Babydrama
-an artistic research report

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Dear reader,
Suzanne Osten wishes to spread the word about her research Babydrama. Feel free to read and use her research but remember to give credit to Suzanne Osten and Unga Klara if you use the material.
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Introduction

“He is naked. He cries. He can’t roll over. He tries to put his fingers in his mouth. An infant in my arms. This at once negates society’s holiest of ideals. He is namely entirely helpless. Not by mistake, rather it is completely natural for him. He is entirely dependent.”

This is the introduction to the book Free souls (Fria själar. In Swedish) by Nina Björk; a dissertation on freedom’s limitations and fiction that is highly worth reading. The image of the helpless infant is striking, but that is not how I would describe a child in my arms today. My point of departure, nonetheless, is not an uncritical acceptance of the plethora of ideas about the value of early learning in recent research on infant creativity. I would like to both review the concept of freedom, which is important, and emphasize human dependency on relations, and at the same time maintain that we need to do research on the entire spectrum of the esthetic sensibility innate to the human being. Our sense for beauty is in the service of becoming human.

With my contribution to this research I would like, in all modesty, to show that the young child’s strong attentiveness for the created and formed, a feeling for esthetic quality that I see as our internal absolute need for externally created order and narration. My image of the child with all its senses ready for art also serves my purpose; the child can make use of art for its survival. I have experienced this. I have seen it.

A report on an artistic development project

The reader/viewer will now be presented with a research report divided into two parts.

The report is based on a major theatrical project that has been finished. Unga Klara’s Babydrama, which I documented in text and video throughout the period that we worked with it on stage at Unga Klara, a unit of Stadsteatern in Stockholm, from 05 to 07. I have filmed several performances in their entirety and with the audience in real time, along with a guest performance abroad to be able to compare reactions of the audience.

Parallel with this project, but over a longer period of time, I trained in gestalt therapy at GIS International in Denmark. The education, which is in English, is also taught in Sweden, Estonia and Finland. This year I have written my final essay which is about contact; the infant’s response to Babydrama, with examples of meetings between the audience and actors during a theatrical performance. I have also conducted interviews with parents and have supplemented that aspect of the report with other clinical material that is relevant for the topic.

All of this work, and the interviews, intertwine and perhaps you the reader may find it trying that I use the same material but from slightly different angles. Nevertheless, this cross pollination has been a method and has given insight into how these ideas are fruitful for me in my work as a director:

This is theatrical performance.
This is therapeutic observation and theory.
This is filmed process.

Filming has been a method for achieving observation. And to be able to go back and reflect over what we are seeing.
Working for an infant audience gives rise to critical thoughts about our society’s view of the child who does not speak yet, and in turn, it gives rise to several ideas about what we can narrate and conduct research on. And if the research question is simple in itself - how early can we begin playing theater for children? The issue of how to break new ground remains a larger problem. The scientific community finds it hard to understand that here we are looking at something entirely new.

A performance at the theater
As far as I know, Babydrama is the world’s first script-based drama that has been written and performed for an infant audience. All of us who participated in the work with testing a dramatic text written for such young children who do not yet speak naturally had no way of knowing about the result and were uncertain. The notion of a child’s abilities at certain ages, and which stimulus it should be given during its first infant period, is also somewhat controversial.

As a director and author I have previously created drama for all ages - from two years and up.

This was primarily for day care groups who watched performance with their adult leaders. The question of how early our need for drama begins grew into a larger question of what comprises the human need for drama. Contact competence is a key word in gestalt therapy and simply put pertains to our ability to live and communicate. A theatrical performance can demonstrate this, while gestalt therapy examines which inner obstacles we face when making contact. Filming has been vital to enabling my observations both as a director and as a therapist in training.

The research question and the theatrical performance
By staging a theatrical play for an audience completely without experience of theater I wanted to explore the question: How early can we perform for children? I have primarily examined:

- Dramaturgy, text, subject matter
- Scenography, space, lighting, sound
- The placement of the audience and moving them from one place to another
- The acting, dialog, acting style, movement
- Music, tonality, rhythm
- The meeting - the authentic

The interested reader can read about our and my considerations in the book Babydrama (Babydrama. Ann-Sofie Bárány. 2008. In Swedish), a book that contains many photographs from the performances. It was produced on the initiative of the theatrical company Unga Klara.

The film on work with the performance
It takes time at the editing table to make a film. The images captured on film show you what you can portray. This is a restriction that creates new potential. I soon saw the potential to expand the subject matter to cover a larger social issue; to make a movie about society’s view of the infant. What does the infant represent for us adults? We came in contact with many genuinely hostile reactions to our idea of creating a theatrical performance for infants; angry experts, a hostile website was started, ironic comments from adult colleagues … Our own fear of the infant’s silence and lack of speech was also a factor.
The video you see here is the story about children as an audience, i.e. the reactions of young children and their parents to a theatrical performance. We decided to show that the dyad child/parent experiences a quality of meeting through a certain performance. We also show our difficulties in overcoming the distance to our audience. The video is based on the gaining knowledge process that takes place parallel in the ensemble. The work changes our lives and our view of the child’s so called competence. And we always work with form of address - the quality of the meeting with the audience depending on the genre.

This report comprises a text on the main ideas in the video and is also a sketch for a prospective new video, *With the infant as a lens* (*Med babyn som lins*) which would reflect how contempt for the infant plays a role in society today and impedes adults in our society from understanding themselves. This contempt impedes social development - which Nina Björk writes about from her perspective.

### Common methods
Parts of this report are also intertwined. Issues are illustrated from somewhat different angles. The theatrical performance is, nevertheless, the foundation. The ongoing video documentation got underway at the same time as the first ensemble started up, in August 05 (the drama was performed in both 2006 and 2007 with partly different ensembles). Soon I also wanted to video record/register on film, an audience without experience of theater, to capture the infants’ response to a meeting with adult artists. In real time. (We filmed, among others, a guest performance in Serbia in September, 2008, with ensemble no. two).

I finished an essay on contact and the response of the child to performance during the summer after my training in gestalt therapy, which took place from 2002 to 2006 in the form of weekend courses in Estonia, Sweden and Denmark. The essay *On contact* was finished in July, 2009. The essay’s section *Diary* was written during the performance period. My essay also deals with current literature on the newborn child and its development, as well as some of the new affect theory and current research on the infant. My conclusions rest on experience of and from clinical treatment.

The connective vision I have in the report’s text and video - and in the research questions, has developed during my profession as a director. The director is kind of a driving observer. In my case, this comes from my interest in an artistic group process. As a director I obtain an overview of a specific audience and their understanding. I drive the work process with the ensemble, a process that consists of different methods and techniques. When I film, I portray our work with capturing the spirit of the drama about the child in our narration, the drama of our adult inability to understand, i.e. our inability to remember our own development from the infant level. The child’s meeting with the adult/parent is at the center of the drama/film.

### Other research questions: imitation
The idea of how the human perceives roles on stage and screen has led me to examine other forms of expression of the human innate need for theater - the human ability to observe, understand, recognize and study someone else’s feelings, body, face. The actor’s acting becomes a mirror of our inner selves. Here is a field for observation - *imitation*. There are several types of imitation in the spectrum of the relationship director-actor-audience, micro-fast processes that happen physically - mimicry of attitude, physique, tone, etc. A facial expression is read. That we imitate each other is also a development of our
ability to depict empathy. Imitation is not highly valued in western theater. Nevertheless, it takes place all the time as a basic element of our communication. For instance, see how infant research describes the exchange of information between the infant and its mother’s face - the beginning of all human emotional development. Presumably much of our transfer of knowledge is built on guessing, observing, reading what is going on the in teacher’s/the other’s face and body. At the theater this is the reason for the presence of an audience.

Mimicry, the transferring of emotional messages, is extremely clearly registered in my video documentation of the youngest audience I have ever had. In their faces, movements, eyes, we can see how they follow, imitate and absorb our play, tones of voice, rhythm, words. How they move towards, mimic, the actors. Do they want to take action? Express something? What the child sees and assess.

Only parts of the work process have been documented with video, but I lack words to explain how inspiring the video has been for the project. The photographer and director Bengt Danneborn’s as a co-creator with respect for the infant’s communication is unique. You will probably wonder how he did this when you see the images. But special close-up cameras were mounted into the set during a couple of the performances.
The field of research
Between the known and the unknown
Our need for theatrical performance
A study in creating a theatrical performance for infants

From an application to the Department for Artistic Development at the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts (formerly DI), January 1, 2006:

The field of research: Theatrical performance for infants, 6 to 12 months and their parents

I have been asking questions about people’s need for theatrical performance, how we reach our audience and with which theatrical means we reach our audience for nearly 40 years. The research questions I previously documented in Secret masks (Hemliga masker) and Difficult people (Besvärliga människor) have dealt with acting techniques and different traditions in communication. Further, I have reflected on different theatrical processes in words in the book In my opinion (Mina meningar, Gidlunds förlag, 2002. In Swedish).

The human need for theatrical performance
Now I will focus on the basic question of the human need for theatrical performance. Since I have created theatrical performances for many different ages (from two years of age and up) the question of how early our need for theatrical performance begins has grown into a matter of what the human need for theatrical performance looks like. A matter that possibly our work with the play Babydrama can help explain. In working with the play we have asked many basic questions such as:

How early can we do a theatrical performance for children? or the reverse - When does the human need for theatrical performance begin? How can we through teatralnost (human theatrical ability and theatrical instinct) and the means offered by the theater reach the (youngest) audience?

Understanding and the significance of feeling
As a director I have always worked with an expanded meaning of the concept understanding, which not only means an intellectual understanding but also, to the highest degree, an understanding based on feeling. Through a study of the role feeling plays in our understanding of the world around us, I imagine coming close to an understanding of the human need for theatrical performance. What interests me here as a theatrical director, are theories on how feelings arise and are expressed in relationships. Theater is a reproductive art form, each evening a feeling must be reproduced. What is this? How does it happen? How do we see what we experience? How does empathy occur? How does the audience interpret played feelings?
Background
1) 1992
At an early stage I examined very young children’s need for theatrical performance with the production *The dolphin* (*Delfinen*). We examined dialog, monolog, narrative, flashback, and so forth. A full-scale story of + 30 minutes (author: Gunilla Linn Persson). In the evenings we performed a play about the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicot’s work with interpreting the nightmares of his youngest patient who was two and a half years old, *The Piggle* (*Pyret*) a play by Nils Gredeby based on the book’s 12 therapeutic talks. A story about a small child for an adult audience. Both plays reproduce a drama about understanding between an adult and a child who are on linguistically unequal footing.

2) 2000
*The royal theater daycare* (*Det Kungliga Teaterdagiset*), a play of marathon length in four parts for young children from 3 to 4 years of age accompanied by preschool staff, was created with students from the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts on the theme of childhood. We examined communication and time.

3) 2002
*The Chief Thing* (*Det allra viktigaste*) - a marathon performance about theatrical performance for an adult audience with a queer reading of a Russian play from 1920 by Evreinov that deals with theatricality - the concept *teatralnost* - and mask performance. (Mask research with My Walther, *Secret masks II* (*Hemliga masker II*), half masks and full masks).

Theoretical points of departure
When I now return to the young audience, to the infant audience approximately 8 months of age, I will add some theoretical points of departure to my exploration.

The meaning of words
Psychoanalysis with infants:

In her book *On the body and the scream (A Corps ET a Cris: Etre Psychanalyste Avec Les Tout-Petits).* In French) the author Caroline Eliacheff describes similar conversations with traumatized infants from 3 months of age. Theories and practice go back to the pediatrician Françoise Dolto, known for talking to the child about its inner world. This part of French psychoanalysis is not well known in Sweden, but we have our own tradition of psychoanalysis for young children and their caregivers, the most important representative being the prematurely deceased child psychoanalyst Johan Norman. We have in our work at the theater met several child analysts who talk with their small patients and their parents.

Modern infant research has today come a long way with knowledge about the infant’s innate ability and how language is established and perceived on the fetal level.

Theatricality - theatrical ability
In my earlier thoughts about whether theatrical performance - role play - the stage as a mirror of our experiences - means some kind of ability to recreate external and internal mental realities, I have sought out and become familiar with early and alien theatrical traditions from other parts of the world (Bali, Guinea Bissau, Tanzania). Evreinov, the Russian playwright who wrote the comedy *The Chief Thing*,
wrote in his Russian history of the theater about the concept *teatralnost*. He says that ALL PEOPLE HAVE TEATRALNOST - (theatricality, theatrical ability). That we HAVE A WILL, AN INSTINCT FOR THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE. Evreinov talks about this as a fundamental instinct - if we do not get an outlet for it we will languish away. In depression. He even says that animals have this ability. Role players today ascribe Evreinov the role as the father of role play.

With my idea of the child perspective, I have always followed the explosion of theories in infant research and have seen how biology, psychodynamics and social research cross pollinate and develop each other. The infant is in no way a blank sheet of paper - neither is it an entirely finished program, but it is more competent and better equipped than what we have understood, more similar to us adults (or are we similar to the infant?). Perhaps more than we want to believe, and it is my understanding that when we fully realize what the infant is prior to and at birth, we will radically reconsider in terms of allocating cultural-political and social resources. Nevertheless, the infant’s total dependency on understanding its caregivers remains - the child is not our object. The baby is a human being to respect and try to understand. For the organization of art and society, for instance, modern research is significant - it gives facts and new arguments. I hope that our *Babydrama* can contribute valuable insights in this area.

I have chosen to work with theater for children since 1967 - and have often been forced to combat society’s discrimination against children *child racism*, which considers short people as less significant. Even when it comes to language. “They don’t understand this play.” “They haven’t understood this.” “The language is too hard.”

**Understanding**

As a director I am always looking for a way to expand the meaning of the word *understanding*. If we measure the words that a child can reproduce from a play or a movie, then all the adult critics would be right. But the sensual experience of words/gestures/feelings form a bigger picture (Eliachef). In contrast, we allow small children to wander around town - in malls - department stores - watch movies, play video games, watch cartoons and look at photographs of other children. In other words, we are confident that they can *visually* separate, delimit, sort - which *they do*.

At 8 months children can perceive the main stage called Lagret with its lighting and objects in the same way as an adult. We can observe their visual ability, focus and interest in details.

We have clearly taught ourselves everything by seeing, then touching, meeting, feeling. But in what way do we see and feel? I would like to refer to the more modern infant research conducted by, among others, Daniel Stern. And the widespread knowledge of the so called affect theory, that the American Silvan Tomkins, who in the 60s studied an infant, his own son, while he was on parental leave of absence. In the infant’s feelings he could observe the entire human spectrum of affect/feelings.

In Sweden, Marianne Sonnby Borgström with the recently published book *Affects, affective communication and bonding patterns: A bio-psycho-social perspective (Affekter, affektiv kommunikation och anknytningsmönster - ett bio-psyko-socialt perspektiv*. In Swedish) describes her attempt with labs and research that seem to unite modern affect research with social perspectives and also with psychodynamic theories. We now know that the human being’s/child’s early ability to imitate, e.g. the facial expressions of their parent, and in this way progress in understanding themselves, is the path that leads to expressing/feeling empathy. Sonnby Borgström has found that adults who have the ability to
imitate - have greater ability to imagine how another person feels - have greater empathy. In a series of experiments she describes how to capture the ability to imitate others - to feel empathy for others.

What interests me as a director are theories about how feelings arise and are expressed in relations - *and the vital role of the theatrical performance for the development of our feelings*, an ability to care. I can see that the infant audience reads the actor’s face, checks their mother’s expression, checks back to the actor. The mother’s interest guides them but what the actor does is also mimicked directly - registered, tested.

In theatrical practice there is very lite actual knowledge of psychoanalysis or brain functions, but a great deal of popular ideas about what happens, and a great deal of handed down techniques for getting at - simulating - indicating - signing- feelings. There is a great deal of confusion in the theater about what a feeling is. (Some traditions work more with breathing muscle control/Indian tradition/ - specific facial expressions, gestures, etc.) All talk about being genuine is more confusing than clarifying. The theatrical performance is a reproductive form of art; a feeling is reproduced every evening. What is this? How does it happen? How/what do we see? How what do we experience? How does empathy occur? Does the audience also sense failure?

- Is the baby the one who sees what is genuine?
- Or is the baby entertained by the *theatrical*?
- The play
- The body
- The feelings

The play with different levels of feeling. Acting with distorted voices.

*Does the baby have humor?* -If you had heard five infants laugh at a pun in our play, you would be convinced that they do. At what age does our sense of humor begin?

Infant research today has an enormous amount of new knowledge that turns other knowledge upside down. The theater world needs to collaborate with scientists to be able to develop.

But in answer to my question, “Can I work with infant masks for a child audience?” Marianne Sonby Borgström replies, “I don’t know, only the theater knows.” My Walther, the ensemble and I test six infant masks. In this way the theater studies its audience - like it always has. What works, what entertains, what is frightening, what is boring? What has meaning?

We hear that we should be quiet when we are with infants. But they can stand noise. The decibel level inside a mother’s womb is like a highway. The fetus hears speech and the noise outside the womb along with noise from its mother’s intestines on the inside. We know that the infant has the ability to recognize its mother’s voice - to recognize text that its mother has read aloud - to recognize its father, and so forth.

**References**

Approach
This project was conducted in cooperation with Unga Klara
The play is about birth. The narrative covers the following periods: In the womb, Birth, Meeting with parents, and Birth of a social self. The script was written by the psychoanalyst Ann-Sofie Bárány, who is also currently conducting research in Theater Studies on the theatricality of the psyche. This is parallel research that we can utilize in this project. Her supervisor is Professor Karin Helander, at the Centre for the Studies of Children’s Culture.

The project is divided into three phases:
Phase 1: Video documentation of the work process and the children’s reactions (Bengt Danneborn). Exploratory work, rehearsals, the audience (infants and their parents), interviews with infant analysts, nurse midwives, prenatal researchers. Correct ethical standards are adhered to.
In addition, reading relevant literature.
Phase 2: Editing of the documentary material.
Phase 3: Reflection, analysis founded on the documentation. Report in the form of video (DVD) and text.

Ensuring video documentation of the project is vital to the completion of the project. The purpose of using video is to create material for reflection and analysis; to be able to show and preserve events and processes that otherwise would not be available for learning and knowledge. The report will also largely consist of edited video material together with a text.

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Project committee:
Suzanne Osten, professor and director, the Stockholm School of Dramatic Arts (formerly DI) and Unga Klara
Ann-Sofie Bárány, psychoanalyst and PhD student
Erik Uddenberg, playwright and dramaturge, Unga Klara
Bengt Danneborn, filmmaker

Ethical considerations
During the production of Babydrama we have had a reference group comprised of infants and parents who have followed the process. This group has been invaluable for our work and we have observed them, talked to and played with them for a number of months. Throughout this period we adhered to the ethical rules and guidelines as laid out by the Swedish Research Council for research in the humanities and social sciences. When parents were asked if they wanted to participate in the reference group they were informed of the following:

* A large part of the work with Babydrama will be documented on video by filmmaker Bengt Danneborn. This will also occur on the occasions when the reference group is present.

* The documentation is for Suzanne Osten’s research.
* There are plans to create a report on this project in the form of a DVD or video, but in that event all participants will be contacted once again for their written consent to participate in the project.

