



an Idea of Art and Childhood

An open collection of thoughts

How many possible ideas could there be about art and childhood? Perhaps as many as the minds that conceive, imagine and tell them. Similarly, an artistic international association is an open set of ideas, minds, well-established practices and new experimentations. This publication collects some of the associates' ideas about art and childhood.

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**Artistic / International
Association Small size**

An Idea of Art and Childhood

editing by Antonella Dalla Rosa and Anna Sacchetti
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Artistic International Association Small size

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Presentation

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How many possible ideas could there be about art and childhood? Perhaps as many as the minds that conceive, imagine and tell them. Similarly, an artistic international association is an open set of ideas, minds, well-established practices and new experimentations.

This publication collects some of the associates' ideas about art and childhood, with an introduction by Roger Berard, Professor Emeritus at School of Theatre and Film of Arizona State University. The introduction is the speech Mr Berard gave on the occasion of the General Assembly of the Association held in March 2012. You will find personal suggestions, reports on activities, technical reflections, thoughts and images. The texts are very different among them, just as different as the companies, the institutions and the artists that are members of the Association.

And if, while reading, you will find inspiration for your idea about art and childhood, please send your texts to info@smallsize.org: we will publish them under the section "Association" of the website www.smallsize.org, in order to keep the debate open to new visions, thoughts and minds.



The Art of Theatre for the Very Young

Roger L. Bedard

Professor Emeritus, School of Theatre and Film
Arizona State University

Theatre artists have a long tradition of presenting theatre for children in countries throughout the world; however, it has been primarily in the last decade that theatre artists have turned their attention to *very young children*. The result has been no less than revolutionary to the theatre field, as theatre for the very young has challenged long-held perceptions of both theatre and children and childhood.

The creation of theatre for young audiences, which primarily developed during the twentieth century, was itself a political statement – a statement that clearly recognized the child as unique from adults. This growth in theatre for children coincided with significant cultural shifts in most countries which, more than at any other time in history, placed the child and childhood in a prominent cultural position. From this prominent cultural position of the child, came theories of child-rearing, increased emphases on education, the commodification of goods for children, children's books, children's television and movies, and, theatre for children. And, as the field of theatre for children grew, it developed around the assumption that the child – that is, the child as the appropriate audience for theatre – was generally 6 years of age or above. Indeed, in my early training at university, I learned specifically that it was best to keep very young children away from children's theatre lest they become distracted (distracting) and spoil the experience for the older kids. We saw them as “infants” who did not have the developmental skills to experience theatre. Theatre for the very young explicitly challenges this cultural belief, and makes a bold statement about the complexity of children and childhood, and the specific needs and capabilities of the very young.

The Child

What is a child? While this seems an easy question, even a cursory examination of the concept reveals the complexity inherent in the term. Every culture has young people – that is, human beings at the initial stages of biological development. Across time, across space, across cultures, the idea of a universal child disappears. How each culture reacts to and responds to young people provides the context out of which a definition of childhood exists in that culture. This includes considerations of the child from all manner of perspectives, including politics, economics, education, and religion family, to name just a few. From the influential culture of an individual family to the hegemonic culture of

the nation-state, the identity of a young person as a child is formed. Likewise, in the theatre, as we attend to the child audience, we, in turn, reify definitions of children and childhood. This includes not only parameters of age, but also perspectives of what is appropriate for young audiences as well as what is the role of theatre in the lives of young people.

According to most historians, the concept of the child – a human identity as separate from the concept of an adult – first began to be shaped out of changing economic and familial structures of the middle ages and was further clarified in the following centuries. Beginning in the eighteenth century, perceptions of the child were generally based on variations of three very different perspectives:

1. The child as natural and innocent. This perspective, celebrated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, posits childhood as a time of angelic innocence, which the adult must protect and celebrate. The goal of sustaining childhood was to preserve childhood innocence. This perspective promoted the child to the status of a person in his/her own right, but a child in need of protection.
2. The evil child. This essentially puritan perspective posits the child as in need of correction. The perspective brings to mind the concept of unruly urchins and street children whom must be shaped in the proper image of society.
3. Tabula Rasa (Blank Slate). This perspective, primarily attributed to John Locke, positions the child as not just an incomplete adult, but one over whom adults need to exercise responsible control.

Each of these themes of childhood reflect extreme cultural perspectives, but we can learn much about a culture or society's view of the child by examining the role of these ideas in the theatre presented to children. These perspectives hinge on the differences between viewing a child as a human being – a sentient being with unique knowledge, understanding, and needs – or as a human becoming – an incomplete adult on the way to full maturity and human identity. The latter suggests a children's theatre that focuses on training and education, the former invokes a theatre that uses the transformative power of art to transform the lives of young people.

