offers a challenging and stimulating contribution to such questions. The term for this intertwining is *Ecosomatically Alive with Tensional Responsiveness*, which is composed of the following four propositions:

1. Perceiving (our) bodyings as vibrant potential for the social, for living in sensitive community with humans and more-than-humans
2. Conceiving the future of work as continuously sharing in the joys of relating
3. Fine-tuning singing and dancing together as practices for activating and circulating bodying gendered power, and maintaining good health and social happiness
4. Attending to relational ecosomatic aliveness and non-violent connectedness as generative qualities for storytelling on future worlds and human survival

Just below human skin, expands fascia, a network of bodily connective tissues. The primary quality of fascia tissues is continuous, ongoing shifting-sliding. This adaptive shaping-shifting-sliding has the quality of *Tensional Responsiveness*, responding for example to shifts in warmth, weight, spaciousness, pulsation, or spontaneous affection. Using the verb *bodying*, rather than the noun *body*, acknowledges the ongoingness of these processes and shifts. Experiencing these physical sensations as much as considering the socio-political and socio-economic implications of such sensations, is tantalisingly exciting. The term *tensional responsiveness*, as a mode of doing so, contains

two parts: *Responsiveness*, which highlights that we as humans do not live our lives as individual islands, but that from habitual daily movements to life-changing decisions, we are always already connected with and responding to information and qualities of (eco)systems as we move-sense the next step. *Tensional* underlines that the interconnectedness can take on many different qualities and intensities. These are not moral or binary (good-bad), and can be perceived as potentials for shaping co-presence. The happy-flower, care-free mode proposed by, for example, capitalism or the esoteric industry, would have people believe that these tensional qualities of relating have somehow gone away. The suggestion made here is to, instead, appreciate the incredible generative potentials in these sensations of tension, and the implications of actively including sensations of tension as a different way of thinking-perceiving social, economic, political, cultural, and ecological issues. Such a shift also re-weaves tensional qualities and ongoingness into futures' storytelling. Joining together *Tensional* with *Responsiveness*, thereby, feeds forward into processes of deepening human *response-ability*. The notion of *response-ability*, as advocated by many critical thinkers such as Donna Haraway, suggests that to appreciate, disentangle and shape-shift contemporary challenges, for example around climate issues, humans need to develop a different capacity and ability to respond to what is happening on planet Earth. The four propositions above aim to contribute to this transformation, by emphasising in novel ways the relevance and potential of the physiology of (human) nested bodyings as the qualities from which to generate and maintain deeper, tensionally responsive response-abilities.

Bodying tensional responsiveness and novel response-abilities in generative ways, demands a different level of awareness and sensitivity, especially as these processes are intricately interwoven with the ecological systems we form part of. In this book, you have been able to meet the *Ivindo Baka*, a cultural group living in the tropical forests along the River Ivindo in Gabon in Central Africa. What is special and unique about Ivindo Baka is their egalitarian social organisation. This egalitarian mode emphasises ongoingness as primary quality; both when it comes to socio-economic practices such as sharing, and in generating and maintaining socio-political practices which simply do not allow people to stand out, or dominate each other. Life as continuity is about enchanting each other. Joy and enchantment inspire communicating with humans and surrounding forests through music and dance, through beautiful, powerful, erotic polyphonic sounds. Polyphonies generate and enable independence within interdependence, and are socio-somatic, so both

a mode of enjoyment and equally a mode of social organisation. Singing-dancing as ways of relating together in *socio-somatic resonance*, not only generates and maintains Baka egalitarian practices for the group, but underlies also the ritualised continuous balancing of male-female energies and group health. Baka lives are lived as alive aspects of the reverberating complexities of Central African tropical forest ecosystems. Ivindo Baka response-abilities to human and more-than-human are grounded in *ecosomatic aliveness*, in co-presence and sensitively organising in relation to all fellow beings and qualities. What makes Ivindo Baka and similar groups extraordinary in comparison with capitalist consumerism, are the wisdom and capacities for managing this aliveness not through dominance and control, but through empowering sensitive tensional responses to the intensity of that occasion.