* We will only film the baby and/or parents in their function as an audience, i.e. not when the baby is crying, eating, is being changed or is playing by itself.

* The material will not be released to anyone outside the project and Bengt Danneborn will be responsible for the safe keeping of the material.

Everyone in the reference group accepted the above terms, and on each occasion we reminded them of what we were doing and that each participant, at any time, had the right to terminate their participation.

As the opening for *Babydrama* approached, the media began to show great interest. We followed the same guidelines as above in all contact with the media. All parents were informed of who was present in the capacity of journalist and how their report was going to be made public. The parents could either accept this or exchange their ticket for another performance date. At the same time, we instructed the reporters, filmmakers and photographers that they could only document the children as an audience and not in private functions.

The same guidelines will be adhered to throughout the project.
About the research
Process and method
I have chosen to work for children

Suzanne Osten in the book *Babydrama* (Babydrama by Ann-Sofie Bárány 2008, 12):

I have chosen to work with theater for children since 1967 and have often been forced to combat what I call society’s child racism; an attitude that often challenges children’s ability to understand the spoken word. “Children can’t understand this play” or “They haven’t understood this, the language is too hard” are common objections that have followed in the wake of artistic theater for children.

The book *On the body and the scream* (A Corps ET a Cris: Etre Psychanalyste Avec Les Tout-Petits. In French) by infant psychoanalyst Caroline Eliacheff, describes similar conversations with traumatized infants from the age of three months. In the arms of a caregiver, the child meets another adult who formulates the truth - and healing takes place.

If a psychoanalyst for infants can speak with feeling, body and empathy to a three-month old child, the theater should be able to do the same.

As a director I am always looking for a way to expand the meaning of the word understanding. If we measure the words a child can reproduce from a play or a movie then all the adult critics would be right. But the sensual experience of words, gestures and feeling form a bigger picture. And why shouldn’t we be confident that our children can understand a theatrical performance when we have the confidence to allow them to wander around town: in malls, department stores and watch movies, play video games, watch cartoons, and look at photographs of other children.

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Modern research on infants covers new knowledge about how the infant; through facial expression, voice, body and feelings, learns how to become a human being. A theatrical performance is ideal for this play with facial expression, feeling and voice. However, the craftspeople of the theater must be given the opportunity to do a little research to come further in their work.

In this production I have worked with my co-workers with the basics of a theatrical performance:

*dramaturgy - text and subject matter*
*scenography space and light*
*the placement of the audience and moving them from place to place*
*the acting, the style and choice of choreographic expression*
*music, tonality and rhythm*
*the difference between an ordinary meeting and a theatrical, depictive meeting*
*the issue of what is genuine and what is a sham*
*the difference between a foreign language and our own language*
*humor*

We can ask ourselves if a baby has humor. If you had heard five infants laugh at a pun in the play you would be convinced that they do.

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*Medea’s children* is a drama about how children experience their parents’ divorce and is a model tragedy for children from 7 years of age and up. The drama was my point of departure as an artist and an updated researcher into theatrical performance for children. I realize that it is worthwhile to reconstruct our very sophisticated process of building a play. I had no idea that seeing children’s need for their parents and at the same time children’s right to and dependence on knowing the truth about their lives would create such a furor among the adult general public in Stockholm in 1975. My co-author, Per Lysander, and I had decided take a radical step: to use a classic tragedy but for children. We wanted to create a full-scale theatrical performance with adult professional actors and with a script with the literary language in tact (the Gullberg Swedish translation) and to write a modern version where children’s language was worked into the play. The children’s experience of living with these adults, and their struggle to understand the adult world was to be given form. That children think about suicide in connection with their parents getting divorced was well known. The divorce rate throughout Europe after 1960 had reached a historic high. The play is still needed as an existential classic and is still being performed and translated. Not, however, in the USA where what we call subsidized school theater is not available.

The English playwright T Stoppard has told the story of Hamlet through the supporting characters Guildenstern and Rosencrantz. In the same dramaturgic way we introduced children as the main characters in the world of the parents. Medea kills her children because Jason has taken another woman. These mythological child characters are in the background in the original drama. Nevertheless, the adults march into the nursery and constantly change the conditions for these children’s lives. They don’t kill the children. In our play we presented this as a dream that the children have. We also wanted to use the idea of catharsis in the Aristotelian sense. An emotional drama for children that contains redemption, although not a happy ending. The play was a scandal. Not in the way we anticipated: We had anticipated that the play would be criticized for its esthetics or that voices would be raised against the cruelseness in the myth, e.g. the Medea witch is the daughter of the sun and does some cruel stuff for her husband’s sake. Instead the criticism was aimed at one word in the lines that a child in the play says to the other child when explaining where babies come from, “And they fucked”.

The most important part of our analysis of the power inherent in adult responsibility and lack of empathy with their children provoked guilt in adults and turned all discourse about children’s theater on end. It was clear that the adults in the debate wanted to have total emotional control over what children see, i.e. no emotionally upsetting plays for children in school. Plays shown in school were not to cause children to criticize their parents or to create a feeling of “unease” in the children. Teachers ended up between a rock and a hard spot, caught between school and home. Society’s view of children as an audience in a theater has, throughout my years as an artist, irritated me. The view reveals double standards; it is unmodern and extremely ignorant of the actual lives and experiences of children. It was thought that a child had no defenses against the feelings or experiences portrayed on a stage or in a movie. This moral panic exists today for theatrical performances which few children see, and can be compared their unprotected existence in front of the TV or a computer. We worry about everything that can possibly happen to children. And a theatrical performance is exposed and open for debate; political action is taking place in a theatrical performance for children! Since then, I have worked with allied experts, educators, analysts, parents, children to give myself and the ensemble a platform of knowledge
to stand on. We have chosen to work with factual knowledge about children’s perspective on the story we are telling. We readily work with what we call a reference group, and through trial and error work our way through the process of creating a performance.

The thread connecting *Medea’s children* in 1975 with *Babydrama* in 2006 is not a taboo, but it is the perspective: *Medea’s children* was upsetting. *Babydrama* is not upsetting. WE - the theatrical group - want the parent to pay attention to their child. In the background. The drama that this report deals with - *Babydrama* - is about being born. A child wants to be conceived and wants to be born, that’s the subject matter of the story. *Babydrama* describes conflicts, the child’s own life and strong desire to conquer the world. In a series of scenes the clown parent meets their baby, somewhat confused. How can we meet? Who are you really? The mother in one scene regresses and wants to be a baby herself after a difficult birthday with the child. The parent’s demands and strict - “No!” causes the child in another scene to beat itself free on a big drum. Our audience from 6 months crawls towards the actors; expresses empathy and shows interest and is hardly frightened by the strong emotions on stage. We now know that they watch and understand. This is only a theatrical performance. But the performance is about a subject that can interest this audience; being conceived, being born. Living.

The debate about *Babydrama* has so far been about the following series of questions:

“Do they really understand this?”

“Isn’t this too much, can they manage, won’t they just forget everything?”

“Is this meaningful for them?”

For me, Ann-Sofie Bárány, and the actors; who have met 1750 children and their caregivers, and who for a period of 2 years have studied this subject in detail, this play for babies and the contact that we have made with the audience is the most meaningful we have achieved on stage.

The Babydrama project and the part of the process filmed by Bengt Danneborn as a documentary, show how we put the adults; actor and parents, experts and co-workers, in touch with their own earliest memories; their own infant experiences. The directing process with a script for an infant audience is to bring the adults in touch with the forgotten. And to establish a child perspective from the beginning. The purpose of working this way with the adult actors is to increase their sensitivity and make contact with and increase their understanding of the child who does not yet have verbal language.

Does an infant need theatrical performance? We human beings need narrative to put life into perspective and to interpret the meaning of life. Moses in the reeds is perhaps the first Babydrama; a story about the time spent in Mom’s womb? The Greeks created Drama with a capital D that tells about our fate, and the message in Unga Klara’s play for babies and their parents can be summarized this way: Welcome to your life. You journeyed in water for nine months. You came out to us. Here you meet the parents you didn’t know, but at the same time in your meeting with them, you recall that you are a self. Your drama begins. But if you who read this think: An infant isn’t conceivable as a theater audience. You are right. The infant is powerless but unique. The message is to the parents: The child you have in your arms is an independent human being who you are to assist in seeing and hearing our play which addresses your child.

The ensemble that played for an audience this young for the very first time observed that even children 6 months of age could perceive the stage, lighting, details, movement. The children search for expressions of feeling in the actors’ faces. They are interested in the full masks. The infants respond to
our dialog. They crawl closer and want to explore everything on stage. The audience varies, but they are interested and they want to see.

“My daughter sat absolutely still for 35 minutes,” one amazed mother says.

Curiosity is the same in all cultures in both children and adults; we crane our necks to see better, open our eyes wide, lift our eyebrows in surprise. Sometimes the situations in the play are as familiar as ordinary conversation and the children fall asleep or eat or explore each other. But their listening is generally very concentrated and recurrent. There is a special quiet. Our dramaturgy works. What a joy it is to be in the same room as an audience that is enjoying itself. At the theater you are not alone with your fate or your journey through life. It is apparent that we learn by watching others, feeling and playing. But once again:

How early does theatrical performance begin to speak to us?
Isn’t it easy to underestimate the intelligence of children because they are so short and can’t express in words what they feel?

When can children need theatrical performance?
Do you want to write a play for babies?

I put this question to psychoanalyst Ann-Sofie Bárány. She writes about and conducts research on the theatricality of the psyche. And she works with young children. I was fascinated by the French child psychoanalyst Françoise Dolto. If an infant psychoanalyst can talk to a child in the caregiver’s arms and if my friend Maria Öller can play the clown for a sick child in a hospital bed then shouldn’t I and my co-workers at the theater be able to do this too?

After all, Stadsteatern in Stockholm wants to expand their audience base.

I’ve been asked whether or not children understand the spoken words in a theatrical performance.
I’m talking about experience here. However, I believe that our audience actually does understand what we are communicating. My most important counter question is:

Who are the children and parents that we don’t reach?
Which children never see a theatrical performance or hear words or music?
Find the adults around those children.

Theater – play
Some misunderstandings

The following are some questions from educational talks we have had with adults about our work:
“What, are the babies going to play act?”
“In a way - they watch. They see and play inside themselves.”
“Is it like playing, like exercise or water aerobics for children?”
“No we act, they watch.”
“They can’t understand any text!”
“Language is more than text in a theatrical performance. It’s feeling - thought - address.”
“Are you going to hop around in leotards and pretend you’re cats?”
“We do it with our own bodies and feelings, in truly beautiful clothes, in red - black.”
And so forth.
We knew that perception is complete in a child at 8 months of age - sufficiently developed to see small objects far away on a large stage. “It’s possible at six months,” the parents said. This means that the child sees what we put in place on the stage. We don’t know what the child perceives of what we do and put in place. We see that they follow movements, facial expressions, changes in emotion and that they register changes quickly. Just as quickly as they change their direction of interest. Orient themselves in the room, often after sound. They look at light, follow the scene changes, suddenly see a detail beside them or see, just as suddenly, each other in the audience.

In gestalt therapy, we talk about background and foreground and by this we mean our ability to see and choose what is pertinent for us. Something that sticks out in the multitude of information available. Children do this all the time at our theater. Interest is a neutral position. The audience’s eyes follow what attracts their attention. Greater interest - the child’s entire body follows and their hands and extremities move.

But there is no method in the world that can force a child to follow a course of events on stage. The narrator must find the means - and use allure, beauty, rhythm, and surprise in the narration. When strongly interested, the viewer leans forward with their entire body and moves and turns around, communicates with their parent: Did you see that? Feelings are taken into consideration. The flow of consciousness that we come in contact with in infants cannot be manipulated but is influenced by the here and now in the contact. We have to be present ourselves, otherwise there won’t be any meeting. The actors report headaches after the performances.

Why a theatrical performance for infants?
Theater is widespread and popular among adults; even if the forms are vastly different theatrical performance is alive all across the country, often in topical revues. However, the understanding of theatrical performance and its potential remains poor, in my opinion after working in the field for 40 years. The adult audience knows very little about this art form for children. But in general and in a new generation of policymakers there is a positive desire to give children so called culture. Nevertheless, as soon as this comes to a head and is problematized, the adult artist is met with a hotbed of taboos, because the understanding of the child’s capacity and need for art is entirely undeveloped. (Do we agree on this?) When new parents however see that their own children less than one-year old are absorbed into a drama for more than an hour, their view of children and art changes.

My idea for a play - maintaining that art - for infants, was intentionally political: It’s we adults who have to change our view of art, and develop.

Is Babydrama a theatrical performance or interactive play with children?
This is a recurrent question. I was therefore eager to have the production assessed as a theatrical performance. I am keen on knowing my own boundaries as an artist within the frame of a specific art form, and I wanted to see if the guidelines that I had drawn up for the project were visible. Therefore, I interviewed the theater critic Lars Ring and asked him to describe his view of the performance. Whether this was a theatrical performance in his opinion as a theater critic, or a game for children where he felt alienated? Ring is considered by many of us directors to have the ability to read the directing in a theatrical production. In the interview Lars Ring repeatedly gives precise observations of how the
audience showed respect for the drama’s invisible boundary. And through my dialog with this professional critic I discover the genre description I need. The drama is visible. The performance establishes a magic boundary. Stage and audience are united but still separate, i.e. the drama also takes place inside the viewer. Participation takes place by means of the ritual boundary between stage and audience. Our unaccustomed audience seldom trespasses this border and when this happens it is entirely individual. *The Toe Girl* in the video does this. And she knows, I dare assert, that this is a theatrical performance. And she observes the performance. And the scene with the tub and the crying mother on the floor was also a scene that repeatedly attracted children to come and express their empathy with the character Malin’s emotion. The Toe Girl expresses what she’s thinking with her entire body, her empathy, and pets the actor’s face on the floor first with her foot and then with her hands.

Another way to gain recognition for your theatrical language is an invitation from a major *adult theater festival*. BITEF is an international theater festival that for a period of 40 years has been held annually. It has a good reputation among the major theater festivals in Europe. The festival invites the most artistically innovative performances to participate, and takes place over a period of one week. I was a member of the jury in 2004 and at that time had the opportunity to see how the festival worked from the inside. I also led a workshop on the theme childhood for 2 days. Unga Klara has been invited earlier and was invited again for its “innovative theatrical performance”. We gave five performances of *Babydrama* at BITEF. These were on September 21, 22 and 23, 2008, and I had the audience filmed to be able to compare their reactions with the reactions of the audiences at the Stockholm performances.

The unique experience of playing in different languages for infants (English, Swedish with Serbo-Croatian elements) is included in my research on *Babydrama*. The issue is:

A. Is *Babydrama* a theatrical performance?

B. that can thereby can be repeated as a performance and have the same effect on an audience born with another native tongue?

The language issue - How to make contact? Would the play’s ability to make contact with the audience hold up for performing in Swedish with elements of English and Serbo-Croatian?

Susanna/Sanna Dilbar, a Swedish actress whose parents were born in Bosnia Herzegovina, had translated some keywords and did her rhythmic clown performance in Serbo-Croatian in the play. The rest of the dialog we did in English (translated by Christer Dahl) along with songs in Swedish interpreted by Sanna Dilbar. The actors learned contact phrases or words of greeting, and how to introduce themselves in Serbo-Croatian. I made the decision to work with Sanna’s interpretations and ways of speaking that were more like adult language. Our festival interpreters in Belgrade, however, wanted to use child talk with many diminutive forms, etc. We requested the same target group that we performed the play for at home; infants from six to twelve months together with their adult companions, and the ordinary theater audience at the festival. (The filmmaker Dusan Makavejov saw the play 5 times!)

We performed in the Yugoslav Drama Theatre in Belgrade - on the main stage. We met the audience and met the babies in a large café and social hall, which we had to air out well in advance of each performance. (Smoking at the theaters there is a big problem.) We understood that it is unusual to put young children on the floor there, and to require that the adults remove their shoes before stepping onto the children’s rug. Unga Klara’s method on stage was met with astonishment: that the technicians themselves vacuumed the stage instead of hiring an army of cleaning women, which we were offered, was one thing, but that our *male stage technicians* also welcomed the infants and parents in the beginning when the audience is welcomed to the theater attracted a lot of attention. Unga Klara has a
way of working in which all technicians collaborate beyond their professional duties in all stages of the performance - even that was news for the audience in Belgrade.

The performances were overbooked and sold out. Enormous interest from media was waiting for us when we landed at the airport. All the TV channels reported on us, radio, daily newspapers; the performance attracted attention everywhere. We were interviewed along with the parents who had seen the performance. We also had a qualified documented table discussion under the auspices of the festival, the catalog was provided with text in English, and newspapers had called and interviewed me weeks before the festival began. The Swedish ambassador was there. A reception was arranged.

Conclusion: Our performance works the same in foreign languages. It is a theatrical performance and *Babydrama* has a fundamental ability to create contact. But that our young audience in Belgrade responded with similar reactions, attention and silence - even laughter - in the same places as our Swedish audience - was great confirmation. Of the dramaturgy!

We observed certain cultural differences, but overall our performance was perceived as a theatrical innovation and an invention in the service of the child perspective. I would like to thank the doyen in BITEF, Jovan Cirilik, because he treated this performance in the same manner as any other theatrical performance.

**Play or theatrical performance?**
The question from every journalist - in Stockholm as well as in Belgrade - is why toddlers aren’t allowed to run freely around our stage setting. Our answer is that this is a theatrical performance, an art experience for the youngest children with their parents - where contact is made through dialog, with eyes and acting. It is not playing around with objects. For everyone who watched the children watch a theatrical performance, together with the parents who assisted them, this was a strong experience. (Children who are too big for this performance need another form of address.) Parents who were interviewed spoke with pride about how their child *understood that this was a theatrical performance.*
The baby and art projects before us

Others before us
The field of research on how the young child reacts, develops in relation to its surrounding world, how it behaves, and what it brings with it from birth in the form of abilities is at the same time established and in progress. My text includes references from research institutions in a wide range of areas that have been significant to my way of thinking; they embrace both medical, behavioral and psychoanalytical thinking. In my field - the arts practically and theoretically - the initiative taken by the Norwegian government in the 90s pertaining to art for young children, has had concrete implications for artists in the Nordic countries. Happily enough development has quickly gone from the purely educational, utilitarian, to an art perspective that is bolder and far reaching. (Read more on [www.glitterbird.com](http://www.glitterbird.com)) In Europe there have been theater festivals for the youngest audience for decades, except that many people in the theatrical world are not familiar with them, e.g. in Italy, Ireland, Scotland.

A director who conducts research?
What does the word research mean for a working director? Isn’t all theatrical performance research - or a new investigation? Creating a theatrical performance, a new event in front of an audience, something fictional and something that has not existed before is investigative, so what is special about what I’m doing or asserting when I conduct artistic research?

