



DOERTE WEIG

Tensional Responsiveness. Ecosomatic Aliveness and Sensitivity with Human and More-than

Transcript Verlag, Germany, 2021, 202 pp.
Paperback. 38.00 €

Desde febrero de 2024, acceso abierto:
<https://www.transcript-publishing.com/978-3-8376-6011-1/tensional-responsiveness/?number=978-3-8394-6011-5&c=310000025>

Idioma: inglés
ISBN: 978-3-8376-6011-1 /
ISBN: 978-3-8394-6011-5

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The work of anthropologist Doerte Weig relates scales as different as those of our physiology and those of our cities. Studying with the Baka, a cultural group from the Central African rainforest, Weig reveals a different sensibility for dealing with spatial and eco-social relations that may be key to the future transformation of our cities. This anthropological text is therefore of great interest also to architects and urban planners.

Firstly, with the Baka we find adaptive socio-spatial organizations. These are defined through what is referred to as motility (the potential for movement and the motives that produce such movements). In the case of the Baka, what is most noteworthy is that their practices and transformations are centered on equality and demand-sharing and not on profit - economic or otherwise. Thus, the collective space holds a relationship of egalitarian values that regulate excess and support fragility

in an empathetic and transversal network. Innovation, for this social group, goes hand in hand with sensitivity and deep listening, and their practices are based on the cultivation of these qualities; the greater the capacity to perceive what is happening, however subtle it may seem, the greater the capacity for collective response. In this way, the Baka form part of a continuous web of socio-spatial interrelationships.

The egalitarian orientation is highly powerful because it generates a dynamic of continuous adjustment and readjustment that puts change at the centre without making it dependent on the crisis. The egalitarian mode rather forefronts those possibilities that are glimpsed both spatially and socially in the existing reality. Here, then, lie both one of the fundamental questions of this book and its most innovative approach, as Weig relates the sensitive and responsive capacities of our bodies - mainly through the study of fascia - to the sensitive and responsive (performative) capacities of social and urban relations as well as their configurations including non-human entities and organisms. In this way the corporeal, the neurophysiological, the microbiological and the environmental intersect, offering useful considerations for urban designers from the scale of the body to that of large ecosystems. Ignoring these interscalar interrelationships is understood here as a form of violence.

In this view, a city is seen as a continuous ecosystemic co-composition of human and non-human matter. Fascias, currently considered the largest sensory organ we have, can serve as a textural proposition for a different kind of urban physiology: A system of tissues in continuous tension - and tensional responsiveness - with mutable and highly resilient surfaces. If this ecosystemic, egalitarian and even performative co-composition is placed at the centre there are several spatial/urban aspects that are of interest to us.

One characteristic of fascias and Baka forest settlements is their organization as fluid, interconnected spaces set in a clearing in the forest. Far from being banal, this is significant as Baka recognize biological and ecosystemic structures as a pre-layer. Moreover, Baka economy is understood as part of ecosystemic co-presence and based on the concept of "demand-sharing" that is about creating and maintaining relationships, containing different nuances to those "sharing" usually has for us as readers. This affects their relation to the land and the distribution of activities in the common space, meaning that, for example, they exert no control over the dynamics of other species. Importantly, Baka spatial language simultaneously refers to time, place and even social group composition. For the Baka, for example, the words for place/space and time are the same word 'tie'. Distance and duration are also combined in the term 'ndanda'. A meeting place is located in the centre, but above all there is empty space, different collective uses are located on the

perimeter, and there are ritual spaces at the entrances to the surrounding forest. The whole spatial form refers to the egalitarian orientation that shapes the social capital of the community, which is equally affective, somatic and ecological capital, and in this way can have consequences and inspire a different architectural and 'urban' morphology.

If these themes may seem generic and far removed from our cultural specificities, the detail and multidimensionality with which they are treated in the book make them a decidedly useful agenda for application to the design of our cities.

From a somatic point of view and its effect on spatial configurations, the book with its lens on both fascias and Baka communities, explains how the somatic refers not only to the body, but to the activities, programmes and actions that bring different bodies into a common resonance, regulating power relations also through collective enjoyment. Co-composition allows for a spatiality of joint bodily practices (for example storytelling, dancing or singing) and this can also influence and impact ways of urban-social transformation. Communication and creation have a lot to do with a communal attunement that must be sustained in the relational spatiality of settlements. Knowing that the somatic is practised, the author proposes at one point in the text the term "bodying ecosystems", which highlights the fact that the body is not something fixed but a system that is co-composed in permanent movement. This links to our practices, including those of the design and construction of cities, opening up the ontological horizon of the different inhabitants and their spaces, as well as that of their practices in common. This is not understood in a naïve way - without conflict - but on the contrary, welcoming in a continuous 'egalitarian' fabric the possible collisions as points of intensity to be dealt with by all.

In short, the book delves into fundamental aspects of any settlement, from economy to environmental aspects and hierarchical organizations, relating them to contemporary challenges and debates, being an exceptional incentive to think about the contemporary city and its ecosystems from our own bodies.

https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_zarch/zarch.20252411649