The aliveness and humming power potential of egalitarian social dynamics and bodying, together with other research I have conducted, shifted and intensified the ways I think-perceive how we talk about the 'social' and current global challenges. From this, emerges the core proposition to learn to perceive (our) bodyings as vibrant potentials for being social, and for living in sensitive, interwoven community with humans and more-than-humans. Appreciating more clearly the permanent changes of (human) microbiomes or fascias, enables to experience and understand 'body' as process, as *bodying*. In this relational bodying, 'I' becomes 'us', becomes *nested ecosystem*. Attuning to, rather than side-lining, the nested physiology, materiality, and potentiality of bodyings from which emerge our daily lives and ongoing activities, can shift how we think-perceive, for example, the future of 'work' as pure relating. As humans, we have the power and the response-ability to start weaving and singing-dancing into existence novel stories that enable generating and maintaining novel ways of relating and organising socialities with human and more-than-human. We can deepen the generative qualities and powers of this process, by shaping-shifting-sliding from an awareness, which actively includes how human physiology is always already moving-sensing and world-shaping in tensional responsiveness with the more-than-human.

The notion of becoming alive with tensional responsiveness deepens how (egalitarian) qualities of ongoingness and aliveness can creatively feed forward into topics such as socio-economic inequalities, neo-populisms, flawed legal systems, or climate issues. This is accentuated by the *institutional plasticity* of the social organisations of our hunter-gatherer ancestors. From our palaeolithic relatives, we learn that things have never 'always been this way'. Shapes and ways of social organisation have always been changing, includ-

ing and honouring the more-than-human, adapting to what fitted best for that seasonal period or occasion, sometimes rapidly and at other times more slowly. From the perspective of bodying as social potential, human groups can once again activate institutional plasticity in ways coherent with a healthy shaping in tensional response to contemporary issues. Humans do not only need food and accommodation to survive, humans need creativeness, joy, and play to develop and maintain response-abilities. Living a good life comes more through sharing life erotically, whereby erotic is understood as shared perception and participation, and less through material goods. (Re)learning to relate in more sensitively attuned and enchanting ways, music and dance activities may counteract current epidemics of fear and eco-anxiety. With regard to the rising mental health issues gripping many parts of the world, awareness of shaping-shifting-sliding in tensional responsiveness may help recognising that often fellow human or more-than-human beings provide exactly the kind of connection, touch, or healing needed in that particular moment. Such complexities and potentials of life are untimely. They defy mind-body dichotomies and being bracketed into conceptual straight-jackets such as that of *homo economicus*. To the contrary, our most 'rational' decision with regard to human survival may be the choice to simply concentrate on the tensionally responsive qualities of our ways of relating, to be playful, to sing, dance and tell stories about the continuously adaptive cycles of scarcity-abundance, and the enchanting beauty of the ongoingness shaping our worlds.

Maintaining the distinction between 'indigenous people' and other human groups, is a serious obstacle to novel relational aliveness. We are all "indigenous" to Earth, and the sooner we start tackling water pollution and mental illnesses from that perspective, the better. There is an urgency to (re)figuring different modes and intensities of relating, either beyond material, consumerist values, or at least in ways which do not centralise it. The material will always matter, but it can only make life easier and aid in surviving long-term. It cannot actually make humans happy, although advertising would of course have us believe that. Clearly, I am neither the first to ponder these issues, nor the last to have dreams about the world being a more alive place for everyone. For 50 years of what makes up current German history, two opposed versions of ideals worth striving for existed on either side of a long wall: The Capitalist West and the Communist East. In 1989, the existential lures of personal autonomy caused the Communist wall to crumble and collapse. 30 years on, late capitalist extraction practices resulting in climate change phenomena have diminished any remaining notions of individual freedoms in the West.

We are all caught in a big, messy socio-environmental melting pot, which necessitates (re)learning to relate differently to the microbial or fascial alien inside, to co-present bodyings with fellow organisms, and to the cyclicities of ecosystems. This shifting towards independence within interdependence is a process which comes not through ideology, but through deeper sensorial awareness of being indigenous, of forming part of literally trillions of nested bodying ecosystems on Earth.