The investigative actor
In an ensemble with many different wills I have learned to recognize the investigative personality. I would like to describe this as the drive to find out why something is a certain way. Just as much I am interested in exploring the path that is not chosen, I want to know why that path was not chosen! All of these questions contain the desire to put words to whatever it is that is discovered. In part this can be the result of a certain type of education, a tradition, e.g. the actor’s training may contain investigative practice (such as in the Lecoq school in Paris, where the students are allowed to conduct their own investigations/performances on their own time in their studio). My colleague the Spanish actor Cesar Sarrachu usually suggests, in the middle of work with a production, “lets do a little research”, i.e. he wants us to investigate the many forms of expression possible on the stage - and included in this investigation is showing the other actors what was discovered and discussing those discoveries. Different types of improvisations are a vital element; going parallel to the text, creating a new text, investigating rhythms, moods. This includes the desire to see the alternatives, finding the exact words for more nuanced meanings, perhaps delaying elements that were decided upon too early, the final result. The actor as a creative subject continues their investigation in their performance in front of the audience. The director who also participates in that period (which I have practiced since my time with the theatrical company Fickteatern 67 - 71, when we never had time to finish rehearsing and I suggested audience rehearsals) continues with the investigation. The freelance director is conventionally considered to be finished at the end of the direction period (she is contracted only for a few extra visits) and leaves on opening night. However, the director’s ideas continue to live or cause trouble throughout the creative process. If the director stays in the process the performance becomes a new living mass to investigate - in phase two of the work.
Each ensemble has at least one researcher. Often a hefty collision occurs between different rhythms and tempi in work when a many-headed ensemble-body jointly tries to move forward with a new unknown work. Everyone, generally speaking, works differently. Someone might follow the corporal path to the intellect, someone else might do the opposite. Someone takes an initiative emotionally and analyzes each and every step of that initiative on the floor, etc. A director I know goes through the entire course of events in minute detail first, like a choreographer, and gives instruction on the floor for the actor to take over. I gather all of those who so desire to participate in the investigative work together with me, and I try the entire time to discover new methods for the process. Many who have not participated in work like this find it chaotic. It can be, probably should be so. However, those who participate in the process and are aware of their own needs, incorporate it into or parallelize it with their own systems and get their own personal space. The benefit is that we share a process and discuss it and that we meet the audience at an early stage.

I had talked about Unga Klara (1975 - 2009) as a lab. When we do a lab we attack the work from many different directions; on the floor - the intuitive first - then dare test that which doesn’t seem to be finished, combine this with regular external lectures to gain new knowledge, and then out on the floor again. This is the investigative approach that unites some artists. Perhaps they are not that interested in safeguarding their secrets? In our theatrical tradition there are many inherited secrets. At some theaters colleagues are not allowed to watch each other’s rehearsals, even though they are in the same play! The element of uncertainty is constantly present, but those of us who want to “investigate a little” can see this element as the essence itself; we don’t know something for certain but we move on while investigating. We are entertained by watching our work in the making. Safety - knowing in advance, e.g. playing a scene like it has been finally analyzed - is an illusion that I definitely reject.

Investigate the audience

We investigate the audience in part by performing for them. The director who sits in the audience registers things (along with others on the team) and this allows an in-depth discussion about the actors’ (different) views of what is happening on stage between them and us. We also do deep interviews with the audience. A successful way of doing this is to play a scene and ask the audience to describe what is happening. Their response is about what is happening inside them when they describe what it is they have observed. This makes clear to those of us who are looking for way forward in our work, which aspects have occupied the audience. For example: a scene with masks in Babydrama came to deal with the terrible fear of different types of masks the adults in the audience had often experienced as children. At the heart of this discussion about fear was the color black, which was on the inside of our painted masks, about hiding it and so forth. When we then worked with the mask for the entirely unaccustomed young audience this heightened my intention to explore possible alternatives for using the mask, and this led to an enigmatic climax in the drama. Without knowing exactly what had happened, we noticed that the contact between actors - children was strong. An elevated intense feeling of dialog occurred.

Language and theatrical language

The children in our target group have not yet chosen their language (Swedish) definitely. This means that there are many avenues are open to us. They react to other languages with interest. At 6 months of age, nearly all languages are acceptable - even if they react to Chinese with special surprise. Nevertheless, it
appears to be in the focus of emotional address between the actors on the stage that we can read a theatrical performance even in other languages. The images in my video clearly show that this is the case for my young audience. We did an experiment without involving linguists (which I would like to do next time) by performing the same play abroad, with a few sentences in Serbo-Croatian, the native tongue of part of the audience - otherwise we worked with Swedish and English. Our idea was that the adults needed linguistic communication the most and in turn they would generate understanding through their bodies, which the infants would take into consideration in their contemplation of what was linguistically unfamiliar.

Theatrical language sends an emotional message up to the level at which it reaches a stylized cultural form, a coded theatricality, e.g. like the gestures in Indian Kathalkali dance. It is at this stylized level that we must be able to recognize the signs in order to understand the cultural meaning of the images. Nevertheless, experience and individual interpretation are the foundation of this understanding.

Research and goal
My investigation of the infant’s ability to comprehend a theatrical performance will definitely have more reach than successfully providing children with an experiment in baby theater - it will affect policy-making for culture. I hope to have created a performance model - the infant watching a drama in the arms of an adult - and the model is to make clear to you, the adult, that by seeing yourself in the child you can also experience yourself back in time; perhaps you will be affected by a performance and ritual - contact with your own history as an infant.

Family Guy: An adult baby
I also believe that we are on the way towards - or are already in - a new-old entertainment culture where we share with each other, children and adults, the same stories but with different frames of reference. The animated humor series Family Guy is an example of a growing popular and artistic genre that unites entirely different age groups.

Babydrama is definitely a performance for more than just the infant, but it is designed and directed so that the infant can benefit from the theatrical experience. The level of sound and the perspective create room for experience. However, it is a paradox that in this children’s room the adult viewer will also find an experience. Memory? That which is artistically defined can be both specific and touch many. At our performances, newborns and parents agree on different degrees of experience, young, older and an interested public, artists and youth.

If the theater borrows from the groundbreaking work of psychoanalysis, speaks to the youngest audience, and then is able to communicate a deep respect for each little individual in the audience, and if the forms of expression in the performance also have traces of broad entertainment (Pingu, clown) as well as poetry and personal drama, where then are we heading with children’s theater? Could it be, as I believe, that Babydrama approaches a vision of a new theatrical form? Children’s theater is not a segregated form of entertainment nor is it an administrative educational unit. It is the result of an ensemble’s artistically specified cutting edge competence that gives a unique experience to a broad mixed audience in a way that the young child feels welcome. The ritual is about entering into a community - and sharing your fate with others.
Cost?
A lot of baloney has run under the bridge - “performing for 12 infants and 40 adults is expensive,” is what some say. “Elitism” has been used to describe our intimate work with the audience. But art is dialog and quality - and it is up to the individual viewer to decide if there is a legitimate exchange between the viewer and the theatrical event. The British artist Damien Hirst’s rotting shark sells for millions on the art market. When he makes a skull of diamonds it is both shocking and reasonable. Extreme art and provocation are part of our artistic development and social discussion. *Babydrama* was created with revenues from the main stage at Stadsteatern in Stockholm. And the artists at Unga Klara develop their art with the aid of national and municipal funding. We have the space and time and wages and knowledge to conduct a qualified investigation. We can compare ourselves with a major company like Nokia which has an R&D lab that employs artists and scientists. The municipality and residents need to decide if we are to have artistic social development in the future or just be satisfied with counting how many attend a performance as a measurement of success without any qualified discussion about quality.

And what do we want to pay for? If a subtly functioning new human being needs to experience refined expressions of our culture - if we are serious about the most recent scientific findings about our abilities from birth, and if we value our own culture as something accessible for everyone, then put a price tag on it … There are no limits, as you know, to what we adults allow ourselves to consume in our need for entertainment. If the infant responds to theatrical performance - what should we cut back on then?
Everything in motion

Everything is in motion in an experiment, isn’t it?
When I create a production for infants I do not know if the final length of time of the production will be 10 minutes or 1 hour and 20 minutes. Observations made by experts and infant analysts are also tentative and uncertain. Uncertainty and speculation are present the first time we test a scene. Through the observations of the parents in our reference group we can make a comparison of the children’s reactions with what they see on TV or other things that they watch with interest. As we get to know the children, they teach us to see when we lose contact with them in our performance. With the aid of my own repeated observations and those of my handpicked co-workers and a dialog on what we see, for instance when working with music; the dynamics, the choice of instruments, if we dare use masks, how the infants react to changes in the scenography, voice quality, etc. And does hour humor come across and how do they respond to it? What does their laughter mean?

In this way we can create a clearer dramaturgy within a narrative where our own positions become visible to us. The method calls for the broad collection and testing of everything scenic in front of the audience. Everything that happens in the space for the performance contributes to shaping the action. (Erroneous conditions, such as changing from one room to another, late arrivals, randomness, things that are not clear for us may also be considered when choosing a new path to follow.) Everything is under discussion and new suggestions come all the time - there is a flowing aspect to my instructions. The video has caught this. You can clearly see this in the edited investigative scenes. Discussion and rehearsal at the same time! Analysis and decisions. Talk - do: a method that resembles play. Suggestions bounce around and turn around. We can hear the playwright Ann-Sofie Bárány comment, we hear my voice, the actors’ voices, our conversation is enhanced by what we see together. My method appears to be thinking aloud on the basis of what I see! You can see this in the improvisations the actors work with based on their own personal material. The improvisations are driven by the director, but are steered by the kind of answers I get. First, we do an interpretation of the interviews that Ann-Sofie did with each actor in advance over a long period of time. Transcripts of the interviews were written by Annika Salomonsson, my assistant who is constantly present and documents all the processes. She has the ability to suggest a schedule and training as the needs arise. She sets up a rolling schedule for instruction in the lab and she breaks down what she sees into details and time structure. (See the appendix to the chapter.)

I have taken this method of flowing dialog from Jacques Lecoq’s instructional method which encourages investigation (1968 in Holstebro, Denmark with Eugenio Barbas and Odin theatre where Lecoq gave a demonstration of his method in front of an audience of students). If 25 people see a scene and give a mutual interpretation of what is taking place there, then a kind of objective truth is obtained about the performance. Something can be read. The next day - without an audience - we reflect on what we have experienced, impressions are reformulated once again - and instruction includes new suggestions, and guidelines are established. New details. The schedule is revised. This is a matter of keeping the material and the conclusions in the air. Observation and dialog with the audience take place from the beginning up to the opening. Maintaining an open dialog with different groups during the direction process with a play is an element that I have developed more and more. In front of a new audience - infants and adults - how are we going to be able to cover and interpret what we see? We can’t interview the children.
We have material ready for rehearsal, it has to be rehearsed constantly. Songs, playing with sound, bits of dialog, movement, masks, clown acts are all tossed to the test audience. During rehearsal without any audience, I follow an established dramaturgy and spatial organization when I instruct the ensemble. Different positions are associated with different content. The actor orients themself, is conceived, born, meets their parents, meets their own will. Each position also has a determined contact spot. The stagehand who manages the arranged eye contact is outside the performance. We appear as giants before our audience.

Stay open
Keeping the material and conclusions in the air is also a characteristic of the process with a newly written play. This is brought to a head in Babydrama - since we still do not know how to interpret what we see. Our view of the audience changes all the while we work and we constantly receive new input from our audience. Everything must be examined. There must be a clear idea of what is to be examined - to discover what we will use. The script also has to be written in motion. Our forms of expression will formulate the issue to be depicted. Reflecting on what it is we are investigating is of the utmost importance.

The first draft of the scene about the fetus in the womb was written by Anne-Sofie Bárány in October 2005. We were going to do a test reading of this version and perform it with music. I wanted to prepare the ensemble as much as possible so that they could learn to climb in silk ropes (umbilical cords). However, learning this exercise proved to be time-consuming. Instead, we created a compromise for the test; movement with swings instead of climbing on ropes.

Below is the English translation of the final version of the script.

Text: Ann-Sofie Bárány
Translation: Christer Dahl

SURROUNDED BY WATER

ALL
(Song. “Embraced by water”)
Ho ho
Ho ho
Hello in there!

STEPHEN
(Song, “Embraced by water”)
Embraced by water
Embedded in my mum
Warming and worry-free
Just being
Body in space
In its universe
All is peaceful
All endless
I am there (here)

Mummy is munching
Wallpaper for the lime
The light tingles red
Rotate no weight
Journey out

Danilo, Clara, Malin, Torbjörn and Claire are foetuses in the womb. Stephen is the father to be.

CLARA
I am embraced by water
Embedded in my mum

STEPHEN
And Dad.

CLARA
Daddy!

MALIN
I was lying there needing
DANILO
Food
Little and often
Ideally
Slowly
Building
Warming and worry free
Just being

MALIN
Here it is warming and worry free
I just am.

STEPHEN
HO HO
HELLO IN THERE
HO HO
CLAIRE
IN HERE
HO HO HELLO
HERE

ALL
HO HO HERE

TORBJÖRN
I am sinking
She is sensual
Sexual
My mum and my dad.

DANILO
To be received by water
Not much of a choice
Maybe cease being

ALL
Cease... to be?

STEPHEN
Are you alive?

MALIN
In here
Inside

CLARA
Perfect pressure all around
Good support
Good temperature
I’ll go to bed

MALIN
I love
Love being embraced by water

CLAIRE
Not hot not cold
Stable
Nothing frightening

**TORBJÖRN**
Clucking like hens

**STEPHEN**
Luck...!!!

**DANILO**
Busy
Talking, talking
Talking, talking

**ALL**
Talking talking,
Talking talking
Talking talking
Talking talking

**DANILO**
Talk and talk
Talk and talk
Discusses
Big brother is talking

**STEPHEN**
(As Big Brother)
What's your name? Helloo. What's your name?

*Stephen takes a step into the womb (Repeated ad lib)*

**ALL to STEPHEN**
(Push Stephen out of the womb)
Careful, careful!

**TORBJÖRN**
Is it a bloody life out there?
Life
Out there

*Stephen makes noises*

**MALIN**
My body in space
In universe
All is still
Endless and enormous
I am there

STEVEN
(Dreaming proud dreams about the future)
Eton College!

*Stephen talks with the audience, ad lib.*

Do you know of a good school nearby?
Have you already put your child’s name down for a high school?
Have you got any special school in mind?
Maybe Waldorf?

**ALL**
Eton College

**MALIN**
Eton College
Neither good nor bad
Total physical contact
Embraced longing
Being there whole... whole...

**CLAIRE**
Nothing but water can embrace you like this

**DANILE**
So soft

**ALL**
(Whisper, echoing)
So soft

**ALL**
(Song: “Embraced in water”, last verse)
Embraced like never
Anything like water
Warming and worry free
Embraced by water
Oh it’s so soft
TORBJÖRN
Look!
My arms and legs
Wider circles

ALL
(Spinning in their sacks)
Look!
My arms! My legs!
Wider circles

STEPHEN
(Spins them round)
An arm! A foot!

TORBJÖRN
Chuck Berry sings “Johnny B Good”

ALL
He sang Go go, Go go

TORBJÖRN
GOOOOOD

STEPHEN
(Laughs)

ALL
(Laugh)

STEPHEN
Schhh
LISTEN!

MALIN
My mummy eats wall paper
For the lime
She’s looking forward to meeting me

CLAIRE
Mum eats wallpaper for the lime
Looking forward to meeting
DANILO
Falling back into love

*Sounds from the outside world, (underground train) gradually increase*
*The foetuses leave their sacks.*

CLARA
I’m falling
I’m falling
Falling back

TORBJÖRN
I’m falling back into my love
Falling
Falling
Back

MALIN
My love
I’m falling
The light

DANILO
The light in there
Soft and red
The light of dusk

CLaire
The light in here is soft and red
The light of dusk
In here

STEPHEN
Life!!!! Life ahoy!

CLARA
The journey out

ALL
Out?

MALIN
Farewell!
My journey
DANILO
The journey out
Farewell
Inside-out

ALL
(Repeated)
Inside!
Out?

DANILO
The journey out
Farewell
Inside-out
Spin a while
Ready

_They all crawl towards the audience._

STEPHEN
Readyyyyyy!
Steadyyyyy!

ALL
Oui!
Oui!
Oui!

_Malin climbs one of the “ropes” hanging from the ceiling._

MALIN
Oui, Oui, Oui

_In the production at Unga Klara the cloth (red silk) material used as the set for the womb was pulled away from under the hanging Malin and sucked through a hole at the back of the stage. Malin climbs down, looks at the hole and at the audience, then back to the hole. Malin exits through the hole. Claire enters, looks at the hole, says: “Ha Ha” Swings for babies are lowered on Claire’s command._

CLAIRE
(ad lib)
Maybe some of you babies want to try to swing, like we were doing just now? If so, you are welcome to try. But you don’t have to! Actually, one does not “have to” half as much as one thinks! What we do though, is stop asking questions about everything far too early in life.

Too many “have to’s” and too few “why’s”.
Fewer have to’s and more why’s!

Where was I before I got to mummy’s tummy?
This morning, when I woke up, I had a dream and I remember some of it.

ALL
(Song “Two tiny”)
When two tiny When two tiny
When two when two
Steam tractor so old
Two tiny turned up cakes
Get the smell of cream

CLAIRe
(Speaks during the song)
Steam tractor so old
Two tiny turned up cakes
Get the smell of cream
Mmmm
The author’s voice is on the paper from the start - and the first draft can be compared with the finished script in the book Babydrama (Bárány, 2008, Mammans mage). What changes between the draft and the final version is that discussion drives the form of the text, the interpretation becomes poetically concertante, an individualized choir of unborn babies discusses life in the womb, Dad is waiting outside - positioned close to the audience, stylized. Music was used to replace a series of psychological events in the final version. Scenic descriptions have changed places and influence the design of other scenes. Writing as a process with a living author and ensemble with its own text improvisations gives a fascinating interaction. The roles in my work have distinct areas of responsibility for the dialog and the approach in the lab - the playwright Ann-Sofie, the actor Malin, the composer Johan, the director Suzanne, the musician Torbjörn, the mask maker My, the set designer Magdalena, the stage manager Peter. I follow the impact of new impulses in the script’s changing yet permanent form as visible proof of openness and motion. This is a demanding way of working - it demands time. And clearly formulated intentions at the right moments.