The Very Young Child

The traditions of Theatre for children have traditionally divided childhood into two separate audiences: the child and the adolescent (with little attention to the very young). The transition from childhood to adolescence is usually marked by puberty; and theatre producers generally offer different kinds of theatre fare to this audience, as different issues are important to them. Because of the topicality of much adolescent theatre (i.e. issues of sexuality, maturation and independence – issues closely related to adult-like issues) is it easy to think of

adolescent theatre as more serious and thus more important than theatre for children. But such a perspective fails to give children proper respect in terms of their engagement with life and thus their potential engagement with theatre as a mirror to that life. Do children think, feel or care about what concerns them in a more superficial or less serious way than do adolescents? No, the differences can be found more in what they care about and not in how or how deeply they care.

This then brings us to babies, a discursive category we created to separate infants from children, and the dividing line our culture maintains between the two categories generally rests on issues of thinking and feeling. Many people look at “baby” as an empty state of becoming, the state of moving from a helpless infant to that of a child. The word “baby” has thus become a useful term for a tiny human with little apparent sensibility. And when does the state of being a baby end and childhood commence? While we look for certain levels of cognitive development for a baby to become a child whom we send to school, we have not defined a major developmental event that marks the move from babyhood to childhood such as we see in the transition from childhood to adolescence. For centuries babies have been viewed as breathing entities that think, feel, and know on only the most basic level. The philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau called the baby “a perfect idiot”. Obviously, this cultural perspective of babies offers no role for the art of theatre. Fortunately, contemporary science is quickly and dramatically determining that a baby's life is far more than just about increasing cognition.

For example, a recent article in the *New York Times Magazine* chronicled some of the ground-breaking work of the Infant Cognition Center at Yale University (Bloom). The subject of the article, entitled “The Moral Development of Babies”, summarized some of the recent and quite astonishing conclusions that researchers have learned about the complex lives of babies – conclusions which bear directly on the relevance of theatre to babies.

The research findings include:

1. Babies think of objects much as adults do in ways that reflect awareness of gravity and movement through time and space. (Bloom, p.47)
2. Babies “have an actual understanding of mental life: they have some grasp of how people think and why they act as they do”. (Bloom, p.47)
3. Babies “have a mental model not merely of the world but of the world as understood by someone else”. (Bloom, p.48)
4. Babies show compassion: “Certain compassionate feelings and impulses emerge early and apparently universally in human development”. Once babies have enough physical competence (starting at about 1 year old) they attempt to soothe others in distress. (Bloom, p.49)
5. Babies have a general appreciation of good behavior and bad behavior. They prefer a helpful character to a neutral character and they prefer a neutral character to one who hinders. (Bloom, p.62)

The overwhelming conclusion of this research is that “The babies’ experiences might be cognitively empty” but they are “emotionally intense, replete with strong feelings and desires”. (Bloom 63). The researchers, in exploring babies’ sense of morality, noted: “to have a genuinely moral system, in other words, some things first have to matter, and what we see in babies is the development of mattering”. (Bloom 56)

All humans (babies, children, adolescents and adults), regardless of age and developmental status, intensely feel and experience their worlds. Contrary to some popular beliefs, things MATTER to babies, and babies CARE; and they have a level of empathy and understanding far beyond whatever cognitive and physical abilities they may possess to express those feelings. From that perspective babies are no less appropriate participants in theatre events than are adults; but the caveat comes in that each age group will experience the theatre in different ways, with very different subjects and from very different perspectives. As adults we want to go to the theatre that is about something that we can understand and care about. Young people, including babies, certainly deserve no less.

Babies, and the Theatre Artist

As the concept of “child” must be exploded to allow for the thinking and feeling infant, so too must we examine the long standing traditions of theatre which do not necessarily welcome babies, much less allow for them a meaningful theatre experience. The cognitive, emotional and physical development of babies in their first five years is more pronounced than at any other stage of human development. Obviously the interests and capabilities of an audience of four year olds is different from that of an audience of two year olds, as are the differences between an audience of six month old babies and those of eighteen months. That is the exhilarating challenge that we face, not just in negotiating the differences we find in the various age groups, but also in offering that baby, regardless of age or development, a moment of *honest, artistic communication*. And, it does seem to me as if we just have a moment: a moment to catch their attention, a moment to meet their gaze, a moment to convince them we offer something that matters. This *honest, artistic communication* is exactly what I seek when I, as an adult, attend the theatre. And when I find it missing in a theatre event I leave dissatisfied. The very young child will not wait patiently to be swept up in the moment; the moment must always be at hand! The task, if taken seriously, can be far more challenging than any adult theatre venture.

Perhaps the single most important aspect of baby theatre is the *presence* of the actor, an idea supported by the scientific research. Scientists have noted that babies treat humans differently than objects. They expect engagement: “if a moving object becomes still, they merely lose interest; if a person’s face becomes still, they become distressed” (Bloom 47). This reinforces the funda-

mental importance of immediacy and presence in baby theatre – the tangible, immediate human presence of the actor. Scientists have verified what we all know experientially: “Babies expect engagement”.