Bodily perception and awareness ground knowledge, wisdom, self-awareness and self-security as much as potentials for aliveness and co-presence. Human futures are closely interlinked with artificial intelligence, which raises questions about whether or how to generate aliveness and co-presence in novel ways also with these influential virtual presences. Whilst humans co-exist in this bizarre togetherness with machines that may soon outsmart human intelligence, we could focus on having the best time, and on making our ways of relating as enchanting as humanly possible. To paraphrase Gandhi's famous saying, can you be the change you want to see in the world *and* move-sense an enchanting, tensionally responsive bodying process following honey towards joyful ecosomatic aliveness with fellow beings? How might be your response?

## Four Sparks of Enchantment

*Chispa* meaning spark, is my favourite Spanish word. Below are some *chispas* to inspire bodying with deeper awareness, and for moving-sensing, shaping-shifting-sliding with qualities of ongoing tensional responsiveness. These are four potential sparks to light up independence within interdependence, and individual autonomy as always already embedded and co-composing with human and more-than-human ecosomatic aliveness.

- a. New vocabularies: From Body to Bodying
- b. Human and More-than-human Matrices: Continuously Spiralling and Shifting-Sliding
- c. Changing the system: Changing the way we relate and organise to sensitive mode
- d. A Somatic Prompt: Dancing with the Unknown of Indigenous

### a. New vocabularies: From Body to Bodying

A practical way of playing with Proposition One is to use different words to describe what is your volume 'body'. To start with, the easiest thing to do, is to use the verb bodying instead of the noun body. This emphasises process and potential. You can experiment with what happens, if each time you want to say body or something with a similar meaning, you replace it instead with verb forms, like bodying. This applies also to saying *my* body or bodying. Each time you want to make a proprietary claim, and say 'my', recall how 'your' gut microbiome or your fascia tissue-system are active aliens co-composing this 'my body'. Try and attune to how these small shifts in the vocabularies you use, impact your thinking-perceiving and sensations. After a period of first one, and then two years, take a moment to see whether or how perceptions of 'I', 'self', 'body' and the world in general have, or have not, changed by using verb forms. If possible, take some notes in writing, so that you can reflect on the changes that you notice, or how things stay the same, over time.

The second way to play is simply to co-invent new words. In particular, how can we say differently *sensitive resonance*, *organising sensitively in relation to what others are doing*, *independence within interdependence*, *sensations of tension*, or *non-violence*? In co-generating such novel vocabularies, we can draw on how Baka terminologies emphasise the interrelatedness of space, time and sociality. Maybe, just as Eskimos have many words for different types of water, ice, or snow, we can invent novel words and process-oriented verbs for expressing the diverse types of tension that emerge with relational aliveness. If possible, play this game with others, in order to activate co-inventing coherently with deeper collective wisdom.

## b. Human and More-than Co-Presence: Integrating Awareness with Trees and Fascias

The following is an awareness practice on trees and fascias. The practice is a way to play with how your body does not end with your skin and how your imagination can activate multi-sensorial co-presences. This involves using the image on the front cover of the book,<sup>1</sup> and the images of fascia in the description in Proposition Once and/or whatever you may have found online. Fascia tissue-systems absorb and respond to imagination, as do muscles and other senses, shaping and re-shaping (your) bodily presence. By imagining *what else*, and telling different stories, you can open up to novel sensitive and eco-somatically alive awareness.<sup>2</sup> What you once thought were fixed boundaries between bodyings, or human bodies and trees, may start to break down. You may want to read the meditation first, and then do and enjoy the practice.

Look at the title page of this book. It shows the crown of one of the trees near the Baka village of Adjab in North-Eastern Gabon, overlaid by an image of the fascia tissue-system. At molecular level, both human and vegetal forms are shaped by multi-directional connections, or spirals, which allow for ongoing movement, and absorbing and responding to tensions.

Shift your attention to the crown of the tree on the title page, and the sky beyond. Allow your breathing and your imagination to reside in the crown for a while. Sense and hear the sounds of the crown leaves moving with the winds. Become aware of the tree trunk which is holding this crown. Imagine the different layers of the trunk, one of which is the sapwood, the network of living cells bringing up water and nutrients from the roots to the branches and leaves. Can you hear these nutritious fluids pulsing through the sapwood? Allow the fluids to draw you underneath the bark of the tree, into the trunk and down to the tree roots. Sense how the roots extend into the underground mycelium web, connecting this one tree with its seedlings and the other forest plants.