When we now play this scene about living inside mom’s womb, with 5 fetuses each on an individual lifeline inside the silk womb, whether in Stockholm or in Belgrade the audience seems to get the same performance, all intentions have been investigated in a text that now has a body - the actors who have sucked the body and feeling from the script.
Appendix to the section
Everything in motion

Week 46 BABYDRAMA
Clown workshop with Maria Öller
* We will be in AKVARIET all this week because of the guest performance by Dalateatern *

Tuesday Nov. 15
10.00 am - 2.30 pm & 5.15 pm - 7.30 pm
10 - 12.30 rehearsal in front of the reference group with Suzanne and Maria. Suzanne leaves at lunchtime
12.30 Lunch
1.15 - 2.30 cont. rehearsal
5.15 - around 6.15 Reference group in Akvariet (mask & clown)
Discussion/ coffee afterwards in the Bandier room, floor 6 until around 7.30 pm

Wednesday Nov. 16
10 am - 5 pm
10 - 12.30 Clown with Maria
12.30 Lunch
1.30 - 4 rehearsal (with Suzanne, Maria & Johan) the couch, womb, birth, clown parents
4 - 5 Music rehearsal with Johan (can be scheduled for Thursday instead)

Thursday Nov. 17
10 am - 5 pm
10 - 12. 30 Clown with Maria
12.30 Lunch
1.30 - 5 rehearsal (with Suzanne, Maria & Johan) the couch, womb, birth, clown parents

Friday Nov. 18
10 am - 5 pm
10 - 12.30 Clown in Akvariet
12.45 Lunch *(Note: meet in Lagret after lunch)*
1.45 Warm up Music in LAGRET
2 Test babies
3 - 5 rehearsal

Saturday Nov. 19
10 am - 3 pm
10 - 12 text with Ann-Sofie
Suggestion: 10 - 10.30 Voice warm up/Music with Johan?
12 - 1 Lunch
1 - 3 Reading of Alcestis
**Sneak preview of week 47...**

Fall techniques with Tuija, music with Ulrika & Johan, possibly training in rope climbing with Victoria & individual work Tuesday - Friday 10 am - 5 pm & Saturday 10 am - 2.30 pm

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**Week 49 BABYDRAMA**

**Tuesday Dec. 6**

10.30 am - 3 pm & 6 pm - 8 pm **reference group**

10.30 - 3 rehearsal with Suzanne,

Short lunch around 12.30

2 - 3 Torbjörn & Ann-Sofie

5.40 music warm up with Johan

6 - 8 reference group. Birth, clown & “the family”

**Wednesday Dec. 7**

Costumes with Magdalena

**10.30 am - 3 pm & 7 pm - 10 pm**

9.45 - 10.30 Malin

10.30 - 11 Warm up with Johan

10.30- 11.15 Claire

11 - 12.30 rehearsal with Suzanne

11.15 - 11-45 Clara

11.45 - 12.30 Danilo

1.15 - 3 rehearsal with SZ

1.15 - 2 Stephen

2 - 2.45 Torbjörn

7 - 10 rehearsal with SZ (not Malin)

**Thursday Dec. 8**

10 am - 1 pm & 8.15 pm - 10 pm

10 - 10.30 warm up

10.30 - 1 possibly Victoria

Rastplaz is performing 7 pm - 8.15 pm

8.15-10 SZ in Lagret

Claire is performing in the Threepenny Opera

**Friday Dec. 9**

10 am - 5 pm

10 - 10.30 Warm up

10.30 - 12.30 replay with SZ

Claire rehearses Threepenny Opera 11 am - 1 pm

12.30 Lunch

1.30 - 3.30 rehearsal with SZ (Suzanne leaves 3.30)
3.30 - 5 individual work/music

**Saturday Dec. 10**
10 am - 1 pm
Rehearsal with SZ

This week...
The cloth will be arriving on Monday. Book time with Victoria and Magdalena for tying it.
About film as a research method

A method that I have made use of is to take video into lecture situations and test the power of the image on a living audience. This has been the equivalent of expanding the reference group to the area of film. The audience only has the video in this situation - and the potential to discuss with the lecturer observations about the baby on the screen, and what the baby is seeing.

A. *Surrounded by Water (Tiden l magen).* approx. 3 minutes (2006)
We edit two short films in the spring of 06 to emphasize the staged reality. We want to show the 6-month old children who are watching the performance from the arms of their parents, and to watch how the parents follow the performance. We show the part of the play that the audience reacts to. In real time. We shoot from the side; the children are small - we adults are big and our acting is big. The children seem to give the theatrical performance their attention; a surprising scene change on the stage - a large piece of red cloth disappears into a black hole. We hear a sudden silence - and then a cheering sound from the audience. What the film states here is that children perceive a staged reality. Are in a room of fiction.

B. *Masks (Masker).* approx. 3 minutes (2006)
We see the children in the swings that extend from the ceiling, and a sequence when the children approach the full masks that the actors hold like dolls on their arms, and then play with on their faces while communicating with the children with voiced sounds. The child is either a) still in the swing, b) on the floor and crawling, or c) is carried by its parent up to the actor. The focus is on the masks and the actors in interaction with the children who now begin to talk/make sounds to them. This section has given rise to a number of questions and speculations.

Eliacheff comments this section in our final movie, and Marie Ramm at the Centre for the Studies of Children’s Culture, has written in detail exclusively on the mask part of the performance. (See literature list.)

The full masks are white with an ordinary neutral expression. They resemble large baby faces. The white masks were complemented later with other skin colors by My Walther, the mask maker, sculptor and co-worker.

The interest in these sections was so great during the test screenings that in the final film we chose to include both the process when My Walther gives instructions for the use of the masks, and how we, with our reference group, work with directing and the author on the matter of whether or not masks frighten or stimulate a young audience. In the finished film, and by the second performance period in 2007, we have realized that the children want to see their parents’ skin color on the masks. Our leading baby Wilma has a dark-skinned mother. There are images that clearly show that Wilma’s interest becomes more intense when she sees the mask with a skin color she recognizes! In the finished film we can watch Wilma’s reaction to the dark mask.

These two films are shown at many of my lectures and seminars on children’s culture throughout Sweden. The image of an infant in deep concentration when faced with an artistic form of expression, shown in these short scenes, awakens wonder in the adult public interested in culture. *“They follow the performance such a long time.”*
C. A cocktail of theatrical process (Cocktail på teaterprocessen). approx. 15 minutes (2007)
The next step was to test the reactions to the actors’ own experiences. The focus is on how we work to develop the text, the rehearsal process.

We need money to make the film stronger - better cameras for close-ups without disturbing the audience. The other purpose is to expand the research, to make a more important film.

We apply for funding from the Swedish Film Institute (SFI) and the commissioner for documentary film and we apply for funding from Swedish Television’s committees for documentary film and cultural programs. We negotiate with the educational channel, UR/Utbildningsteve.

Collaboration and partners
The questions we meet along the way come primarily from artists, educators, researchers in theater studies, and from the art world. I also use these films in the discourse about art policies. How much does a child understand?

Showing the film is a way of getting new ideas and questions from other scientific fields. The film leads to knowledge. The medium reveals elements of the research: brief moments on film have the effect of expanding the issue of theatrical performance for the baby to a larger issue about mask and face, about empathy and imitation. Johan Cullberg at the Swedish Research Council gives me a tip about a possible collaboration on affect research conducted by M. Sonnby Borgström at Lund University. I initiate a dialog with her and she agrees to be a consultant for the performance, in the section Dare to use masks (Våga använda masker)

Our film partners are the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts (formerly DI), the section for artistic development work, which becomes the chief funder of both the film and the research. Another partner is Stadsteatern in Stockholm/Unga Klara which produced Babydrama in both versions. In 2007 we received extra financing from the section for artistic development (KU) at the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts to cover the lease of cameras so we could get close-ups of the audience from the front. We built the cameras into the set and filmed four performances (with the second ensemble). Stadsteatern in Stockholm gave us a cash contribution of SEK 30 000. The Swedish Film Insitute (SFI) gave us a grant of SEK 30 000 for editing costs. We were able to subtitle the film in English and show it in several international research contexts, such as at the World Congress of ASSITEJ in Australia in 08. And I was able to finance the filming of a guest performance of Babydrama at the BITEF theater festival in September 2008 in Serbia. We filmed three performances to compare the child audience in Belgrade with the Swedish audience.

D. Babydrama: A welcome to life (Babydrama - ett välkommande till livet). 23 minutes (fall 2007)
This comprises half of the finished film. The project’s improved economy; the funding from the department of artistic development (KU) at the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts makes it possible for us to film an interview with the infant analyst and author Caroline Eliacheff in Paris. She is one of our sources of inspiration, was one of Françoise Dolto’s students, and still works with infants. I have courted her for two years with questions and descriptions of our project. We show material to her that she can comment on in front of our camera. We have 4 hours of film from this occasion. Her reaction was, in brief, that she would never have been able to imagine anything like this, neither as a theatrical performance nor as film material.
After having tested film narrative perspectives we settle on a narration about a child that has never seen a theatrical performance. The editor for the documentary radio channel, Susanne Björkman interviews Ann-Sofie and I, individually, about our thoughts - and we talk about the analysis.

The linear narrative takes shape when Ann-Sofie and Bengt D follow Wilma from the time she is in her mother’s womb until she is five and half months old and comes to the theater together with her mother Joy. They see the play several times. The film’s line: A child/a viewer who watches a theatrical performance: Her reactions are for the very first time. The film includes the rehearsal process.

I show the film as part of many seminars in Sweden and for participants in seminars in many places around the world, e.g. Mongolia (child caregivers), Ethiopia (theater and film professionals), South Africa (professional artists and academics as well as open seminars), and for individuals at festivals who work with the exploding market for baby art festivals. This leads to many invitations for guest performances of the play and for the finished film, among others, in Ireland, Hungary, Poland, Italy, Germany. Invitations to symposiums on theater studies and cultural policies in Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland, Australia continue to drop in. I was invited to the Montreal Children’s Festival in 2008 to show the entire film, but we did not have the funding to finish the film at that time. (Unga Klara was awarded the major theater prize there in 2002 for The girl, the Mother and the Rubbish (Flickan, mamman och soporna).

E. The more extensive research film Babydrama: Our need for theatrical performance (Babydrama - vårt behov av teater) This version of the film is to be finished by the time of my report to the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts (formerly DI) in November 2009, appended to the written research report which I am currently formulating. At that time Babydrama, the theatrical project and the investigative report on film will be finished, i.e. the artistic research project will be concluded at about the same time as my paper in gestalt therapy On contact is submitted to GIS for approval.

Funding (2006 - 2009) was received from the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts (formerly DI) the department of artistic development. I have conducted this research within the framework of my professorship in directing. For the production of the film/DVD, the research report and the final seminar, slightly more than SEK 600 000 was granted.

(page 57 -63 missing: Uppsats summary)
On contact

The response of infants to Babydrama

By Suzanne Osten

Supervisor: Inger Haapaniemi

GIS International 2009/07/08
Introduction

My first thoughts regarding my thesis centered upon creativity as a possible response to deprivation. In other words, I was concentrating on the baby who has lost his or her mother. Or rather, who suffers from lack of basic qualities from her. The mother offers little or no point of contact at all: she is somewhere else (depressed), or she is threatening (resentful) or inadequate (won't acknowledge hunger, cold, or closeness).

Every baby who does not give up develops fantasies and isolated answers to that frightening situation. The baby tries to get in touch with whomever will respond, or starts to fantasize about the non-existing connection (the trauma).

Sometimes starts to create?

My own frantic creativity (which I have maintained tirelessly, it seems, for many years) and my deep curiosity regarding childhood, young theater audiences, and certain therapeutic models seem to have shown me the way to the point where the trauma arose. At the same time I have been looking for answers to the question of why certain contact points in my own life never did materialize.

Every day during the Babydrama production, when I and my actors communicated with children between five months and one year of age, as well as with their parents or guardians, I reflected upon questions of infant creativity under difficult circumstances, the infant's need of alternative support strategies if it is not there. I'm reflecting on my own road to creativity, and on Gestalt therapy's basic notions: contact (dialogue), presence, awareness.

Has theatrical work been my way of dealing with my original predicament: being a sick mother's baby? Since how early, in that case? I also realize that I have as an adult often used my creativity as a shield against closeness. Thus, contact and awareness of its boundaries, in the here and now — with a client — do reflect an earlier playing together: If the client does not dare to take the risk, to meet, it's because she/he doesn't know the way ahead. The trust is not there. In Gestalt the therapy's focus on the body itself, its sensual presence, I have been given an instrument with which I might be able to help the client: We are born to live in contact!
I. Babies need contact

To live on the boundary
“A small child, before becoming socialized, lives on the boundary: looks at everything, touches everything, gets into everything that lives. He discovers the world, expands his awareness and means of coping at his own pace: playfully serious or serious playing, he makes an ongoing creative adjustment to his own potential.”

— Laura Perls

Laura Perls’ reflections on children and their surface of contact with the world serves as a starting point for this paper. I will discuss the concept of contact — how it is understood in Gestalt therapy and how it may appear to an infant who encounters theater. In particular, I use experiences and observations from my own stage production Babydrama, a theater play intended for an audience of infants.

I articulate my new insights and explore recent theories about infant development. To trace the development of infant research during the last fifty years is to witness a field which is continually expanding and deepening — a synthesis of existential philosophy, biology, psychology, psychoanalysis, neurology, and more.

It is my wish that the reader will get a sense of how much this important and growing body of knowledge has to offer us at the present time. In the past, children were considered as little more than an undeveloped appendage to the parent. Now we can paint a picture of the history of humankind based on the infant’s innate capacity, and perhaps also formulate a thorough analysis of the young child, on a par with that of the more verbose adult human being. The fact that infants do not express themselves verbally doesn’t mean that they do not think and enrich the world.

When I decided on contact as the theme for this paper, I wanted to limit the discussion to how contact is experienced and expressed in childhood, at the beginning of our lives. My point of departure is the encounter of small children with theater and the actor and my observations of contact occurring in that context.

The central question for me in my work as a theater director has always been: What does it look like? In other words, How are feelings and attitudes expressed in the body? What makes the material from my Babydrama project unique is the long process it documents, spanning work over two years.

I will also draw on clinical observations made during my work as apprentice therapist, when I worked with a client with a newborn infant. This was during 2006, at the same time as I was rehearsing the Babydrama production. Finally, I will use some of the course literature to describe, from a Gestalt perspective, how contact disturbances can manifest in the client-therapist relation.

Babydrama, my theater experiment for infants, was developed and performed between 2005 and 2007 at my theater, Unga Klara in Stockholm. It was inspired by my long experience in children’s theater at Unga Klara (starting in 1975), as well as by my own Gestalt therapy process.

This paper explores baby drama through interviews with parents and therapists, my own observations of actors and infants, and selected portions of the recent literature on infant development, which functions as a tool to shed light on and analyze what I have seen and felt.

1 Perls in Smith, 1997.
My discussion is grounded in the belief that theater can create moments of great value for a distressed child who lacks parental support. The subject matter is of great personal importance for me, because contact through theater has been my lifeline. Talk of contact, for me, is about nothing less than the unique human ability to observe the environment, gather information, and exercise the conscious ability to establish intentions and express a will, present from the youngest age. The Gestalt perspective and the story of my own personal growth runs like a thread through the text, and I also describe how knowledge about the circumstances of my own infancy has influenced my thinking about this topic.

Writing this text has been a gratifying experience for me, since it has allowed me to combine my own desire for contact, my passion for the theater, and insights into childhood, parenthood, and the relation between children and parents. As a theater director, I'm constantly working with the concept of contact, which takes on various shapes, as contact between, a) dramatic text and audience, b) actor and spectator, c) actor and actor, d) actor and text/situation. When, in 1997, I encountered the Gestalt therapeutic interpretation of contact through the work of Marcus Goth, it fit organically into my theater experience. In the theater, we often talk about contact, how to discern when it is present, and what it is like when contact is lacking.

In the GIS therapist education and in my clinical work, contact issues are the very foundation of our collaborative reflection and work: how contact flows through the here and now, seeing and feeling the other, being aware and curious about how we are blocking, interrupting, breaking contact. I understand contact as an inner need, and as the deepest of all human characteristics: the ability to reach out.

Looking at an actual baby in its parent's lap shows us real life. The baby's journey is after all the story of our own body. Our own journey to life is present at every cellular level in our bodies. The very opposite of the open child can often be witnessed in the disturbed contact and blocked responses of the adult world.

As the reader has no doubt already noticed, I will, in this thesis, deliberately and freely move between the fields of Gestalt practice and the theory of contact and its functions and boundaries, as well as theater aesthetics and practice, and, more generally, communication through art.

**Children understand our words**

Traumatized infants reach out for language, need to understand in order to survive. That is my understanding of Caroline Eliacheff's analysis of three months old infants.² This is an extraordinary book which I have quoted from during several seminars, to the astonishment of the adults listening.

The neonatal physician Hanna Kapadia, who is a member of my Babydrama group, described during a lecture how a child physician at the Sachska Child Hospital amazed the hospital staff some years ago when she asked if anyone had told the surviving, prematurely born twin in the incubator that his brother hadn't survived the early delivery, but had died. Then the doctor talked with the boy in the incubator and after that conversation, when he had heard the truth about what had happened to his brother, the boy was finally at ease and began to eat.

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Ronald D Laing’s statement that humans are born with an existential need for truth, or freedom from mystifications, fits very well in with these unusual observations. Hanna Kapadia’s description shows us how the child physician turned words into a corporeal form for the baby, in a way that reflects the infant analyst who studies the bodies of children.

I drew this simple conclusion: if there are adults who talk to very young children in a way that can comfort them, then theater, through actors, must also be able to do that — to feel and state, in and through the body, what we mean. I contacted the experienced child analyst and writer Ann-Sofie Bárány, and we began to forge our experiences into a theatrical piece for an audience of infants. We discussed and shared our knowledge, and came to the understanding that theater can communicate in a corporeal way, it can endow thoughts with a body, transmit language in an embodied form, and likewise with feelings.

**Interpreting a young audience**
Having observed children audiences during forty years, I have learned to pay attention to very small motions in a body, a face with mouth open and saliva dripping. My theatrical side, with its imaginative urge to control and create meaning, has to wait patiently when I wait for the audience’s response. The therapeutic method of paying attention “sideways”, to adapt to the pace at which things are brought forth and resist premature interpretations, was of great use to me during the infant theater project.

Gestalt training has also offered me the opportunity to train in recognizing a small corporeal response. Yaro Starak taught us how to TRACK each others motions. We learned how to peer, like Indians in the forest, for any sign of involuntary motion that 2 people make during conversations. In this exercise, one person talks while the other silently observes all the subtle micro movements the speaker makes. This is of great use in theater for infants, where we must vigilantly look for signs of contact (not least during our trial performances when we found ourselves looking for such signs in the midst of infants, parents, experts, and baby strollers). The point is to observe how the child listens.

They look captivated, attentive. Not paralyzed in fear, motionless, but vivid and still! The hands are moving, they are breathing calmly.

My theater education has given me the tools to notice the silence of mental presence. I have noticed, during the last years, that I have become calmer, and that I don’t rush others as much as I used to. By seeing more clearly, I make more things happen, because the energy for things to happen is already there. Actors are inheritors of the tradition of listening. They constantly keep one ear – figuratively speaking - to the audience and the other toward themselves and their fellow actors.

An audience of infants cannot, of course, give me verbal feedback, but researchers agree that preverbal children constitute an ideal test group for presentations, because they are especially perceptive to other people’s behavior before they start speaking. We find ourselves at the outer rim of a vast body of knowledge, and my path forward has been through observations made in the theater.

**From Spock to Baby lab**
I have, like almost everyone born in the years following World War II, been raised in accordance with a popular American handbook on infant rearing, written by the child physician Benjamin Spock. Spock was
synonymous with common sense, hygiene, and the satisfaction of material needs, rather than with the fulfillment of the esthetic faculties.

The book even induced a feeling of security and tradition in me when I was about to become a mother in 1965. At the same time, new findings were reported from Switzerland by the obstetrician gynecologist Frederic Leboyer. He introduced a radical perspective on the needs of infants and influenced not only me, but our whole health care system.