As I reflect on baby audiences, I am struck by how theatre, at its essence, seems so wonderfully matched to the interests and engagement of babies. Not because babies are in any way less than, but because babies actively reach out for connections, for ways to expand their worlds, for ways to understand their places in the universe. They come to the theatre with an openness and receptivity unlike any adult audience. And what is the theatre at its best: an actor/performer seeking honest engagement with an audience, over a span of time – a span of time wherein something happens, and wherein the audience and the performer are joined in mutual respect, focus, and interest on that happening, on that action. This is true regardless of the age of the audience! I think it useful for us, as theatre artists, to ponder often this idea of the basic communication of theatre, because with the conventions of the theatre that are a part of our work scenery, lighting, complex dramaturgy and even elaborate special effects, this core of the theatre can easily become clouded. When the theatre artist meets babies, the very youngest of our audiences, they expect engagement on a basic, honest level, and the traditional tricks of our theatre trade can easily be a distraction to that goal.

Our understanding of babies has moved far beyond Rousseau’s idea of them as “perfect idiots”. But to create a theatre experience that offers a meaningful artistic experience for babies requires an understanding and commitment to the “art” of theatre, a thorough understanding of babies, and a joyful commitment to engaging in the complex interaction of all of these factors. The challenges of baby theatre are difficult; the potential rewards are immense.

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Theatre to dream together

Dramatic play at school: a proposal

**Acción Educativa
(Spain)**

If we consider the educator as someone who wants to wake up the children, a witness, a liberator, we can base our work on the importance that teaching theatre has in the whole process. We can take theatre as a reliable witness of the present time, a liberator of our instincts, of our passions, of the dramatic richness we all possess. At the same time, theatre frees us from our paralysing inhibitions, and encourages us to come to a new and enriching perspective, allowing us to launch ourselves into new cultural experiences.

This is the starting point for our work with the body: if we simulate a dance, and add words and dramatic play, what we will get in our classes is the essence of theatre, and we can use it to achieve some of the basic objectives of pedagogy. In theatrical performances, as well as in the creative process, from the very beginning of time, everything we have is language and communication. Its expression is voice, gestures, mime, pauses, silence, darkness. The dramatic expression is created by a combination of all of these elements. And this allows us to work in class with all these different languages: speech, visual, contextual and conceptual languages.

In addition, we have to examine to what extent actors and pedagogues have worked in a similar way, and how to use a creative act with educational purposes. In this way, we will obtain a clear message in a more global and profound way. We express ourselves orally and physically, and this offers us a great variety of resources when it comes to perform in front of an audience.

Originally, teaching was considered as a form of art; now it is considered as science. If we give its essence back to it and try to enhance it, we will achieve our purpose: on the one hand, it is science because it is a useful method to teach other curriculum areas in a more relaxed way, like, for example, literature. However, it will definitely be a more lively literature, where the language is used in its most expressive way, both in terms of form and contents.

Theatre can be useful in classes with disabled students as well, because dramatic play offers them the opportunity to integrate while playing. The same occurs with students from different cultures: theatre gives the possibility of exploring a variety of aspects, from body expression to screams or choreography, limiting the use of words to a more advanced stage of creation, allowing the students with lower language levels to integrate themselves in the group. It is important to separate all this from the concept or practice of teaching theatre as an art form. Theatre offers no scientific results, but still they connect differ-

ent aspects of our life: voice, body, set design (furniture!), clothes, light, make up, sound, special effects... they help us discover the human potential of our students. All this entails a development of our sensibility and artistic perception, without distancing us from the conceptual value. This translates into the need to study the ways of teaching theatre, turning it into an instrument able to distance us from the traditional model, and it implies we approach the most advanced pedagogy and didactics.

Theatre makes people get rid of their inhibitions; it opens the doors to imagination, feeds us with sensations, fills us with its richness of words, improving our vocabulary, sharpening our senses to the most hidden perceptions of the human soul... all this, without any effort, starting from the endless possibilities that playing can offer us - the same play typical of children, the same play used by the ancestral tribes to go hunting, the same play that makes it possible for theatre to go out there, swamping them with theatrical performances.

When theatre lives together with education and they hold each other's hands in a common space, we will discover one of the most important resources that teaching gives us in and out of the classroom, breaking not only the walls of the classroom, but also the walls of imagination.

The Arts and Very Young Children

**Baboró International Arts Festival for Children
(Ireland)**

Why is it important to create, develop and present the arts for very young children? My response to this question is: Why must this particular life experience be consistently questioned? We strive to give our children knowledge and skills for life as they grow. Is it not the arts that constantly surround us in its many forms? Does it not give way to expanded thinking and wonder? Do we want children who are anaesthetic to the world around them or do we want to encourage children to be aesthetic and to be rich in imagination, originality, curiosity, and intuition? So how do very young children engage in the arts? And how can we tell? This is like asking me what does a strawberry taste like? I could talk about texture and sweetness but the best is to give them a strawberry to taste. So my answer to this question is "go and sit with children in a theatre and watch and listen to their response".