Now look at the images of the fascia tissue-system on pages 48-49. Also, if you haven't already, try and find the documentary *Strolling Under Your Skin*,

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- 1 I would like to thank Xander van der Burgt from the Royal Botanical Gardens Kew (UK), who helped in the selection of the tree image with his specialist botanical knowledge on tropical plants.
  - 2 This practice is also inspired by Natascha Myers' Plant Kriya: <https://imaginative-ethnography.com/imaginings/affect/sensing-botanical-sensoria/>

or other professionally captured video images of the fascia tissue-system. Really look at and appreciate these still or moving images of fascias. Try and truly attune to the textural micromovements of these tissues. This is going on just beneath your skin, as you are reading these words, or watching the moving images of fascias. This amazing tissue-system is key to moving-sensing where and how you are in the world. Fascias anchor your bodily awareness in relational movement with gravity, and in processes of always already interweaving co-presences.

Shift your attention again to the title page, and attune to the fine details of the interwoven image of tree crown and fascias. Re-aliven the awareness of the dynamic expansiveness of trees, from the sky, to the crown leaves, to trunk sapwood, to roots, to mycelium network, to the ground you are standing on, becoming with the ongoing micro-movements of (your) fascia tissue-system. Allow yourself to sense into and appreciate the qualities which connect (your) bodying to that of the trees and other plant life in the place where you live.

### c. Changing the system:

#### Changing the way we relate and organise to sensitive mode

The capacity to move-sense - the capacity to experience – the capacity to relate: The challenge of the 21st century, is not only to be able to fly to Mars, but to engage with one another in ways beyond male-female or human-beyond-human binaries, and beyond populist stereotypes of self-other and national citizen-immigrant. Can we learn to move-sense with such potential diversities we might not even be imagining yet? Can we change the system, by changing the way we move and think-perceive with each other, by organising and relating sensitively? Such potentials and capacities are shaped by and shape the local and global systems we are nested with. These potentials are also shaped by rhythms of breathing and moving-sensing, which are both beautifully unique and at the same time intimately and inextricably embedded with qualities of, not fitness, but joy and aliveness of ecosystems.

Interweaving Donella Meadows 14 points of *Dancing with Systems*<sup>3</sup>, with Ivindo Baka egalitarian socio-somatic resonance and independence within interdependence, can you...

- 1) Pay attention to sensations of tension, not just to what is visible, quantifiable or controllable in your world
- 2) Expose your mental models to the wisdom of the socio-somatic system
- 3) Sense the polyphonic beat
- 4) Become a response-able, lifelong learner
- 5) Stay humble at all times
- 6) Attune to the enchanting potential of organising in sensitive, non-violent, coherent relation
- 7) Go for the ongoing joy of the whole
- 8) Celebrate non-binary complexity
- 9) Honour sharing ecosomatic aliveness together with more-than-human

Find a way to have these 9 points visible to you (for example on a screen or in printed form). For yourself or together with others, first read them out loud. Then, put on your favourite music, and dance-sing out your responses. Enjoy how these responses develop and shape-shift-slide with different qualities and intensities. Relish the aliveness of this process.

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

#### d. Somatic Prompt: Dancing with the Unknown of Indigenous

This is a somatic prompt, an invitation to sense, perceive, meditate, reflect. The prompt is adapted from a workshop I offered for the fugitive summit ‘The Wilds Beyond Climate Justice’, hosted by *The Emergence Network* and Bayo Akomolafe, from May 31 - June 4, 2020. If you can, have somebody else read this to you, whilst you are standing, sitting or lying in a relaxed and receptive way. Alternatively, you can make a recording, and then become enchanted by your own voice.

Environments and landscapes where past generations have lived and in which we continue to live today, are alive with more-than human qualities and beings. Imagine you are among people, maybe your ancestors. You are all aware of how patterns of light, sounds of birdsong or rainfall, scents of forest plants or animals, shapes of orchids or mountains, cycles of seasons and of generations – how all these qualities and intensities are always shape-shifting into one another, creating and telling about place and community, about life forces and life changes.