In the 1960s, researchers like Sylvan S Tomkins started regarding infants as subjects. Today, the question of what infants think and perceive is at the forefront of the whole field of inquiry. No longer is lapis dripped into the eye at birth, or infants removed from their mothers and swaddled. Nor are infants handled as if they couldn't feel pain. In Sweden, anesthetics have been administered prior to surgery on newly-borns since the 1970s.

Elizabeth Spelke is a cognitive scientist at the famous Baby lab at Harvard University's Department of Developmental Studies. Spelke and her students have been investigating the newly born baby's implicit knowledge for thirty years. She has said: "I realized that we didn't have a clue about what babies actually understood. I really wanted to study these emotional and social issues. But it seemed as if we first needed to know some basic things about what infants perceived and understood."³

To gain insight into these topics, Spelke has studied infants in specially constructed theater rooms, with "magic show" installations. Among other things, she has found that infants look for a longer time at unexpected events. At the age of two and a half months, infants know that objects exist even though it is currently not visible. They also know that the world before them is a real world. Spelke's students at the Babylab can hold a baby's attention for up to ten minutes.

Unga Klara theater lab
In this paper, I wish to emphasize that art is even more attractive to babies. Infants in our audiences have observed actors with continuous focused attention for lengths of time between 45 minutes and one or two hours. We have observed that babies from the age of eight months are fully perceptive of details in even the tiniest objects on our biggest stage, Lagret at Unga Klara.

The parents in our trial group even suggested that babies as young as six months could be included in our age-defined target audience group. Even young children of about four months have the ability to establish or avoid contact, and to move away, turn away, withdraw, or scream when they don't want to watch the performance. The theatrical tradition to which I belong aims to provide art to children in a segregated adult society, as a life reinforcement or sometimes as a sort of substitute for contact with a parent. We call this a child perspective in art. We also point to the necessity of solidarity with children, based on a power analysis. We regard children as dependent on adults.

The psychoanalyst Ronald D Laing put me on the trail to investigate power in childhood early on, in the 1960s, with his writings about family society and family psychology. He describes the child as an intentional being — a being searching for meaning. The child depends from the very beginning on adults to help her find truth, but finds herself surrounded by lies.

³ Talbot, 2006.
**A theatrical investigation of the small child's contact ability**

Babydrama is a unique experimental project investigating drama for infants in "full scale": a professional production, performed on a big stage with full availability of resources. The play is a scripted story aimed at infants. The stage accommodates several settings. The ensemble consists of actors of varying age, interviewed and selected for the ability to maintain a uniquely intense commitment to establish contact. Whether the actors themselves had children or not is not regarded as significant.

The aim I had set was to investigate if we could reach an infant audience, and to see how the children reacted to theater, individually and as a group. The script and the actors constituted one starting point, and infant analysis was another.

Françoise Dolto, a physician and psychoanalyst, did pioneering work in France after World War II. She talked to infants. She watched in pain as infants died at her clinic every day, and started a trial routine: every day, the nurses were to speak tenderly and intimately in each contact — during a short time every morning and evening, with no playing or feeding. Contact based on language helped many infants survive their illness and state of abandonment.

Today, there are several strains of therapy where infants are talked to in the presence of their parents. Daniel Stern, another theoretician whose ideas are of great importance to my work, describes this method as based on the idea that the mother has a real baby in her arms while in her mind she has a mental representation of the baby.

My method as director is therefore clearly influenced by psychoanalysis and Gestalt therapy, the latter of which I have been training in for the last ten years. My method is dialogue: I observe with my senses, draw, write, film, reflect together with the recipients, the others. Then I try again. I ask the actors about the baby in the audience. I read the work of researchers and ask them what they see. What is contact? How can we recognize it?

The therapist Per Erwander, who works with troubled young children whose parents find it hard to make contact with them, describes contact as meeting "a gaze without control". I have been trying to establish theatrical contact with infants, a group which doesn't speak. In trying to inspect this attempt to make contact with our youngest audience ever, I use material that includes:

- Video material documenting how, during a six-months process, we develop the drama
- Performances recorded with two cameras, one photographing the stage action, and the other the audience's reaction
- My work diary, including observations of the audience
- Conversations with the actors, who have acted in 98 performances, with a total audience of 3448 persons, whereof approximately 1470 infants in the rough age span of six to twelve months

The reference group consisted of:

- Infant analysts, neonatal doctors, midwives, parents
- External experts, like Per Erwander who works in Gothenburg with families in need of support
- My advisor, the Gestalt therapist Inger Hapaniemi, who has seen the play performed

We did the read-through for Babydrama on October 5, 2005. Performances were grouped in two periods, one between January 12 and March 31, 2006, and another between April 27 and June 9, 2007.
The performance itself is an experience that cannot really be described with words, because it gives the spectator the feeling of participating in something crucial together with the children in an ongoing now.

**Criticism in the media 2006-07**

As we were developing the Babydrama performance, critics charged us with exploiting infants. Such criticism, if it aims at protecting children from ever increasing demands from parents or society, has a point. But in the discussions that took place in the media at the time, facts were jumbled up. New sensational data regarding the cognitive capabilities of infants were bundled together with things like baby swimming, baby salsa, baby cinema, baby readings. At the same time, battles raged over irrelevant topics like the claim that contemporary "café latte mothers spend too much time in coffee shops", with the alarming consequence that their "children's motor development is impeded", according to a Norwegian news report. So, on top of all this, why should babies now go to the theater too?

The well-known Swedish pundit Hugo Lagercrantz, an expert in neonatology, claimed that there is no point in showing a thing like a theater performance to children below the age of three, since they forget everything and continually redevelop their knowledge. At the same time, Lagercrantz presents remarkable insights into permanent language acquisition in infants, in a Swedish daily paper. According to Lagercrantz, if an adult speaks Chinese forty-five minutes every day for one year, the child remembers the language and can speak it when grown up.

Unga Klara's baby drama project was debated and criticized in print, radio, and TV, and there was even a web site against the project. An authority on education in child psychology stated on radio that "parents can play theater with their own children rather than bringing them to baby drama! [...] They are too small to watch theater."

(No-one mentioned the fact that one hour at the theater is like a meditation session when compared to a day spent at Ikea! But children seem able to cope with shopping malls and more. Neither did anyone point out that many parents use the TV as a "parking station" for their children, and that commercial as well as pedagogical programs are produced and broadcast on TV).

I put together a group of child experts who found the idea of baby drama a constructive one, and arranged a series of seminars in the hope of testing some of the criticisms that had been raised against us. During the fall of 2005, many of my colleagues at Stockholms Stadsteater were unfavorably disposed when I presented the Babydrama project. "Completely ridiculous", commented an old coworker of mine. My actors at Unga Klara didn't fully understand the proposal. "It will work for ten minutes maximum", someone said. The project was to be a deep learning process for me, where the only stable ground to work from was the observable basic needs of infants.

My own journey in Gestalt therapy also helped me to find answers. I myself had to work my way through to contact. To take criticism seriously is contact. To meet is to receive. The actors' ability to listen is the material we have to work with when we create a play, but we must also listen attentively to the adults' hesitation and fear.

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Whom do I write for?

"I believe that the arena of childhood will situate some of the most exiting ideological battles of this century and that progressive thinkers must begin their interrogation of that territory now. In a secular pluralist society, where adults and children wear the same clothes and read the same books, how do we reach a consensus on the kind of morals, ambition and characters we want to share with our children?"

— Libby Brooks

My goal has always been to reach grown-ups in general, to widen their appreciation of aspects of childhood and adults’ power over children, because adults are the ones who can change the circumstances that children live under. I think the Gestalt community needs to be self critical, just as people in the theater world need to be. There are new facts out there in the real world, and sometimes we base ourselves on old knowledge.

As a young director, I wanted to reach children outside of the sphere of control of adults. It was a radical idea to perform for children and offer them better contact and insights than the adult world had been able to give me and my generation. Over the years, I learned to negotiate with the grown-ups in order to be able to show children something that I thought was the truth. I began to teach and reach out through adults and their institutions.

Now I have reached full circle back to the very beginning of the child’s dependency, and I address both the parent and child directly: that is the most powerful relation there is. My intentions are clear, namely:

a) to let the parent experience the child as a separate person, and

b) to reach the child and speak about the drama of life.

I also want to deflate the myth about the weak, resourceless little child, and in equal measure I want to do away with the tale about the lone strong child who manages everything on its own. "Children are not made of glass”, as Ann-Sofie Bárány often told us during our work: "We are made to survive”. Children continually show us what it means to live in contact. (But the adult world knows how to remain blind and deaf).

Through my cooperation with Alice Miller in the 80s, I learned to see through this perspective, to understand whose needs we need to address first. There is a power relationship that we need to be weary of. The theater is a potential meeting place, a place where a grown-up and a child can reach each other outside of the normal battle grounds of school and home.

The French child analyst Françoise Dolto has been the inspiration for the goal I set for the baby drama, with her assertion that “The most important thing for humans is that which strengthens their lust for life”.

Audience arrival

Members of infant audiences are sometimes shy when meeting adult strangers. But parents are also nervous that the children will behave "inappropriately" at the theater, and are extremely uncertain about which rules that apply. We developed rules as a support:
Adults, including the actors, may not carry members of the audience, pinch their cheeks, kiss them, photograph them (without permission), carry on conversations not involving them, or embarrass them while they are eating.

The children have various capabilities to take them into the theater: they can walk, crawl, be carried, or sit in their stroller (a safe world they can bring along). Most of them want to enter by their own means, some far ahead of the others.

**Diary**

**From the first trial**

Their eyes clearly wander searchingly between faces. We have to film this! We can see how the child chooses amongst the dialogues between the speaking faces. The breath and the body react to the new scenic proposals. The breath rises and falls. Small, frozen moments — they freeze — of intense attention. That's when the child is at its most immobile. It looks like a moment of escape. Is Gustav afraid? Paralyzed? No, his breathing is even.

Pia: no contact. Averts her eyes, looks like crying, head turned from her mother, the body wants to escape, no contact at all, falls asleep.

Pia: wakes up, looks, new contact with the acting. Completely different attention towards the mask in the corner, checks out her neighbor and a detail in mother's bag.

The spectator is sliding in and out of contact, like we adults do at the theater, but the child's body shows it in an obvious way.

**From the second trial**

We try out the new text passage. The actors don't know the "Hospital" passage. We try anyway. The reference group is there.

- There is interest and curiosity at the beginning. The curtain, look! Gone! Technician Lisa should say this when she takes away the sofa also! Everything should have this magic! Disappear, exist. . .
- Then we need to keep the attention with new offerings. We should use this in all introductions. Curtains, look gone!, should recur, remind, with variations. Good when D shouts out the children's names! They react!
- Attention, the parents also request the children: "Look!" They point. But the children don't follow the finger. They follow sounds.

Actress Malin at the floor in her baby position, wrapped up in the carpet. Is this scary?

Amazing moment: they come, crawl, they want to go to her!

Contact in the meeting with the actor: I feel it immediately, living, intelligent contact. Dolphins. Incredible. They look at her, they listen, breath calmly. Some crept closer. Malin's head isn't much bigger than theirs. Meeting between actress Malin and a child, Inger, particularly long. How many seconds? The child blinks calmly, Malin doesn't blink.
Another child lets the eye contact remain with Claire at the tub. The water has attracted Ville. Claire splashes a few drops. He looks down into the tub. He turns away, looks that way again, looks at his mother, "Did you see?" Looks that way again. Sits down, looks at her, "What are you doing?" Claire brings her text about the starfish to him. She is a bit aggressive. He seems interested.

In the now: feel flow, be able to withdraw, satisfaction.

The well-developed baby seems completely free and establishes contact and withdraws and receives independently what is offered. Our prejudices about babies are that they don't have the energy, don't understand, get confused. Don't know what they are. Forget everything. And so on.

We notice that they, contrary to what others claim, know the limits of their self, have an interest in the other, can experience a sated satisfaction, withdraw into calm. They can remain in contact, can be in calm, together. They think, there is intense inner activity, they process the theater experiences. The thought is visible, like a palpable silence, something you can touch.

**From the third trial**

Abrupt beginning on new green stage. Some children are worried already when they enter. New space today. New entrance. Green and black. Nothing red, that makes them more worried.

Tried clowns for the first time. Red noses hanging from a string around the neck. They accept to put them on their nose. A bit heightened interest.

We do not make a magical beginning. That makes it more messy, not very good.

They don't like that we're not making contact like we usually do, calmly and steadily. They are already missing the big room. The others more restless, the children are kept from seeing, experiencing, by the accompanying adults. Damn they are disturbed, interrupted by hugs, kisses, when their heads want to turn towards the performance, or away (too noisy, scary?).

**Welcome to life**

The baby drama performance is about joy for life, meaning, contact, and the conflict inherent in having a will within a relationship. We see the child's arrival into life as an act of the will to live and be born, then meet the parents and thereby be born existentially, obtain a self, claim one's independence-dependence.

The task was to attempt to achieve contact for the baby in a certain theatrical meeting, to show scenic human meetings between actor and actor, and between actor and audience.

The baby is never an isolated person, but always interacting with the parents. Stern talks about the dyad, or the triad, with mother, child, and father.

With these six months old children we encounter their fundamental relations. Twelve young people at the time, in the front row, on the lap of an adult, meet the grown-up actor and the story at a theater. It is a theatrical meeting the first time. It is something new for everyone involved.

When I start the process I assume that we adults who are strangers can establish a meaningful contact with the individual, the child, with our art as the link. That is my great hope. The audience watches six actors relate, three men and three women.
Diary
I am touched when I watch the long necks that the infants extend when listening. They reach towards us to see, hear, feel regardless of the half-finished text.

We had expected that infants could handle theater for a maximum of ten minutes at a time, but tests showed that we can construct bigger arcs for many of the twelve.

Theater contact
As a director, I make sure that my play offers contact, that is presence. The actor's breath, movement, gaze, listening, feeling all touch the senses in the same now. The actor's gaze can rest directly on the spectator and spoken lines can be directed in the same way. Chosen moments of contact are staged.

The actors listen to their audience's reactions, and can answer, adjust their tempo, answer in the now: so-called improvised moments. They listen and sometimes perform while maintaining contact with each other. They don't always look at each other when they speak and move, but they always listen.

In my theatrical work, I use concepts like making contact. That is our purpose before the performance, during rehearsals, and afterwards. We ask about the spectator's own experiences, even if they diverge from what we had wished. We need the spectator in order to deepen our experience.

We often ask, What did you feel? because we want to know if we made contact. We ask, Did you understand? We want to have an exchange about what we are narrating. I, the director, am the representative of the audience in the theater hall, and I must see with the audience's eyes. Without contact between performance and audience the play turns into a kind of mechanical act. We see without feeling. It is a play, a game that assumes that there are participants.

Diary
Sometimes we impede contact, complicate things because we're in too great a hurry.

December 19, 2005, a letter to us from Ann, a social worker.

Beautiful colors from the ceiling made the atmosphere warm and welcoming for everyone, not least for the small babies. However, the atmosphere was somewhat disrupted when the three babies were to be put into baby sitters suspended from the ceiling. The idea is wonderful and very surprising, but a bit cumbersome and therefore the tempo was interrupted ...

. . and felt that things happened a bit too fast at the moment when the babies were to crawl to the stage during the party. I think there would have been more who would have come closer if there had been more time. Many looked a bit hesitant at first and were about to leave, and then it was suddenly too late.

I wonder how a baby who is deaf or blind would perceive the performance. I came to the conclusion that, because of the proximity of the actors, and the sensuousness, they would also be able to relate to several parts of the play, based on their special capability (to feel).
**No contact**

It is important to point out that professional actors as well as amateurs often perform without contact with their counterpart on the stage, without "feeling" the things he is telling the audience about. He can perform in front of the audience while not having any particular experience of the words that are being spoken. The theater can be mechanical, just imitated life.

The spectator, however, can nevertheless autonomously feel and create meaningful images and experience real feelings. "It's only theater," I often say as a comfort when we fail to create contact with ourselves and the audience. We demand of ourselves to give, to feel and establish full contact.

The milieu of the theatrical arts is plagued by the word "authenticity." I think what this is really about is our suffering because of the lack of contact. We want to have an authentic meeting, which occurs all too rarely. In life, more often than not we experience lack of contact in intimate relations.

According to Daniel N Stern, we have a tendency to block out and refuse to see what is actually happening. Infant researchers must train to be able to observe and interpret clinically important events. This process, which demonstrates the crucial importance of small, repeated behaviors in the relation between a mother/guardian and a child, is called microanalysis. Stern and other researchers have used film to be able to freeze time and cast light on events that take place in the child-parent relation but that we usually don't notice.

Stern, who is influenced by humanist, existential, and Gestalt therapy, stresses the intersubjectivity in meetings and his research follows a microanalytic approach. He focuses on the subjective aspect of every present moment, describing such moments as short, evanescent now-experiences. Moments changing in a matter of seconds.

George Downing, with a background in Gestalt and body therapy, shows parents "microfilmed" sequences filmed in slow motion. The parents might have sought help for problems with eating, for example. Watching such films with the therapist, they are able to see how their own behavior is lacking in some respects. In the extended seconds of the film (these are brief events that have been sped down) they see that the child is reaching out for food, but the parents don't notice the important moment because they are having a discussion.

This moment that has been isolated and preserved can help the parents to study and repair the missed opportunity for contact. The parents see the child's relation to them clearly as if on a stage. "There: the child reached out. Can you see?" Therapists doing this type of work focus on the moment when the parent succeeded in seeing. This has inspired me in my baby drama work to offer parents the opportunity to watch their children watch theater — an offer to see the child in contact with an aesthetically represented world.

Thus, a central question in my work is: Can theater teach the parent to see the child by means of the actor's and the text's seeing the child? Can we imitate deepened contact after seeing it in others?

The idea of learning from each other was at the basis of the Maisons Vertes preschools started by the analyst Françoise Dolto. At these schools, children and parents were allowed to socialize and play in a good environment with creative rules and to learn by watching each other. Parents are also able to sign up anonymously for a session with a therapist if they have questions.
In Gestalt group therapy, the learning process takes place through the insight into the other participants' process. We learn about ourselves by being in contact with others. In the theater space, there is room for this shared now.

Diary
I notice that I get irritated when parents don't pay attention to their children's struggling heads, who are trying to see the stage. H, is left to struggle and wants to see. I want to rush there and point it out to them. But I resist the urge, of course. I'll have to ask Ann-Sofie B to write in the prologue that the adults are expected to facilitate, to let their children follow the play. Our perspective must be respected. I get angry.

Performance for a baby
The show started with 20 minutes of personal introductory meetings between each child and actor, where names were exchanged and the parents were greeted and handed name tags to wear.

During the performance the actor came back regularly to this baby. Personal contact, eyes, name, presence, word. At the end there was a real goodbye, person to person. The actors and their behavior towards the audience were devised by the psychoanalyst Ann-Sofie Bárány, who wrote the plays for the actors and me in a collaborative process. I was still attending the training program at GIS during the autumn of 2005 and early 2006.

I directed a second version of the drama in 2007 with three new male actors, and arranged for this process to be filmed. In this version, we refined the first meeting, so that the audience was received by the theater's actors in the foyer.