I have also attached an interview from Phillip Pullman that I love to quote in regards of the importance of the arts and children.

[The Guardian - Tuesday March 30th, 2004]

Children need the arts as much as they need fresh air. Otherwise they perish on the inside.

Children need to go to the theatre as much as they need to run about in the fresh air. They need to hear real music played by real musicians on real instruments as much as they need food and drink. They need to read and listen to proper stories as much as they need to be loved and cared for.

The difficulty with persuading grown-up people about this is that if you deprive children of shelter and kindness and food and drink and exercise, they die visibly; whereas if you deprive them of art and music and story and theatre, they perish on the inside, and it doesn't show.

So the grown-ups who should be responsible for providing these good and necessary things - teachers, politicians, parents - don't always notice until it's too late; or they pretend that art and theatre and so on are not necessities at all, but expensive luxuries that only snobbish people want in any case; or they claim that children are perfectly happy with their computers and video games, and don't need anything else.

I'm not going to argue about this: I'm right. Children need art and music and literature; they need to go to art galleries and museums and theatres; they need to learn to play musical instruments and to act and to dance. They need these

things so much that human rights legislation alone should ensure that they get them.

I can remember evenings in the theatre, both as a child and as an adult, which were among the most important things I've ever known. Seeing Frankie Howard as Bottom in A Midsummer Night's Dream at the Old Vic when I was nine, and laughing so much I fell off my seat; watching Peter Hall's production of the Oresteia at the National Theatre, and feeling a sense of awe at the gradual unfolding of this ancient, savage, profound story; more recently, simultaneously helpless with laughter and shivering with pity and terror at the extraordinary Shock-Headed Peter. If I hadn't seen those things, my life would be much the poorer. Theatre feeds the heart and nourishes the soul and enlarges the spirit. When we are adults, and if we're lucky enough to have developed the habit, we can find our own way to plays and operas, but children can't do it on their own. They need to be helped into the experience by people who've been there before, and who can excite their curiosity. A little knowledge helps a great deal. A theatre especially set up for children helps even more; and plays presented by people who know how to perform for children without talking down to them, or being facetious, or leaving their brains behind, are best of all.

Children and ART

City of Helsinki Cultural Office
Annantalo Arts Centre
(Finland)

Annantalo's fundamental idea is to make a child visible through/by means of art. To give children a voice in the community through/by means of art.

Some thoughts from Annantalo artists and young art lovers:

"Art is not just for 40 + ladies going to the opera and drinking champagne during the intermission. Art belongs to all, Art belongs to us!". (14 year-old artist)

"Children are much more creative than adults". (artist/teacher)

A little child (baby, toddler) reminds us of the importance of presence. Having real communication here and now, giving time to the child, we receive the gift of presence – the same kind of presence that a charismatic performer radiates on stage. Art, for instance a short moment of music, works as a tool for communication and strengthening of this magical presence.

"You should take children with you to see art, to watch a performance. It is worthwhile to discuss and call into question, look for solutions and your own answers. Children love to make excursions to theatre, to art galleries and they get inspiration for their own creative work". (a mother)

Children see and discover amazing things in Art.

Small children are open to everything that does not disturb their feeling of security. Young teenagers become conservative and don't accept different things easily.

Small children are often underestimated by the performing artists and parents. Adults are reflecting their own childhood experiences with arts, when they introduce art to their own children. We believe that small children need "childish" things, when actually they can appreciate very abstract and "artistic" works.

Art is real, here and now, for children – you don't have to make special appetizers for them, you don't have to smile all the time.

The portrait of the artist for early years

DA.TE Danza
(Spain)

Since I started working in the field of arts for early years, I've had a lot of questions, answers, doubts and solutions. During all these years, I've become aware that working for the very young does not mean to work, it means to create. Many times I've considered how I should create for them: maybe by using colours, maybe by using little things or maybe without a big effort. No, they need all my effort, because they deserve the best. They need ART, and art must have artistic tools for creation, instead of a simple work where they just sit in front of the play and nothing happens in their creative world. They need something to happen, both in their social space and in their everyday exploration and investigation of the world. We, as artists, should consider artistic creation for early years as part of our job. Francisco Mora says that art is knowledge, pleasure and beauty. Our brain has the ability to build what we call idea; something abstract, universal, a concept beyond what is concrete. Knowledge stems exactly from this ability to abstract a concept from something concrete, a concept that remains abstract and doesn't exist in the world. There definitely is something primordial about art. The origin of someone's desire of painting, composing a beautiful symphony or performing, comes from the comparison between the abstraction and the real world, a comparison that highlights a discrepancy between the idea and the reality and generates dissatisfaction. According to Mora, this dissatisfaction is a feeling of unconscious frustration. We have to add to this relationship between art and abstraction what goes under the name of symbolic thinking. The cradle of culture is the essence of the interpretation of the meaning of art. Abstraction and symbolism build in the artist the expression of what we call knowledge and this is the base of how our minds work. It is something that idealises because it creates ideas, an abstraction of something concrete. For this reason, Francisco Mora thinks that this is not the total construct of art. Abstractions require pleasure, emotion, something that strikes you deeply in front of the artwork. Pleasure is the base of human behaviour, whether you like it or not. This is the unified theory of the human being. Only those who get excited for what they see and learn can really learn something. Art, in this sense, can change the world.

