

BIN Conference 2007
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Hotel Örken, Island

The presentation is sorted under the theme: The meaning of aesthetics in art for children - infants meeting theatre.

Abstract

"Babydrama – theatre and psychoanalysis servicing the desire for life"

The paper presents experiences from the play "Babydrama" - a full scale theatre performance for infants 6 – 12 months old and their parents. The production was first staged at Unga Klara, Stockholm City Theatre in January 2006, and again in April 2007. It is the story of the will to come to life and follows the first experiences made by the all that has come alive.

Babydrama was written by Ann-Sofie Bány and directed by Suzanne Osten. The presentation is given in English and uses PowerPoint, DVD, musical CD's & stills.

"Babydrama" wants to study and challenge the limits of what could be done in theatre in relation to a new audience and poses the following questions:

Is it possible in a play for infants to use a cohesive story?

Can the story be meaningful to the infants?

Can the story be of significance to the infants' experience?

Our aim was to express a welcome to life – can a play for infants do that?

The work process of "Babydrama" is inspired by the psychoanalytic view of the human being as utterly sensitive, actively seeking and creating meaning, fully capable of aesthetical enjoyment.

The theatrical expressions as such are taken for granted as being obvious and easily grasped for all human beings, irrespective age. This supposition will be discussed in terms of "psychic theatricality", one of the authors focus of research to which "Babydrama" contributes with empiric experiences.

The research the author presents and discusses, takes the theatre-performance as its point of departure and the aesthetics of "Babydrama" will be presented to the colleagues through music, stills and video-material. This is crucial to a meaningful discussion based on sensuous experience amongst the colleagues. The issue of infant theatre has turned out to be somewhat of a hot topic. Direct contact with the play and the infant audience is a prerequisite to understanding without too much prejudice.

Observations of the audience, both as a group and as individuals, are discussed in relation to the aesthetics, dramaturgy and the contact-focused acting of "Babydrama". The infant audience of "Babydrama" does not seem to differ significantly from any other age group in terms of attention, interest and emotional engagement. Among infants there are theatre lovers that sit perfectly still, deeply concentrated all through the 80 minutes of the theatre performance. Another category moves in-and-out of

contact with the play and yet another, but small, group of infants never seem to get in touch with the theatrical atmosphere. These last mentioned, seem to start off in a bad place and can't be reached by the actors.

Interviews with hand picked knowledgeable experts in children's theatre and infant research are made in connection with their visit to "Babydrama". These interviews follow a given line of thought to examine different impressions, interpretations and ways of understanding the new phenomenon of infant theatre. This material is used by the author to reflect on the initial questions posed. The interviewees differ on some points and are unanimous on one: the infants experience the play "Babydrama" as something different from everyday life; as something playful, not-for-real, a sort of fantasy. A psychoanalytic understanding of this phenomenon is posed as a function of "the transitional area", proposed in the 1940's by the British psychoanalyst DH Winnicott. The author tries to expand on this with the help of the aforementioned concept "psychic theatricality".

Does "Babydrama" differ from plays created for other age groups?

Many visitors have been surprised that it does not. It follows the ground rules of the classic theatre with the addition of a calm, personal welcoming by the actors of every infant in the foyer of the theatre, which may take around twenty minutes, but most important is the way the infant audience differs from other audiences! They are called "aesthetic experts" by the author, thanks to their direct sensuous way of experiencing the world and expressing themselves. This, of course, also dominates the infants' way of relating to theatre and its esthetical qualities. Theatre is bodies telling stories to other bodies and the infant both "talks" and understands body language. All senses are meaningful to the infant, both in what they express and what they experience in contact with their surrounding. Also the adult audience has an aesthetic meaning to the way the infant audience experience "Babydrama": amused, concentrated adults create a directed space in the room, and offers emotional resonance that carries the infant audience through the play. On other occasions, when the adults are less concentrated, maybe insecure in the situation, the atmosphere and quality is more vague and scattered.

"Babydrama" address infants, adults and the "inner infant" of the adult with an aim to celebrate life. When contact is established between these individuals and between these aspects of the individual, deeply touching theatrical events may occur. In these, one may say, that aesthetics and ethics meet.