The children were at first on their parent's lap (or at the parent's feet!). Further into the show, the babies had access to several modes of moving or contacting the actors, even climbing on them to get closer to see a chosen scene or moment.

We also deepened our listening ability in the second version, and became more aware of our constant presence for the children: a floating, transparent attention. Still the invisible line between spectator and actor, like a border of contact, a boundary, was established. This line — which demarcates the actors' otherness — respected by almost all the infants.

One theme in the drama is the act of being born, which the young audience recently had experienced: The life choice. The journey in the mother's belly. The birth.

The biological beginning of life is followed by the baby's existential birth as a real and living being. This can only happen when the baby is seen. This second theme is the baby's meeting with the parents, the conflict between several subjects. All this takes place between the actors in metaphorical form and through spoken words, and also through songs, pictures in the stage set (appearance and disappearance of objects, curtains, etc), genre play (different acting styles, stylization, masks).

The focus of my attention is the infant's need of contact, and how we adults can visibly see it expressed as through body language — they show us answers. In a film from April 2006, direct frontal

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Laing, 1961.
takes of their eye glances reveal that they choose to direct their glances and stay there. In May 2007, we can observe that they watch and move forward, make rhythmic gestures, and show shifting expressions while following the play. They imitate the spoken words, mimicry, moods and gestures. We can see simultaneously the same direction of attention and moods in several faces in the filmed sequences.

We also see in a dramatic way how differently the babies are supported by their adult companions. In the films we see the babies, after they have been seated and introduced, contacting the actors by touching, talking, crawling towards them, caressing them! We have even filmed a baby caressing a face with her feet. (The actors were instructed not to interfere with parents' holding. Actors did not carry the audience members or caress them, and they always waited for the spectators initiative).

Questions to Ann-Sofie Bárány
Suzanne Osten: Why did you want to make Baby drama?

Ann-Sofie Bárány: It has to do with the baby's isolation. Dependence is not everything, the baby always has its own world. That is a reality. The baby has a life of its own from the moment of conception. This life is partly one of dependence, but nevertheless wholly its own. There is a quality of mystery in every individual.

(This new type of theater spectator, the infant as the subject of the performance, is something completely new in the theater. The baby is not only entering the stage but the world, presenting us with its needs, innate capacities, and "implicit knowledge", showing us the potential for receiving and giving full contact. It is able to get what it wants, show satisfaction, and make an obvious withdrawal.

The baby drama is not a clinical "lab play", but still it gives me an opportunity to underline that every unique baby drama we witness must be understood as a subjective one. The spectator/adult can also, with no real baby attached, establish a special relation with a child in the audience, as the performance sharpens bodily memories.)

SO: What happens to the adults in the baby audience?

ASB: We are touched by the theme of babies and the role of parents; that is a loaded field within us. I think it's important to emphasize one's subjectivity and emotionality. This is a way of researching and writing through experiencing.

SO: The babies' heads, their skulls, do they evoke bodily memories?

ASB: That's where things start shaking. I call this psychological theatricality. That is a term I am trying to coin and define. We have an infinitely large repertoire of characters and relations inside us. It functions as a reference system for all theater, letting us see that "this is me!" We are especially prone to feel touched in the theater hall. Many among the adult audience cry or say that they have been touched.

(The actual parent regards the child with a new sensation. The baby has an obvious inner world of its own. Placed in interaction we can see it move, and when contact is created by someone in this theatre meeting, we can see the "bright light," in the baby's eyes. We even "hear" its thoughts. I register an electrified look in the eyes of the actors when their thinking is "on". When twelve babies reflect, there is
a dense quietness. When five infants laugh together, it is a collective recognition of some kind, whether it is a recurring event or a sudden disruption.

However, this question presents itself: is communication with infants only possible when the babies already have a fully-developed contact with their parents? Does the meeting give release even to infants of six to twelve months, when they are not satisfied or responded to by their parents?)

**Diary**

**Trial with swings.**

I register at each performance: parents disturb and prevent their children from receiving contact in the now during the performance; the parents are restless. They booked in advance, they bought a ticket, they were instructed to let the baby see — but the adults hinder the infants' will to watch, to crawl, to touch, to look. Parents, out of neglect or self-interest, block the children from contact with the world. They caress, or turn their heads, they hold them too tight, they make them stressed, they toss them up and down, they photograph them, they disturb them when they themselves are not interested in the play, they give them toys and food.

My deep question revolves around the assumption that art in itself gives contact its moments—an ersatz, gestalt, a now-now—that it has the aesthetic qualities needed.

We provide the children with new spaces outside the parents' grasping. They are offered an opportunity to be put in the swings, there is space for them to crawl away, to enter the stage, meet the other babies and the actors. They can always go back to their support.

The goal is based on a baby perspective. The possibility is there, if the baby wants contact. But it only works with the assistance of the parents. We want to give the adults an understanding of the infant as a spectator subject.

The play will open the way to new insights: my child is a subject! Another of our aims in the project is to reassure the parent and give open instructions in order to keep a perspective of the baby.

Most important is always to support the new parent coming to our theater: you are doing well. You are welcome.

I observe that parents glance at other parents to see what they do when something goes wrong with the swing. Parents are insecure and wonder whether they are behaving in the right or wrong way. I ask the technicians to demonstrate. The actors shouldn’t interfere. Can we give insights to the frustrated parent? Will they support their children in their needs for this new arena, the contact with the arts?

We are learning that parents are easily frustrated or get competitive with their babies in a group of other parents. They compare capacities and stages of development. They worry easily when other children behave differently.

Stern writes about how we can decipher the interaction between the child and the parents:

“Does anyone approach or withdraw, and if so, how rapidly does it happen? How are shoulders and hips positioned and how do they change? Is either side completely directed toward the other? Is there a movement away from the other? In which direction is the head turned, in other words, which way is the face and the eyes turned to?”
What is being interpreted are the motives that regulate the interaction. Stern calls this an etiological reading. By studying film recordings in detail, we can see whether, for example, a mother is forcing a position with her arms tightly embracing the baby and holding it close to her. We can also see if the child chooses to break eye-contact and evades the demanding aspect of the contact. An untrained eye sees only the "normal": that children are not treated as subjects.

We can observe that the babies watch

a) the actors' faces
b) the actors' bodily movements

and react to

c) voices
d) sounds.

What about images, props, masks? Changes occurring in the stage-set? At the Harvard Baby lab, Spelke and her students investigate cognitive skills, how the baby counts people entering and leaving a room, and objects appearing. We in the theatre also notice their interest in comings and goings. That really is the essence of theatrical drama: Who comes for dinner? And what is happening behind the curtain?

Infants are extremely fascinated by that which is hidden. They seem to be aware of how many actors are not visible at a certain time. They are observing changes intensely.

The theater performance for babies is a big-scale experiment. We have communicated directly and by means of different theatrical elements: acting, written dialogues, singing, clowning, choreographed dance, stage sets. All of this was presented to the baby audience seated in the front row. My point is clear: contact cannot be forced on the children. It is the interest that keeps the drama going. But what remains afterwards? I suggest: the quality of the meetings. Contact. The experience of emotions in a genuinely aesthetic exchange.

**Diary — Test 4**

They do react to the loud screams and the wails at the end of the belly. Could it also be the new subway sound effect?

To scare a baby is easy. Slam a door behind it, make a sudden movement. The actors have to breathe first: announce the movement beforehand.
**Meeting the actor on the floor**
Spelke and I both have to work with parents' approval and assistance in our trials. My drama is not an experiment measuring cognitive skills, it is an act of art about meaning. We want to communicate: the whole journey, our narrative, is for the baby to use and fantasize about and add to the ordinary "schemes," the networks of earlier experiences (as Stern describes the development of a baby's consciousness). Even a 3-4 months old baby can interpret meaning and intention in the behaviors of others, according to Sterns studies.

At the age of 6-12 months, which is the age of our audience, babies are able to register and collect experiences of past interactions into a scheme of "being with another in a certain way". (Moderskapkonstellationen. Stockholm 1996)

After watching the drama, they can remember and return to the experience in their memory, the way baby Gustav and his mother Karin do, using a CD with music that comes with the theater program.

**Parent interview**
Karin, mother (in the reference group): You notice immediately that Gustav recognizes this. He gets happy when the performance starts. During the performance, he watches intensely. Sometimes he takes a break or looks at the neighbors in the audience or at the lamps in the ceiling, and then, when he can concentrate, he watches the stage again.

We have been here four times now and it is very noticeable that Gustav recognizes the place. The colors, the atmosphere, the rhythm. Afterwards, he always falls asleep. It is such an intense experience and he gets tired.

Gustav likes to listen to the CD. We share a joy together.

The mother and child now share a tale of life. The mother has learned to see which aesthetic needs Gustav has, as he wants to listen to the CD with songs from the drama at home. As they listen, Karin also recounts the visit to the theater. Karin told us about the restless daughter of a friend of hers. The baby would never stay on the parent's lap for a long time. During the performance she was sitting very still, completely absorbed. Karin said, "She was focused."

The bulk of our observations come from more than a thousand children and their parents, who have attended the Babydrama-performance. Most of them learned about our performance through the theater's home page. I distinguished several different groups amongst the audience: younger mothers, and older ones, fathers, families with members from several generations. The reference group was hand picked to include both parents with theater experience and those who usually do not go to the theater. The group also included various experts.
The spectator child and the adult

“I don’t like children particularly, it’s just that I don’t differentiate people based on their length.”

— Françoise Dolton

There is now a body of work in the field of Theater Studies describing theater audiences and the various reactions to theater. However, no-one has ever before created a written text based performance for infants, and it was only possible to allocate the resources (mainly time) because of Unga Klara's long history as an experimental theater company, seeking out new forms for children and adolescents, within the frame work of the state subsidized Stockholms stadsteater (City Theater) in Stockholm.

Theater for infants is not essentially different from theater for adults except when you see where the audience is seated: on the laps of adults. Or when you notice how short the spectators are.

This performance is, to a larger extent than anything I have produced before, about the mother/child entity. The child is clearly in a position of dependence at this time, before society takes on the child, with preschools, schools, and teachers. The infant depends on its mother's reaction to the thing they are both watching. (I have had experiences in the past of school classes where no-one was allowed to like the play just because of one critical teacher!)

The children read the adult's attitude towards what is shown in the theater hall. Thus, the need for contact with the adult is of primary importance. The child's bodily needs, like hunger, toilet needs, and feelings are expressed and have an immediate impact in the room.

_Babydrama_ looks like a cabaret, a sequence of figures that the children must assimilate into Gestalts (Foregrounds). How can we determine what impact a performance has on an audience? The audience absorbs some images and fall completely silent. They show focused attention without stiffening. The child answers through its body, through the direction of its attention, the rhythm of its breath, and by sucking when the movements of the comforter is intensified.

We also see and hear how they speak, as they imitate the speech coming from the stage with melodic phrases. They gesticulate with hands and feet. Infants speak with the masks. They crawl over to them and initiate contact, touch the mask face, speaks to it. The mothers in the audience have widely varying responses to the theater's aesthetics and flavor, and they respond differently to their children's needs, for example when they want the child to watch something, but the child doesn't want to.

It is obvious that parents support or suppress their children's interests and attempts to absorb experiences. They also naturally attach various degrees of value to the experiences the theater affords them, but even those who are indifferent to the theater, or have no previous relationship to it, they can support their child in the experience and themselves find joy in their child's discovery. In some filmed interviews, young mothers say they don't understand what they are seeing, but they are happy that their children appreciate it.

Even depressed mothers seem to be reinvigorated through the child's interest. During _Babydrama_ Ann-Sofie Bárány observed children who connect with the performance in proximity to the mother's rejecting body, and that the mother some times react to the baby's interest and leave their depression position. Probably, the baby's will is entirely concerned with breaking the parent's depression, if they are allowed to.
Do we reach those who need us the most? First, there is the obstacle that the parent must want to see the performance with their child in order to make it to the theater at all. The parents that I would like to reach know nothing about theater or about cultural activities for children. It is a matter of class and culture, and above all of knowledge. Some parents are so depressed that they have no energy for anything beyond the daily necessities.

New research on depressed fathers show that the birth of a child is a fundamental blow to their life as adults and to their pair relationship. This situation, which Stern calls the "motherhood constellation", brings a new identity, the Gestalt of a parent. We reach parents through our audience outreach efforts and through the theater's home page. Performances are sold out rapidly. Parents on maternal or paternal leave need to be stimulated and they are a big potential consumer group.

Diary
Someone has to have the energy to book the ticket. We should cooperate more with the infant care centers, even before the babies are born. The baby's contact with theater mostly takes place in the morning, before noon. The performances that start at 1 pm are not popular at all.

But what does the baby think about this? Someone has to bring her there. Bring out the stroller and all the other things: diapers, food. Dress her, put her on their lap or on the carpet, listen and take her through the stations on the stage. Someone must give the baby basic confidence: It's okay, go out, meet the world, meet other children, see new things!

Investigations and results
The starting point for Ann-Sofie Bárány was that everyone, adults as well as children, are preoccupied by the tale of their birth, which is a central myth for every human. Thus I decided that we should work in a process similar to that of psycho drama, where the adult artists were to work with memories of their own infancy. Apart from lectures and meetings with children and parents we worked particularly with voices, and especially composed music by the composer Johan Petri and the voice coach artist Ulrika Skogby. The clown pedagogue Maria Öller trained the ensemble in communication with infant audience at several levels, based on her long experience of working with hospital audiences and Alzheimer patients.

Diary - Response
Today five children laughed at the same time when Claire, Clara and Stephen worked with the word "skärrrrpning" ("orrrder"). This haunts me, now I want all twelve to laugh. We get a response! It's sensational: theater contact!

We have improved the dialogue rhythmically, now we get a response every time.

In the sofa: Laughter and identification from the adults. The intentions behind the eroticism between the grown-ups at the party, while the unborn circle around the sofa. This hits home. The children don't respond to this realistic dialogue but pay attention to Clara's stylized reptile movements. They listen actively to the consonants S, K, T, and P, which Ulrika has worked with.
Twelve babies at the same time — listening to each of them in an audience is a skill that took us initially six months to develop. The performance must also hold an interpretation of the text and look the "same" each time. Many questions are raised, such as, How do we find a transparent form for the theater contact? The films show we did not always reach the infants' interest, at least not from the outset. The children sleep, cry, or eat more in the beginning of the period 2005, than in 2007.

Malin C: When we are not clear and aware and present, they do not feel our presence and intentions. Slowly we get a more precise and more relaxed communication during the hour and half of the show, without loosing our dynamics. And we get more babies seeing it through with sustained focus.

Rules for the parents
The child can interrupt the performance in its way. The accompanying adult is responsible for the movement if the child moves towards the stage area; the parent must crawl behind. The actor informs but does not carry around the audience, but performs to the audience. On the other hand, he/she must not be disturbed by the screaming or walking around among the audience.

In the end, we were able to make this work as well. But the other adults are disturbed. They reacted negatively to the children's crying, while the children themselves could accept crying. In the scenography there are passage ways to places where the audience can withdraw, gather their strength on a sofa, change diapers. It is always okay to come back to the performance. Encourage them to leave! The theater technicians can assist: Crying children should be comforted.

The structure of the Babydrama performance
The play took place at several different places, or "stations," set up in the big theater hall.

First we receive the audience in the foyer and introduce ourselves. Then we start with playing the "here I am" game, presenting theater play, hiding behind curtains, presenting the faces. Look! Gone! Thereafter there is a prologue stating the rules for the parents.

We then move into the stage area. There are actors in the sofa: parents having a party. The audience sits in a line, the adults behind. Children want to come into existence. The child chooses his parents, who make children. We unfold a big body game with climbing and disappearances before them. Hiding behind the curtains; more of the "here I am" theme.

In mom's belly: The embryos/actors are suspended from umbilical cords and express their love for mom and for the life outside. They enjoy the water in the uterus. Music and lyrical text.

Ejection: Big change of scenery. Dramatic scenographic climax: the red velvet is flushed out and away and leaves way for a completely white room with doors. A rush, disappearing into a hole.

Pause: The children in swings. And there: Meeting with a mask. (This eventually was extended to five minutes).

Birth: Arrival at the hospital. Arrival to the world, with letters. Encounter with parent clowns. More pranks and games with the curtains. The clowns are confused at having got children.
Birthday: Struggle with the parent's interest, child rearing, scenes that illustrate the child's own will and own world. I want. Birthday song and goodbye. Colors: red, the infant's favorite color, mom's tissues, blood; white for the hospital and the world; black for words. Elegant glossy materials in the costumes.

Interview: Ann-Sofie Bárány
SO: Can a baby use art? I imagine that all humans have an infinite amount of needs and expectations and wishes, and that we always meet with resistance when we try to realize them.

ASB: One way that we can always satisfy ourselves is through fantasizing. For example, when a child fantasizes about his/her mother returning it is not just something that happens "mentally," it is a fantasizing that takes place in the entire body. It makes the child happier. That's how humans work. It's almost as good as reality.

That doesn't mean one should fantasize instead of living. The optimal is being in reality accompanied by inner processes. Then one is both a subject and an object of social coming-to-be, in an "I" and a "we". This leads further into action.

A theater performance is an intermediary which can convey specific stories, situations, and qualities into one's own system. The meeting of an individual's inner world with the external reality is a powerful influence. It's important to choose the themes well and make meaningful statements.

SO: What takes place in the baby's inner contact with the performance? What does the contact look like?

ASB: One way of looking at a scenic dramatic situation is that it contacts several parts of the baby. A parent, even if the relationship with the baby in general is good, must make sure that the baby is handled in a conducive way in the now that happens at the theater. Some parents disturb their child instead.

When the relationship is functioning, both in general and in that moment, I believe I have witnessed that the child's contact with the performance works well. So, if the parent also sees and has contact but does not seek body contact with the baby all the time, it works.

Even children who do not have a generally functioning relationship with their parents can, I feel, benefit from the performance. From my observations I would say that, granted that the parent does not disturb, almost any child can get in touch with that which the performance offers.

"All children love to talk about their own birth. Through that tale they express not only their love for themselves, but also their love for life itself. Even children who live in hellish circumstances often have a bright picture of their own birth." (Bárány in the Babydrama program sheet, 2006.)

It has been seen that children who reject the performance, for example crying incessantly, do so already in the foyer, before the theater meeting. We have heard several reasons: it's a bad day; the child can't handle more; we went to IKEA before coming here; she was woken up; he is ill.

Sometimes the child is noticeably stressed, when the parent is ashamed that their child is crying when the others seem interested. We say, withdraw and come back again, walk around, wait. Sometimes this also makes them stressed. I want the theater to function as an offer to watch. Something
to approach calmly. Sometimes parents feel that their child's reactions is a bad reflection on themselves, and they have a hard time handling that.

**Diary - Crying**

A girl is crying, seemingly impossible to comfort. We offer her to return another day. But the aunt tells us that the mother has just gone away so it is obvious the relative wants to draw the crying child into the performance. Girl moves around in the theatre crying. It looks sad, and midway into the performance, still crying softly, the child gets partly in touch with the performance and comes nearer. She watches, approaches the stage. Then she is fully engaged with the other children around the drum. Nora is happy and in contact when it's time for goodbye, actress Clara noticed.