Imagine feeling these continuities and changes of stories and places in your body. Resonating with your bodily elements, with water, gases, proteins, blood, connective tissues and bones. You are made of the shape-shifting of all the places, where people have lived and travelled, the migration stories of love, discovery, unspeakable pain, forgiveness; you carry them with and within you. How did and do these qualities become your bodily systems? Then and now? Feel deeply the sensations, imagery, voices informing you.

Now imagine these signals and stories deeply shifting and changing. What is it that changes? How do the changes feel in your body? What binds you to the places and stories of what for you is indigenous? Are you bound to stories centred on humans? Or how are the more-than-human relations – with trees, humming-birds, coral reefs, or whichever beings you resonate with most? What connects you? What separates you? What will the generations after you know about this quality we call “indigenous”? How will they resonate and create with places and stories?

# Annex

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## Annex I

### Interrelation of space, time, and sociality in Baka terminology

The analysis of Baka gathering terminology by Christian Leclerc showed lexical interrelation of space, time, and sociality.<sup>1</sup> Space is not conceived in relation to units of time, and there is no differentiation between space and time, but distance and duration are merged. All Baka terminology, which reports on space, time and activities, refers to how ‘people’s relations amongst each other during an activity, ... are made with reference to the residential group unit’.<sup>2</sup> The duration of absence from camp is the marker of distance travelled in order to realise an activity, and the terminology of activities refers to relations between people, and between people and place. The interrelatedness of space, time and sociality extends further in that the term *paki* signifies both the social unit of the Baka group and the (previous) local group territory.

The following tables give examples of the interrelation between space, time and sociality in Baka terminology:

*Table 1.1 - Examples of Baka terminology with both a spatial and temporal meaning*

<b>Baka term (spatial and temporal)</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
tie	place or time
ndanda	place/location or moment
belebele (doubling of bele, meaning forest)	always or everywhere

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1 Leclerc 2001

2 Leclerc 2001:112, my translation

*Table 1.2 - Examples of Baka terminology with both a social and temporal meaning*

<b>Baka term (social, spatial and temporal)</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
moyapa	family quits the group for two or three hours
noo	family quits group for whole day
mombato	family quits group for more than a day
limbanga	only the couple quits the group for more than a day





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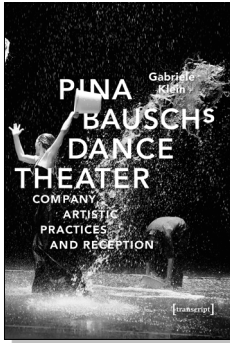
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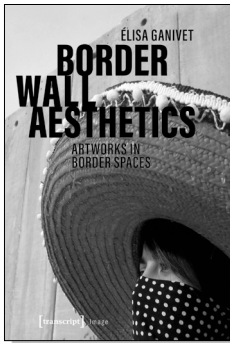
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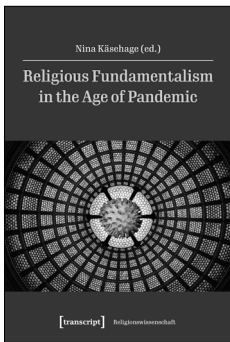
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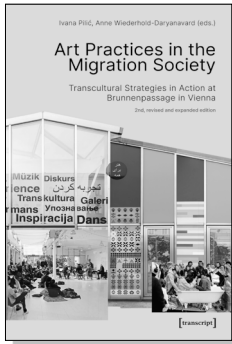
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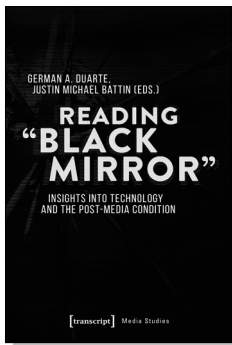
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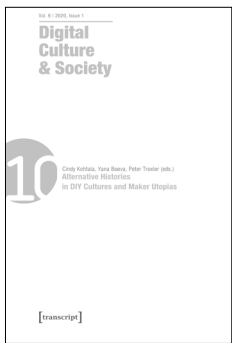
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