When the enchanted child enchants

Drammatico Vegetale
(Italy)

Many of us find themselves playing two roles, both very tough and delicate: we have to draw up a cultural planning towards early childhood and, at the same time, be artists. I am one of these people.

Maybe the ideal would be to separate the two roles, to eliminate this conflict of interests, but this is not the subject under discussion here, so I'll try to write a few brief notes, skipping from one role to the other.

First of all we need to create opportunities and occasions for the encounter between art and early childhood.

This means that we must contribute as much as we can to achieving centrality of the child's role in society as an active being, as one who directly enjoys rights. This has always been hard, but it is a particularly ungrateful task in this period of economic and systemic crisis.

We have to defend with tooth and claw the ground we have gained in many years of work, yet without losing the desire to set ourselves new objectives to achieve.

Now let's talk about children.

The younger they are the more they are open to artistic experience. All we need to do is employ a few technical measures, which we all know and which I am not about to repeat, and we have an audience in front of us, or with us, who is very willing to get in the game.

It all sounds simple. But the hard part is yet to come. We have to find a shared language, a harmony with the children in order to communicate with them.

Children's natural curiosity about what is around them, what they have yet to discover, is our Trojan horse for getting into contact with them. And then?

And then from the curiosity, from the desire-eagerness to discover, you have to reach the magical moment of enchantment. And that is when the enchanted child enchants: enchants the actor, the musician, the dancer.

Distances are cancelled out and art is created.

A colour staining a sheet of paper, a hand rummaging in the sand, a piece of wood falling to the ground, and a few words.

Childhood as a social construction

HELIOS Theater
(Germany)

The outlook on childhood is coined socially to a great extent, which is both an opportunity and a danger, as childhood is always dependant.

I would like to quote a passage from Wikipedia:

"Childhood as a social construction. Childhood, in many cultures, is characterized as a time of freedom from work, a time of learning, where children's rights to shelter, to education/nurture and to a free development of their personality are expanded. Children and childhood studies have been more and more taken on the opinion that children are not only "humans in development" but "people in their own right". The term *development* is rejected as a paternalising metaphor, as it reduces childhood to a state of transition towards adulthood. The subjective needs, wishes and interests of the child are highlighted".

(http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kindheit#Kindheit_als_soziale_Konstruktion)

What makes it good?

**Kolibri Theatre for Children and Youth
(Hungary)**

“...the only thing that's good for children is that which has real artistic value! Everything else is bad. Food for babies is more carefully chosen than food for adults”, said Zoltán Kodály, in 1929.

What is a good and what is a bad performance, what is a good and a bad audience, a good and a bad director, a good and a bad owner, what theatre is suited for the smallest ones and what for older children?

The different opinions on theatre for children reflect different societies' views on children from country to country. The view on theatre for babies, toddlers or teenagers changes along with the view on these age groups. In theatre for babies, language before speech, body-language, lighting, sound, visage and movement have a special importance. Creators of theatre for the smallest ones formulate thoughts in this language beyond borders and cultures, and therefore might have a greater understanding for each other's work than those who work with grown-up theatre using real speech. If new generations represent the future of humankind, then theatre for babies, which builds bridges between countries and cultural heritages, is an obligation for the theatre of the future. On stage, grown-ups play for children and for the grown-ups who came along with the children alike. In this new context, children step up to a higher status for a moment and the parents in the audience come level with their children. During the performance, they become equal as members of the audience.

It is worthwhile to marvel at the intensity with which the babies are looking at the world. The higher the intensity, the more senses we involve in what we are doing, the higher the level of enjoyment. Theatre for babies gives back to adults used to strong theatrical effects the possibility of rediscovering the world, the ability to and the value of observing something in stillness.

Those who have become accustomed to the intense shared enjoyment of theatre, those who learn to make an effort to acquire culture will live a happier, more complete life. Experiencing the compressed reality of the theatre, understanding that we can overcome the obstacles ahead of us, that it is worthwhile growing up and discovering the world around us and ourselves - this message will be relevant as long as man lives.