**The child perspective in Babydrama**

The child "belongs" to the family in our culture, as Laura Perl points out, and we accept this! However, we offer the child scenes with movement and performance areas where they can crawl around and widen the relation parent-child-surrounding world. Here theater functions as another world for children, a separate world of play. If the parent understands and supports this, art can function as a zone for exploration together with children of the same age.

During the performances there were two groups of people who most often allowed their child to sit on its own, to move from their lap: fathers and young mothers. Because we don't want to humiliate the insecure adults and make them angry, and out of respect for our child audience, we didn't want to take on the role as nannies. The actors perform and offers stories and contact. He or she is the stranger at the verge of the contact border.

**Diary**

I am struggling to make sure that this is theater, and enter into an argument with an angry father. "Why don't you play with the children?" His little girl is crying and clings to him. She doesn't want to come close to the actors, doesn't want to be left alone with the performance. The children who are upset and crying are not being held. They must be calmed to be able to listen. Or perhaps they don't get enough support to dare.

**A note to Gestalt readers**

As Laura Perl says, and I fully agree, the "need for contact" can be fulfilled not only by parents, but also by other adults and by qualified forms of art. I have seen dance by adult dancers with babies in interaction (Oogly Boogley, British performance group, 2005.)

We humans are probably more prone to play than any other animal. Humans are the most social animal and the baby plays from day one. The response to my question whether the baby can get deep contact in an aesthetic exchange between "strangers" and through art, is "yes, they might." But this essay contains a series of proposals to the Gestalt community to open up for more research and knowledge of the real infant's inner representations, and how we could meet this further.
Aspects of contact and their clinical implications in adult therapy is researched a lot and written about. I see a white spot on the map, waiting to be filled. In the Gestalt community there is a lot of jargon about the "inner baby," the memorized one, but I want to make a strong point about what we can learn from watching real babies in interplay with us and each other.

In this thesis, the "observed baby" is our guide to deep contact skills. The baby is an expert on need, before all the described contact disturbances are visible in us, which we must later free ourselves from in therapy. There is much more in the dynamic field of new infant studies that I could describe here, but I will highlight some important researchers, like Daniel N Stern, as we go along, and articulate how this knowledge might affect Gestalt theory in the future.

**Babydrama meets the public**

**Diary - Opening**
Today: official opening. One baby is a bit late, is waken up and lifted up too soon, starts crying and is placed brusquely on the floor with other children he has never seen. But when I look in his direction a while later, Owen has also found other babies and looks around. I am really surprised.

Gustav is stressed by loud adult talk and cries. Unusual. Something is not right. Tensions in the foyer. The adults know each other, talk past the audience children. We need to quiet them down. I loathe the fact that the adults don't feel the imbalance in the talk. They take up all the space and don't even see the children sitting on the carpet. They step over them with their moose's legs and block the view.

Owen is interested in the child right next to him. Or is that a button he is looking at on his friend's sweater? Attention alternating between these two.

Janine meets Claire who introduces herself, smiles, looks away, looks again, shy. She reacts to Claire’s dark voice, turns away sharply. Then she takes her eyes off Claire. Today Claire is wearing a red shiny shantung silk dress and has red lips. Claire's hair is another red hue.

**Diary from first opening (2006)**
Many new faces, appearing and disappearing behind the curtains. All children react similarly, watching this game attentively. Some get a bit scared or surprised but they soon regain their courage.

**Diary from second opening (2007)**
All the children react to Marcus' prose information (when he talks to the adults) and direct their eyes towards him. As soon as he speaks "Chinese" (or when Torbjörn last year spoke real Chinese) all the children quiet down and look at his mouth, as if on a given signal. They know that they don't recognize this language! This is a deeply ingrained knowledge in our body, telling us that this is a language you haven't learned. This passage is always attended by deep silence on the audiences part.
Interview: Malin Cederbladh, actress in both versions
The contact between children and me in relation to the parent was most apparent to me in the foyer. There I could quickly feel where the child was and how the parent related to that, to me, to the theater, what their expectations were for their own experience and for the child and the whole context. My attention and direction during the performance was mainly toward the little ones. I feel that they also helped me in my work. Of course, I also registered the adults, what they did and how they reacted.

Diary – Parents’ interest is important
Some crawl to the edge of the carpet where the actors are, and then crawl back. Some definitely need distance. Some reject certain scenes, some return to the performance. Some shout out, imitate words, address the performance with sounds. Most speak only when they meet the mask. Very few cry for a longer period. If they do, it is during the first meeting.

The babies continuously register the parent’s feelings. They want to share the impressions, they look up at the face to check: Are you following this?

Theater lovers and others
The adult who has to interpret the child's signals is not always up to the task. Parents and actors sometimes misunderstand the child's wishes. The child's defense in such a situation is its contact skills. While they cry, they do not interrupt contact. The baby is autonomous at birth. A separate being. Want to have! Want to go to the swing. But don't want to sit in it! Want to stay in the swing, not leave! Can't speak, but I express what I want.

We observe a distinct group of children who act like Gustav at the theater. We call them the theater lovers. They seem content during the prologue and then watch the entire performance with sustained interest. They can sit through the whole time on their parent’s lap, continuously focusing on the performance. They take part in the way we had intended.

Those who have just learned to walk are more fluctuating. These children are not part of our intended target audience, because at this age they are more interested in exploring their own ability to navigate space.

Parents teach their children to act like children: Jump, there is music! They also teach cultural codes, such as applauding. That's also not a behavior that comes naturally.

Diary - Theatre feelings
For the babies, the theater's acted feelings seem to be external. They watch the dialogue being bounced back and fro between the actors and don't get disturbed or sad in the least when there is shouting, crying, and fighting on the stage. They quickly get used to the dynamic of the voices. The primary instrument for contact is the face with its gaze and voice.
Full vocal power
We put extra energy into our voice training, singing, sound, music and rhythm. We had to be able to vary our voices more to compensate the lack of word recognition with a richness of vocal nuances and the melodiousness of the words. At the same time, we watched for signs that the emotional intensity scares the audience.

After forty performances, the actors felt that there was no reason for them not to raise their voices strongly to express emotions, as long as they were exact in the way they directed those emotions.

Actress Malin Cederblad: "There's no limit to how loud we can be. In the beginning, when we were not confident, our insecure feelings leaked, and that's what causes problems."

Theatrical insight
In my opinion, children respond to the heightened reality of the theater. They register our signals, play, and performance. It startles all the grown-ups that the small children we perform for, who lack all experience of theater, don't react with fear to acted conflicts. The angry lines spoken by the parent characters in the play — "No!" "Bad!" "Yuck!" The child character exclamation "Mine!" seems to arouse interest rather than fear. The children even move closer!

It's nothing new: shouting and fighting. We recognize it. Small children seem to understand that this is theater, something outside of the everyday events, and that they themselves are not involved in the way they normally are in what takes place around them.

During the performance, the children got scared only when naturalistic expressions of emotion were displayed. For example, when actress Clara's lips started shivering or actor Marcus made the forlornness in his voice too real when he said, "What if nobody wants me?" In those cases, when the actors did not act in a theatrical manner, the audience turned easily into a choir of tears.

Sorrow is so near to the infant. Is it empathy? We reduced the pitiful sound and steered around the most sensitive infants in the audience.

Diary – Expressive experiment
I conduct an experiment with my young friend Valdemar, in my room, fall 2005. He is the son of Magdalena, the set designer. Janne, the actor, comes by my room to talk a bit before the evenings performance on another big stage in the house. (Brecht's The Three-penny Opera; Janne is playing the part of a bandit). Janne is wearing a torn 1920s theater costume and make-up. Valdemar is playing by the sofa.

I ask Janne to shout and scream, in character, directing his lines toward me. All three of us are seated on the sofa. Valdemar, who is fourteen months old, watches the scene keenly. Interest!

The innate understanding of the theatrical
Teatralnost, the Russian dramatist Nikolai Jevreinov's term for the innate "instinct for theater", describes the human ability for performance and role playing. I staged a performance of his play "The main thing"
Unga Klara in 2002, because I have a fundamental belief that all humans have an innate capability to watch and appreciate theater (broadly defined).

I think this ability is obviously present in infant spectators. They register the events that are presented beyond the thin border between stage and audience. These twelve spectators sitting in a row are like adults in this sense: they can view a performance.

So as not to be the only ones trying to convince others about the things we have witnessed in our audiences, me and Ann-Sofie Bárány invited several researchers with varying views and areas of expertise. I also interviewed the theater critic Lars Ring who described his impressions as he watched the performance with the children, and also analyzed the performance's aesthetic and the "contact border" that the acting creates for the infant spectator. He expressed the aesthetics of the performance as an invisible theatrical border.

**Bárány interview**

Suzanne Osten: Is it sure that the infants know that they are at the theater?

Ann-Sofie Bárány: Definitely. The researchers I interviewed are not in agreement about which term to use, but it is clear that the children know that something else than the everyday reality is taking place. They are not scared by the aggression in the scene between Claire and Malin, for example.

**Mask and contact**

It is especially interesting to see the reactions in the episode with the full masks. Here the contact is completely transformed, it changes before our eyes: the infants start "talking". They use words and sequences of sounds, and their whole body is activated and directed towards the mask, which is a representation of the child's open face, with the mouth opened in a surprised expression.

The mask is placed on the actor's body, so there is a mask with bodily presence. This is without doubt the performance's strongest point of contact.

Our videos show that the children want to come near to the mask face, and start a dialogue.

I have instructed the actors to respond with murmuring voices from within the mask, to help establish the relation. The sculpted masks, created by My Walther, have different colors. This was a development introduced in 2007, because we wanted to see if children with dark complexion would be attracted to darker masks. Six months old Wilma reacted in a clear way to a dark mask, with a tone of color resembling that of her mother, Joy. In the video documentation, she is seen moving towards that mask.

Marie Ramm at *Centrum för Barnkulturforskning*, Stockholm University, made a detailed study of the use of masks in the Babydrama performance. In an inter-disciplinary research paper, she investigated the Babydrama's five-minute mask meeting, and points out that the infant has an inborn love for the most characteristic traits of the human face. The infant is an expert in reading facial expressions, down to the most subtle muscle movements. In this way, the child participates in another person's emotional processes. We already know, for example, that a baby of five weeks can remember a mask face up to one week after being shown it for one minute.
The masks only appear once, as a climax in the drama. Ramm noted: "A mother whispers: 'Look, how exciting.' There is an absolute silence, suffused with fascination, among the audience. A few scattered sobs are heard; a boy who was unfocused before connects with the actor wearing a mask and let out a joyous shout. The actor mimics the baby's body language and aural register. The child wants to wear the masks. More happy shouts and exclamations”.

We work with the mask both as a doll and a mask on the body, always through movement and breathing. According to Daniel Stern, around the age of seven months, the child begins to be able to share the focus of attention with someone else. To wear a mask is to enter into a role play. This is clear for example when Malin moves back and forth from behind the mask. Mask play is a part of meta communication, which Gregory Bateson and other researchers call the child's early play and training. When we play, we enter into an agreement. There is not a trace of fear in this. The children meet the masks as the actors introduce them, kneeling to get closer to the children's level. The mask is glossy and stylized.

Malin animates the mask and shows the children the masks face, then shows the expression on her own living face. The mask's countenance is curious, as if it said, "Amazing, you are here too!" The children respond with a similar attitude. If a child responds with hesitation, the mask also withdraws. We are here working with mirroring, where the child is the guide.

**Interview with Clara Norman, actress**

My strongest meeting was with two girls, around eight months old. Both times were during the mask episode. The first girl was already calm and happy before the performance. When I put on the mask she looked for a long time into my eyes, and then she smiled broadly and turned toward her mother, who answered with a big smile and wide eyes. The girl turned back to face me and leaned down to ever so carefully pick up an imaginary straw of grass. She held it between thumb and index finger and started feeding me. She kept on plucking the grass and I ate and made happy sounds. This went on during the entire mask scene. Her mom let her play with me without interfering. When the girl turned towards her, she just looked back affirmatively.

The other girl reacted instantly and very strongly when I put on the mask. She started talking and making sounds, flapped her arms, and stomped her feet. She sounded powerful, not afraid but very engrossed in what she saw. She was talking about something that for her was of the utmost importance. She didn't turn to her mother; the contact with the mask and her experience was definitely most important. I answered in a similar manner, but less forcefully. Her mom was a bit frightened, or at least surprised, by the girl's reaction. It seemed like she had never seen this side of her daughter before.

Through the mask's openings, they can see my eyes and mouth. These are most important for the contact to happen.

**Interview, Bárány**

A young mother, around sixteen years old, wearing a huge jogging suit, gave off the impression of being depressed. All the actors noticed this. She was there with her mother, and sat through the performance half lying down. Her son was shy, but it was possible to connect with him for some moments in the foyer, and during the mask scene, and later. The boy responded. But for this to happen, another child first had to express to him in a very clear manner and out-power the message that the boy's world was
dominated by, that life is a drag. In such a case, much more intense activity is needed to establish contact; but it's not impossible.

**Music and sound**
Musical arcs and certain notes coming from certain instruments visibly affect infants' bodies. The lyrical part of the "Mommy's belly" scene creates a meditative atmosphere. The audience relaxes back into the laps where they are seated.

The phrasing and the repetition of the words "so smooth" in the song moves the entire audience; they relax. The scene has an almost hypnotic effect every time. The notes from the harmonium and the slowly moving curtain creates a space pervaded by peace.

Another non-lyrical but suggestive musical passage is the part where snappy sounds are created playing on teeth and cheeks. These sounds make the background silence all the more compact. The theme of teeth and biting, which Fritz Perl describes in "Ego, Hunger, Aggression", is here physically manifested in theatrical form, as the recurring snapping and crunching mouth sounds create an intensely charged atmosphere.

**Simultaneous attention**
The children show selectively directed interest toward the scene containing louder physical comedy. They react mostly to the farcical sounds, and the sounds of adults bursting with laughter. The actors use their breath, their attentive presence, their listening, and ability to steer the dynamics of their acting. Their simultaneous attention is needed to maintain contact with the two levels in the audience: adult and child.

During each dramaturgic passage, at least one actor must take on the task of keeping an eye on every infant. The children crawl around everywhere, after familiarizing themselves with the theater space during the first forty minutes of the play. At first shy, they soon find themselves comfortable in the midst of the stage dynamics, and many like to study the conflicts being acted out from a close distance, where they can see our faces. Contact is best established when the parents observe the children's reactions but only assist in establishing the direction of attention, security and support for the child, interfering only if it is really necessary.

We observe how the parents who are alert seem to have an inner eye trained on their child, but let themselves to be entertained and engaged by the performance. They share the experience with the child, through eye contact and laughter (faces towards each other). The children of these parents seem to be better blended into the group, discovering each other, sometimes laughing together, collectively.

There are also some children and parents who bring with them obvious tensions: the child never really connects with the play; the parents are restless and their attention is constantly changing focus.

**Diary – Siri, the running girl**
Some let their child disappear out of sight. Today one child didn't care at all about what we had to offer. Siri is already more than twelve months old, she walks very quickly and confidently, running all over the
place with the parents following after. She is not at all interested in the performance, about the rest of
the audience, or the technicians whom she meets backstage.

No contact. She doesn't look at her parents. Is she deaf? No, she can hear. This is remarkable: she
owns the whole performance. She is in control because she refuses contact. The parent who has let
go regards the child as being tyrannical, and other adults get irritated with the child.

The majority of the adults are very ambitious parents, which is another reason for momentary
lack of contact between parents and children at the theater. The ambition becomes the determining
factor. It is easy to see and to hear when the adults don't understand what the child wants.

Perspiring adults struggle to act properly. Some, on the contrary, won't let their children
experience anything except themselves. They constantly delimit their child's space. They pull their
clothes when they want to move. I observe many parents, and the majority, themselves bemused,
actually assist their children during their first theater visit.

Bárány interview
Ann-Sofie Bárány actively observed the children and parents in the audience during fifty performances.

Ann-Sofie Bárány: The parents need to be focused, concentrating theater seats, who send out emotional
psychological signals and create an emotional room for the children, to help them be receptive. To
express it simply, the baby needs a prior experience of contact in order to experience contact at the
theater.

Suzanne Osten: What do you mean by contact?

ASB: It is the meeting of two things. Eyes looking at each other. Images meeting. Colors, sounds, words. If
I say "mommy," mommy is inside the baby — this is a kind of recognition. Mimesis is the basis for all
thinking.

SO: Do you get surprised by anything you see? I am surprised all the time.

ASB: There is not a single parent who doesn't get surprised. Even those who are on the depressive side
tell us that they were very surprised: "He actually got really happy when..." I realize how important the
emotional response from the adult is to the child.

I understood after quite some time how big responsibility the adults had. One show was a
disaster. The adult part of the audience consisted of indifferent people. It wasn't the fault of the
performance; it has become quite stable. But the quality of the contact was wrong. Terrible. Some
children fell asleep or gazed up in the ceiling. No attention.

I understood there is a certain spatial function performed by the parents. They form funnels that
the children are placed in, so that they are placed in the field of attention. They establish the direction in
the room. The children themselves perceive what is stage and what is not stage.
**Contact quality**

Interview with Malin Cederbladh: I think about the times when I was rolled up in the bathroom rug and Johnny played on the vibraphone. I breathed and looked around me, bent my head backwards to look up and down, to the side. I saw a small girl crawling all the way from the black floor, quickly and with determination.

When she reaches the carpet, she stops crawling and we look at each other. I say: "Here is my place, it's nice here." She stands still, our eye contact ceases, she crawls up next to me, stays at my head. I look at her, she brings her head down close to mine, a thin string of saliva slips from her mouth and lands on my cheek. She puts her mouth around the tip of my nose, carefully, tastes for a while. Then she goes on to the rest of the performance.

I have no idea what her parent or adult company was doing at that time. She seemed very secure and was simply there with us, and they (the parents) let her do that.

The baby is my companion throughout this thesis and throughout my theater work. The baby is my inspiration for survival. Research on fetuses in the uterus gives us startling insights into the hearing, language development, and sexual awareness of unborn children.
Discussion and conclusion

I have discussed in detail the concept of contact in Gestalt therapy and in theater. My examples are drawn from observations of audiences of the Babydrama. The theater project was an experiment to investigate how early a child can see and respond to a theatrical play. And if actors would be able to contact this audience. My focus is on the baby’s contact as part of a triad between parental support, child, and actors playing. Some visionary researchers include humans before birth in their work, but I have limited my observations to children after birth, mostly aged between six and twelve months. I also make a link to our grown-up contact capacities, as seen in sessions between a client and therapist.

In my theater work there is an emphasis on the child’s perspective — one must call this a power perspective. The baby is a subject. The parents follow the child’s reactions and assist it in the experience of the drama. I see that as an image of the ideal relation, analogous to the relation client-therapist-world.

The word contact is all over this text, but it is also itself something palpable, something to be felt! We can see the full flow of the baby's affects, before the social behavioral contact schemes of the adult world take over. Infants never hide their dependence or emotional skills.

There is an unanswered question running through this thesis, which cannot be proved right or wrong, but which I pose as a central question: Does my creativity and production of art heal my trauma and deprivation? Can theater contact contribute life-meaning? Can the child to a psychotic mother become a healthy child through outside stimulus?