What is theatre for babies about? It is about paying attention, about understanding without words, about loneliness and friendship, about touching and stroking, about soft familiar objects and about sharp and spiky and unfamiliar things, about danger and about floating, about fear and victory and surprise and

happiness, about pleasant and scary sounds, noise and music, light, darkness and colour. It is about the beat of the heart, the dance of the hands and feet, about curiosity, about discovery, about taking off on a journey and about arriving somewhere. About magic and about adventure. It is about us!

A time, a space

La Baracca - Testoni Ragazzi
(Italy)

Children have their own space and time.
It is not always the same as the space and time of adults.
Teenagers have another space and time.
And young children's space and time is also different.
Space and time define a dimension.
Space and time are the basis of rhythm.
And rhythm is the basis of theatre, as well as of life.
The basis of communication, with ourselves and with the others.
Doing theatre for children - of any age -, or doing theatre for teenagers or young people, means entering new spaces and times.
It means experiencing new rhythms to find a shared rhythm.
Searching a shared rhythm means searching a neutral territory.
Not a no man's land, floating in the middle of a conflict.
But a land that does not belong to anyone, and still free from conflicts, a free land.
Where nothing has to be defended, but where it is possible to finally share something.
A piece of knowledge, a question, a doubt, and even an emotion.
It is often said that one of the greatest illusions of man is to be able to share their emotions with others.
To reach a state of fusion.
It is also said that this is impossible in real life, except when we fall in love.
Maybe we can be sympathetic, live an emotion close to someone else, feeling emotions at the same time. Which are, in any case, different emotions.
I can be glad that you are happy, but I am not "happy", I am "glad".
I sympathise while you live an intense emotion.
I can be sorry for your sorrow. But what I feel is not sorrow; it is something different, something lighter.
Maybe we can share an intense, collective emotion, just like the one that unites us in supporting a sport team, but it is hard to share a personal, deep emotion.
I like to think that the unattainable wish of the state of fusion is one of the reasons that brought mankind to need to do and live art.
In particular, the art that needs the presence of actors and audience at the same time.
Like in music, dance and theatre.

Together we can wait for the sun to rise, knowing that it has already risen.
Being Juliet who detains, not wanting to; or being Romeo who stays, knowing what he does.

In the fiction of theatre it may be possible to share deep, and therefore "real", emotions.

If all alchemies work and if there is truthfulness.

Truthfulness is basic.

I mean the truthfulness of those who are aware they are living in a "free" land. Which is neither mine, nor yours. It is a land of transit and meeting.

It is the truthfulness of a kind of theatre that does not celebrate actors and artists.

But it is a kind of theatre where actors and artists live intensely what they do and the opportunity that life offered them: being able to set foot in free lands, where it is possible to glimpse fusion.

In doing theatre for children or young people, whatever their age, the free land is often visible. Because "they" have their own space and time. We cannot enclose them in our dimension, we should try to move and search for a new rhythm.

The rhythm of a meeting. The rhythm produced by trying and getting to know the others, their being unique, their being different.

This is one of the many and most important characteristics of theatre for children.

Which is not a "minor" kind of theatre, but a place of deep artistic and human research.

Because children have the right to interact with adults who respect them as human beings.

Art and theatre can represent a land where meetings are possible, where other spaces and times can entwine, full of amazement, allowing us to touch the chords of our deepest sensibility.

Children and arts: the hundred languages

La Piccionaia / I Carrara
(Italy)

I strongly believe in the artistic, social and educational value of youth theatre. Theatre for young children can't be only or primarily didactic. The theatre I wish for them tells stories and feelings. Every kind of art brings emotions and makes you dream. Saying "children" means nothing and everything, because we will never get to know them all. And this is amazing. This is the reason why young children always amaze us. And this is the reason why with every new play it starts a new adventure. The Kindergarten in Italy is a place where you can experience openness, transparency and exchange with the exterior, where the rule to follow is to respect the child and his needs. In the Kindergarten there always exists a necessity to welcome the child considering him as a whole, like a growing person – instead of a subject to educate with notions and rules – with openness to creative, artistic, expressive and emotional experiences such as theatre, movement, sound, image. For this reason we tried to find a common language among us (the arts, the theatre), the teachers (the school) and the children (our recipients). We looked for a common language and we found a wide range of them, the hundred languages of Loris Malaguzzi:

The child is made of one hundred.
The child has a hundred languages
A hundred hands
A hundred thoughts
A hundred ways of thinking
Of playing, of speaking.
A hundred always a hundred
Ways of listening
Of marvelling of loving
A hundred joys
For singing and understanding
A hundred worlds
To discover
A hundred worlds
To invent
A hundred worlds
To dream
The child has

A hundred languages
(and a hundred hundred hundred more)
But they steal ninety-nine.
The school and the culture
Separate the head from the body.
They tell the child:
To think without hands
To do without head
To listen and not to speak
To understand without joy
To love and to marvel
Only at Easter and Christmas
They tell the child:
To discover the world already there
And of the hundred
They steal ninety-nine.
They tell the child:
That work and play
Reality and fantasy
Science and imagination
Sky and earth
Reason and dream
Are things
That do not belong together
And thus they tell the child
That the hundred is not there
The child says:
No way. The hundred is there!

Young children have within them a great fortune: the ability to get excited and the willingness to join the arts. The theatre can do something magic: it can bind the arts together (the performing art, music, images, light and darkness, shapes) in order to carry away the spectator and communicate him feelings and poetry. This way it is established a dialogue, using the hundred languages that the theatre has and that the children know so well. This is what I would like every child to bring with him after watching one of our plays: ... emotions above all, and a vague sense of something, inside, something shaded, something that for me is poetry. But not only the stories talk directly to the children: they – unlike the adults - can perfectly read symbols, signs, words, shapes... that is, every form of art.

So... relationship, exchange, respect, care, and... not pretend to understand and to know always everything! The space dedicated to the incomprehensible, the inscrutable, the unknown allows us to enjoy the freshness, the unexpected,

the wonder, the stupefaction, the suddenness. This is what gives us the “here and now” in theatre, the possibility to have a direct relationship with the spectators, a “popular” way to relate with them, that is such an essential thing with children.



Small size, Big Voices

**Polka Children’s Theatre
(United Kingdom)**

How do you make art for young children that is directly inspired and shaped by young children? This is a question we are exploring at Polka Theatre, as we develop a new show called *Inside Out*. We want to encounter new ideas and possibilities that we would not have thought of ourselves, and to be faithful to those ideas and voices as we create our show. At the last Small size directors’ meeting in Budapest, the subject was words. But something that received little attention, was the experience of making work that used nothing except children’s *own* language. What are the opportunities and challenges of this approach?

A visual artist, Albert Potrony, and myself, are working with a group of ten children aged 4 to 6 from the local children’s centre. We started working with them last summer, 2011, and the show will be staged at Polka this summer, 2012. It’s a long process, but one which gives us lots of time to get to know the children and their families. Albert and I have discovered that the best work happens through an encounter between us and the children. When we challenge them and they challenge us. When they inspire us and we bring something back to inspire them.

We run sessions every Monday afternoon. We make things, play games, go exploring, and gather lots and lots of stories. When we gather the stories, we write them down EXACTLY as the children tell them, word for word. There is so much material, and it’s rich and diverse. We have stories about monsters and lost cats, about dinosaurs, holidays and telescopes. We have stories about adventure and excitement, about loss, jealousy and feeling alone. We have one-word stories, stories made of entirely of pictures and stories that never end. We must now begin to make a show. People will come and see the show and they will pay money. So the show needs to be wonderful and brilliant and true. What will emerge? Will the children recognise themselves in the finished work of art? Will other children like it? One thing is certain: it’s an adventure, a journey into the unknown. And aren’t those the best journeys of all?

“Inside Out” premiered on July 4th 2012. More information on this show here: www.polkatheatre.com/whats-on/inside-out

The Proscenium Press-Gang

Participation as tyranny in arts for the very young – a provocation

Starcatchers
(United Kingdom)

In Scotland, as around the world, theatre for the very young is rooted in participation.

Every performance relies to some extent on audience participation to engender engagement and enjoyment, from simple eye-contact to complex processes of exchange; indeed, they are often crafted around a series of participatory moments. Some offer true agency (artistic improvisation in *Icepole* or personal exploration of the carer-baby dynamic in *Baby Chill*), while others encourage sharing before, after or at discrete moments during the show (hunting worms after *Archaeology: A Worm's Story*; gathering discs in *Round In Circles*). Such moments can be exciting communicative exchanges, gifts from the performer, to be reverently explored, tasted and savoured; but sometimes a child will bury their head in fear or shame in their parent's chest. Is this experience one of tyranny for these audience members, simply wishing to spectate? As Grotowski noted of his participatory experiments, "we were putting the people who came to us in a false position, it was disloyal of us: we were prepared for this sort of encounter, while they were not" (1973, p.129).

In Cooke and Kothari's definition, "tyranny is the illegitimate and/or unjust exercise of power" (2001, p.4); the members of society most vulnerable to tyranny must then be those least able to exert power themselves: the elderly, ill and very young. Of these, the least powerful are babies, lacking all autonomy - their lives and experiences are routinely determined by others, despite evidence for rich communicative abilities from birth.

Some argue that Western liberal parenting means young children are no longer Freud's ego-driven 'His Majesty The Baby', but tyrants, dominating and controlling like a "domestic torturer" (Pleux 2002). Yet babies are denied the most basic choices: what to wear, eat or play with. When they visit a theatre, they have not chosen the show from the brochure, nor the location of their seats, nor even whether they wish to go. Parents are tyrants, not children – while artists and even architects conspire to tyrannise: at both the Children's Theatre in Minneapolis (USA) and the Egg in Bath (England) there is a soundproofed booth within the auditorium, where parents can take over-excited children, to continue watching without disturbing others (a 'disturbance' defined and enforced by adults). Where an adult is free to leave, a child is made to remain 'for their own good', seen and not heard.