So, can even a child in a disturbed mother-child relation develop contact and get creative impulses from deeper images, for example through theater?

With modern technology, and through new developmental studies, we can analyze processes on the micro level, using slow motion film photography to catch short moments (counted in seconds) and observe bodily poses and glances that signal possibilities for contact within an otherwise negative repertoire of actions. In contemporary therapy, there are many varieties of therapies for children and parents which can mend and heal disturbed contact. The therapist works with the parent's automatic behavior, mental representations, (earlier) phantasies about their children.

Daniel N. Sterns has researched and described all these possibilities in USA and Europe. His book The Mother Constellation gives a whole range of new situations to investigate in this field, in life and in art.

Perhaps it is provocative to insist that my art can give emotional healing even to a somewhat dysfunctional parent-child relations, but that is what I see in my film documents and dialogues with parents!

Before a relation to us in the theatre however — before before — is basic trust. The child-spectator with good enough parental support definitively meets many creative images in our drama. It is a meeting in the now: how the child is able to answer in her body and face, and we register the affects. Art can provide meaning and lead to knowledge and contact. When children and adults come together to participate in a drama, we can get in touch and sense a holistic ritual. We are part of the living miracle; We share the experience.

I have in the past created dramatic pieces about loss and trauma for young audiences. Performing for even younger audiences, who do not yet have a spoken language of their own, and are in
need of strong support to leave their home and go out in the world to meet total strangers, has been my greatest challenge.

**Theatre for life and death**
The Finnish actress Maria Öller acted with a clown colleague in a hospice for a very sick infant, in Edinburgh in 2002. The baby Edward was held up by cushions in the arms of a nurse. This forty-five minutes long piece of contact is the most important play I have ever watched. Baby Edward hung on to Maria’s face. The now was a presence of life although baby Edward’s young life was shadowed by illness and death. We live every present moment, every spectator comes to a performance with their own life, and own trauma.

Even the very young spectator is dealing with the conflict of being born, being given these parents and a specific living condition. We are born, however, with the sense of a self and the need of others. To me the stage represents the ritual space where theater deals with existential questions and actors portray what is inside of us humans.

The young child's contact with its surroundings and the way in which art plays with its senses is described by Fritz Perls as a biologically determined interplay, and this description is in tune with the infant research of our time. "We are born with this ability for interplay with our environment in order to develop ourselves. Life, theater, and the arts can be used in therapy". If this is what we want to do, we have to study the small child who can teach us everything about awareness.

**The difference between theatre and therapy**
In closing, however, it must be said that there are fundamental differences between theater and therapy. Making theater and conducting Gestalt therapy sessions are two distinct activities that differ in crucial ways. Theater can give the audience as well as the actors insights, and in that way have a therapeutic effect, but I do not regard theatrical art as therapy for the actors I work with. The director and the therapist have different functions to fulfill.

In the theater we work with specific intentions towards the goal of creating a performance which will be received by an audience. The intentions are controlled by me, the director, as well as by the actors, the set designer, the composer, and others. The spectator's experience is the focus of our endeavors.

Gestalt experiments where elements of theater are used in a therapeutic setting places these techniques in the context of the therapy's basic aim of helping the client to get in touch with his whole personality, to be able to view his life project and make choices. The therapist offer experiments with the aim to explore, but does not control the choice in the way that a director does.

There are other dissimilarities that I wish to emphasize: In the theater, my role is not to frustrate my coworkers, even with an intention based on empathy, to help them develop as persons. The theater works with a particular text or theme, and presents a certain angle on that. The work is very much about form and aesthetics. Theater should attract all the senses, and its practitioners must make use of their craftsmanship and discipline. One way of putting it is that imagination is disciplined in order to create a shared world.
In therapy, on the other hand, the subjective world is taken as the working material. My task as a therapist is to observe, with acute attention, signs emerging from the client's world and body, and to give back descriptions of the observed signs and make them visible and conscious in what we call the foreground.

Such processes also enter into the process of developing a character, say actors who know their Gestalt theory. In therapy, the aim is never fiction as such. Techniques using imagination are ways to approach that which the client has the strength and will to look at. The goal is the real life.

Group therapy increases the feeling of the risk of exposing oneself to the client. This can be similar to the theater. A catharsis effect can manifest, because in the group, several people witness my fear in the group. My feeling is real. In the work of an actor, what is to be witnessed is a fictive situation, such as fear, and it must be processed by the spectator.

When I lead the client in therapy, I make myself, as therapist, floating or "alien" in order to be able to see and observe. At the same time, I make myself clear about my own inner processes. I have to be separate in order to answer her spontaneously in the moment. In the theater process I do everything to pull the actor into my play world. When I sit in the theater hall, I find myself with a live audience, trying to observe how they react to my imaginary world. My job is to evaluate the contact between my ideas and these reactions.

In group therapy I can use the now-experience of the group, as in the theater, to see whether the client is in contact with her work, which is to say, whether the group's energy decreases or increases when she works. In both cases, the audience brings out the level of contact. But in group therapy, my focus is the client's work, not the group’s response. Stern emphasizes the intersubjectivity in the meeting, and his research concerns the microanalytic approach: he focuses on the subjective in the now.

Finally, a few words about what I have learned about my creativity through my Gestalt therapeutic process: In my creative work in the theater I have been able to tell the story of the enraged baby: deserted, in need of the supportive love with which she might succeed in being freed of her trauma. In Gestalt therapy's focus on the body itself, and its sensual presence, I have been given an instrument with which I might be able to reach a way of responding to and experiencing contact.

Aspects of my creativity have been linked to the need of contact, and I see this in my creativity as also instinctively connected to the defense system. We human beings apparently need aesthetics to organize our thinking: everything goes through our body's perceptions. As the baby thinks, reflects and absorbs, we can see the responses and the contacts. The baby eats our faces, bodies, emotions, words, and we imitate the baby. Creativity is an answer and a defense against the lack of human contact.

In my mother’s paranoid, psychotic world my need of closeness was too intense for her. She gave me access only to words, images, art. More specifically, I have been drawing quite diligently, as a way to understand other people. Drawing, however, has also been a therapeutically important part of the learning process itself, a way to creatively open up aspects of the self-image.

My professional role, as a director and a teacher, is about communicating images, by other people, to people working with me. Group therapy, however, has been about letting loose, in a controlled environment — to give up all control of how I and the other group members interact. It is about getting in touch, about getting the feel of the human flow. Here I encounter myself quite naked. I have perceived other people’s emotions as dangerous and tried to arrange them in images that I could control.
The object of all creativity is improvement of contact. The self-understanding that the adult person gains in Gestalt therapy – the training in being alert to defensive contact strategies — makes it easier to take an interest in children's real existence, in the real child. Through my own history as the child of a schizophrenic mother, I have come to have this urge to portray the healthy relationship between mother and child. A successful therapeutic process leads us to quite concrete experiences, and experience mends the disconsolate infant.

Suzanne the director has no contact problems, but Suzanne the private woman is scared. She is naked, as the baby she once was. Her concern is with how she can protect herself against more disappointments. She is avoiding things, she is evasive, and so she is short of contacts with others. Drawing is a kind of bulwark, and also a creative way to express things. Papers are like a second skin.

During the first two years of my present education, I drew constantly during every group session. I portrayed all the group members and made drawings of the situations we were in. Thus, my awareness was turned inward. After two years of Gestalt education, I was subjected to a powerful evaluation by the group, and was astonished to be found quite feeble in regard to awareness, ability to make contact with others, presence in the here and now.

I sensed a frightening vulnerability in myself. The therapist challenged me to work on. In order not to lose the contact I had gained, I met the challenge and mobilized whatever will, force, and movement I possessed. During the ongoing work one group member told me she loved me. The word love I found perfectly shocking. I felt that I had been born again, like a baby. This woman supported me like a mother. Despite my all-encompassing need, I still was somebody who could be loved. My impression of having been subjected to a monstrous and shameful rejection was replaced by a sense of direction.

To a certain extent, all creativity is part of a person's defense. I draw the world I am in — I get to understand it, I put you somewhere in it. This is the therapist's constant question: What do you want? If you want to take a step forward, I'm there by your side.
Epilogue and acknowledgements

When I started writing this thesis, I dreamt that someone wanted me to help holding a baby. I held it as carefully as I could, but the other woman helped me to hold the baby properly, because no matter how I tried, the baby's blanket got in the way, or I held her upside down and messed up the directions. I couldn't get it right.

Surrounded by this infinitely patient caring, I managed to place the baby in the right position in my arms, and the woman who embraced us both could withdraw and I stood there, filled up with warmth and soft joy. I woke up happy.

The thesis is about completing the contact with an incomplete figure: my mother. It is also about my daughter, who I wanted to have when I was nineteen, my baby, who taught me to live and grow. Yes, the core I wanted to focus on is about the needs of an infant of a supportive environment.

I have worked during one year, and my whole life, to create a play like Babydrama, theater about being born and finding contact. This text is also supposed to exhibit the contact I have created with my new, young Gestalt insights. My dream says: I'll take all the help I can get.

Thank you, Inger Haapaniemi, who helped me the very first times to express my longing for the motherly, and who has now helped me as my thesis advisor.

Thank you all teachers at GIS, who showed me a way to not back out but instead be more aware of my limitations and my strength. Thanks to Lina, and the original T3 gang, my, who gave me permission to be incomplete and grow. Thank you Minna who supported me through.

I continually learn from my clients, and I also thank my close, tough colleagues and friends during my four years of education at GIS. Felix Holmgren gave me final academic advise!

At my side on the bumpy road since 2004 I have had Ann-Sofie Bárány - what luck! — and my sister Pia, who was the very first to teach me about contact. And Theatre.

"After birth the first connection is made in the search of closeness. Subsequently the possibilities for meetings increase. Immediately at birth, the world makes an inviting gesture with, displaying a symphonic bouquet to all the child's senses: colors, sounds, sensations of heat and cold, the play of light, inner sensations of hunger, the skin's longing for closeness, play, curiosity — interest. And the child already possesses knowledge."

— F Perl
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Children’s culture

Children’s theater
Still photographs by Leslie Spinks and Paulina Simon.


Part 2, 45 minutes, June 2009.


Plays


Om den filmade forskningsrapporten
Concluding words

So how early can we start playing theater?
   Deep play and play research assert that we can begin at once.
   A child is born and immediately begins communicating and mimicking and interpreting.
   We are born and we look up to the important pair of eyes and mouth in a face. Our survival depends on how well we can interpret feelings, read facial expressions, enter into a dialog.

In the images of the audience in *Babydrama* I can see the infant audience imitate the actor with their hands and faces - they mimic the actor with their mouths.

Human need for contact exists from the beginning. A human’s ability to create is there too. As early as the fetal stage we form language, listen to sound and music. How early we can begin playing theater is thus a rhetorical question.

We now have the knowledge.

**We proudly declared,**
**“A newborn theatrical genre:**
**Babydrama!”**
Background - Unga Klara and Suzanne Osten
Suzanne Osten is the artistic director of the theatrical company Unga Klara, based at Stadsteatern in Stockholm. She has directed innovative theater for adults and children, and she has raised the status of children's theater not only in Sweden, but internationally as well. Suzanne Osten is also a film director and the Professor of Directing at the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts (formerly DI), and holds an honorary doctorate from Lund University.

Suzanne Osten directed the fringe group Fickteatern from 1967 to 71, and then went to Stadsteatern in Stockholm in 1971. In 1975 Suzanne Osten formed Unga Klara, a separate unit at Stadsteatern in Stockholm for the production of theater for children and youth. Unga Klara produces innovative and investigative theatrical performances with a pronounced child perspective, and has a special status in Swedish theater.

Throughout the years Unga Klara has produced many cutting edge performances, In the summerhouse (I Lusthuset), Difficult people (Besvärliga människor), and The Chief Thing (Det allra viktigaste), just to mention a few. Above all Unga Klara has revolutionized the concept of children's theater, even internationally, through the production of plays such as Medea's children (Medias barn), Hitler's childhood (Hitlers barndom) and The girl, the mother and the rubbish (Flickan, mamman och soporna). Unga Klara was formed in 1975 on the initiative of the manager of Stadsteatern in Stockholm at that time, Vivica Bandler. A point of departure for Unga Klara is dialog with its audience through reference groups and seminars. Suzann Osten was appointed Professor of Directing at the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts (formerlly DI) in 1995.

The child perspective
The child perspective is a question of power, about describing power relationships, and about seeing power from the perspective of the powerless. A child is always more dependent on the adult since children are powerless in relation to adults.

Unga Klara has since its start worked actively with the concept child perspective. When Suzanne Osten directed Medea's children (Medias barn) in 1975 the point of departure was the ancient Greek tragedy about two parents caught up in a bloody dispute as the result of a divorce. In the original text the children are mentioned often in the dispute but have only a few lines themselves. When Suzanne together with Per Lysander revised the text they put the children at the core; the children were to tell what the divorce meant to them, and this is exactly what the child perspective is about: narrating from the perspective of children and youth. Taking childhood and powerlessness seriously.

Babydrama
The play Babydrama had its world premiere in January 2006: a full-scale dramatic narrative about coming into the world, 80 minutes long. The play addresses infants between the ages of 6 to 12 months and their parents. This was the birth of a new theatrical genre!

Babydrama awoke interest and fascination not only in its very young audience, but also around the world. On Christmas Eve on Swedish Television (SVT) the play was described as a Christmas present and good news.
Babydrama assigned itself the task of welcoming infants to life, promoting lust for life, and encouraging parents to see their child as a cultural creature. The infants were the main characters of the play - both on the stage and in the audience.

Unga Klara is at the vanguard for children’s rights to the same treatment and value as adults in the access to meaningful artistic experiences. Our tradition of defining children’s life situations from a power perspective based on the dependency relation between children and adults assumes that childhood is dramatic to the highest degree.

The aim of the cooperation project
The point of departure for this project is that the access to culture varies for people depending on their individual socioeconomic situation. Young parents and their children are a group that often have low socioeconomic status and consequently have limited access to culture. The aim of the project is to motivate young parents to give their children the opportunity to experience culture in different forms. We believe that this can lead to increasing the parents’ interest in culture, too. Since the parent experiences the theatrical performance together with their child, this could also create a new meeting between the child and its young parent, and it could give the young parent better insight into their young child’s perceptive ability. With this cooperation we want to prove that children between the ages of 0 to 3 years can assimilate a theatrical performance and we want to show the positive effects culture has on such young children.

Goals/vision
Our goal with this project is to contribute to raising the awareness of young parents in the ability of young children to assimilate culture in different forms. At the core of this project is theatrical performance in the form of Unga Klara’s play Babydrama, but elements of music, movement, drama and imagery will also be included in the group meetings at the community center Xist throughout the project. Young parents and their children can become acquainted with the theater, take part in drama activities, discussions and meetings with actors. They will be given the opportunity to discover how culture in different forms affects their children.

Another goal is to raise the awareness of other community services that work with this target group, about how access to culture is affected by socioeconomic situations and spread the conviction of how important culture is for young children from 0 to 3 years of age, and the positive effects cultural experiences have on these children.

Plan of activities
Year 1 - Spring
* A group of 12 young parents with children between the ages of 0 to 3 years. 10 meetings. The work with the group will consist of preparations for a visit to the theater to see Babydrama with a subsequent visit to Unga Klara, and post-production. The theme of the groundwork can be how to behave at a theater as an audience. Post-production with a discussion of what the parents observed in their children during the performance, research on how much young children understand and how they process impressions, the importance of culture for these children. We will also have baby rhythmic and drama
with a rhythmic teacher at these meetings at the community center Xist. The process will be documented on film.

Year 1 - Fall
* A group of 12 young parents with children between the ages of 0 to 3 years. 10 meetings. The practical work will follow the same schedule as the one above.
* Evaluation phase of work with the two groups.

Year 2
* Start a group of 12 young parents with children between the ages of 0 to 3 years. 10 meetings; rhythmic, drama, watch the film on Babydrama, discussions. Development of work with the group will be in accordance with the conclusions from the evaluation phase.
* The development of a method for working with groups on this theme, i.e. create a manual for how to reach young parents and their children and awaken their interest in cultural projects for children, and how to reach youth/young adults from the group with a socioeconomic background that has not had cultural guidance from home or school.
* Educate other public services that work with young parents and their children about the importance of culture for children between the ages of 0 to 3 years, and show them how they can work to increase interest in culture among members of this group.

Year 3
* A method manual.
* Results and follow-up, among other things, in the form of a series of seminars at several locations around the country with the leaders for the subprojects. These are intended for personnel in childcare, prenatal and parent care.

Assessment
We will engage an external assessor who will follow the process.

Film production
One of the tools in this effort will be a documentary film based on Unga Klara’s play for infants from 6 to 12 months, Babydrama. During work with Babydrama at Unga Klara, the cinematographer Bengt Danneborn has documented the entire process on video. Bengt Danneborn and Hans Danneborn (Mariedamfilm Production, formerly Mariedamfilm) began working with Suzanne Osten and Unga Klara in 1999 with the documentary film Difficult people (Besvärliga människor) and they have since collaborated on both small projects and most recently in Suzanne Osten’s feature film Welcome to Verona (Wellkåmm to Verona), from 2006. The documentary film will be produced by Bengt Danneborn and Hans Danneborn in collaboration with Suzanne Osten and Ann-Sofie Bárány.
Short synopsis of the film

Babydrama: A documentary film with the baby as the lens.

The baby is enigmatic. Provokes strong reactions. Touches us deeply, tests human humility and tenderness for other humans. We need to peel off layers, wind down, drop our guard and lower our tone of voice. Then we can experience something unique. Adults are defenseless when faced with an audience of infants who, in deep concentration, empathize what which is taking place. The play Babydrama for infants between the ages of 6 to 12 months that was staged at Unga Klara in January, 2006, captured a chain reaction of fascination:

The child who watches and seeks contact with the action on stage, the actors who seek contact both with the child audience and their own concentration, the adult or parent who assimilates the action on the stage and their child as their own “inner child”.

The narrative of the film follows the child’s genesis from conception, the time in the womb, through birth, out to the meeting with its family and then on to life of its own. Our point of departure is that all children, all people, love to hear the story of their own birth.

- I wannabe! the unborn baby shouts in the play.
  The baby longs to come out
  The adult wants to go back in
  What does the belly want?

We want to show in a clownish mirror how an adult sometimes without thinking treats a baby like a possession, their own body part or simply like something yummy to nibble on. Being a baby is definitely not a bed of roses. It is a struggle to survive and find a balance between being dependent and being independent. A struggle that is ageless and common to us all.

We want to present these strikingly dramatic reactions to the baby - from ridicule to enthusiasm - and discuss what they stand for. Swedish culture, on the one hand, tends to reify the Infant that does not yet speak and, on the other hand, tends towards a very strong; strong by Swedish standards, emotional approach. A fundamental issue is how strongly we perceive the baby as an individual in its own right, a young human being that we can relate to with respect.

In the film we follow a couple of families who are expecting. We follow them through the period in the womb, through birth and thereafter on their visit to the theater to see Babydrama when it ran a second season at Unga Klara in the fall, 2007. This permits us to tell our story in real time combined and cut with the play, the process, discussions and interviews; with the baby as the lens.
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