Article 31 of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees the

right "to participate freely in cultural life and the arts" from birth (United Nations 1989); can participation ever truly be free in arts for the very young? It will take a paradigmatic shift in perception by parents, artists and venues before the proscenium press-gang cede power.

Ben Fletcher-Watson, author of this article, is working towards a PhD researching theatre for babies at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow, sponsored by Starcatchers and Imagineate. He holds an MA from the University of St Andrews, and trained as a director and dramaturg at Emory College, Atlanta. He has worked in theatre management and fundraising for seven years, as well as directing shows at venues including Northern Stage, the Hampstead Theatre and the Byre Theatre.

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A world of possibility

Sticky Fingers Early Years Arts
(United Kingdom)

The arts play such a magical role in the life of a young child, creating a world of possibility, wonder and surprise, creating an adventure of curiosity and discovery. The innocence of early childhood, captured in the essence of a song, a story or the enchantment of a performance, seeing the world through a kaleidoscope of colour and bringing to life the many layers and secrets hidden within the imagination, creating treasured memories of early childhood.

Children learn through play and the most natural medium for a child to play is through the arts, providing the material that enables the growth of a child's perceptual discernment, looking at, reflecting upon, making connection and provoking thoughts, ideas and dreams. The art experience is more than seeing, it is thinking, learning and making connections with the greater world. The arts for a child provide a place for the child to look, understand and grow.

Childhood theatre and art

Teatro all'improvviso/Dario Moretti
(Italy)

I started my career in theatre in 1974.

Through my experience in puppet theatre, I approached young audience first and then sculpture and painting.

In the '80s, I increasingly refined my point of view on the connection between art and childhood, and I decided to totally devote myself to it, obviously through the language of theatre.

I believe in a theatre for children that can excite imagination.

I'm not interested in telling stories, I prefer stirring up emotions and curiosity: I don't think of myself as a story teller, I like to arouse visions, through poetical and abstract shapes, arisen from one's most hidden dreams and thoughts.

I believe in a theatre that deals with the need to express something.

A theatre that forces you to take on a challenge, in order to explore one's own limits.

That is why, in my shows, I always looked for something new, compared with my previous experiences too.

In my latest plays, I have analysed the languages of dance and music: I'm not looking for the perfection of a movement or a melody, my aim is to explore space through gesture and listening.

I'm not really interested in addressing an adult audience, if not related to childhood.

I know that sometimes my plays are quite complex and that they can be difficult for young children, but I do think that this is the only possible path to follow.

My latest shows "The Nature of the Bear" and "Blue Forest" focus on the observation of nature through the eyes of a child.

In order to preserve that look, I keep creating works of theatre and art for children.

Early Education. Theatre for 0-3 years

Ion Creanga Theatre
(Romania)

Children learn new things during the first months of life by imitation, exploration and interaction with others. The concept of "Early Education" involves a new approach of the child and its needs, in which learning is the most important aspect. In 2005 Ion Creanga Theatre starts the new program: **Early Education. Theatre for 0-3 years**. The program aims to promote the importance and the benefits of applying the concept of "Early Education" by means of theater. It includes performances especially created for children under three years, theatre workshops and other cultural events aimed to educate the parents about the importance of child education from the early years.

Given Jean Piaget's studies on child psychology, the feedback from children and the impressions of the parents after the performances made so far by our company, the following questions arises: What does a 2 year-old child remember? And what about 3-5 year-old ones? How can we distinguish these two categories of age and how should a performance be structured to obtain the best results for both the child and the parent?

The unitary performance created so far in our theatre should be modified/improved so that the child will be able to perceive and to retain as much information as possible. Therefore, we wish to develop our *Early Education Program* by forming a team coordinated by a consultant in child psychology, a team to produce performances based on the child's developmental stages (mentioned by Jean Piaget).

This interdisciplinary team will help create performances for children between 0-3 years and so for those from 4 to 6 years.

We wish the *Early Education Program* will be doubled by the perspective of an expert in child psychology, so that the next performances will be able to put forward the children's capacity and the potential of their involvement, participation and learning by interaction with the surrounding objects, but especially with other persons.

Art, a question of age or curiosity?

Children need art. Art belongs to them, as it belongs to everybody

Theater De Spiegel
(Belgium)

After the seventies, when we thought everything was possible and free, economic crisis's made us into new, more functional and most of all consuming human beings. Active young citizens had to become time managers and organisers of their own wealth. As at the same time everything had to specialize and everything was labelled with a certain price.

Children, as well as elderly people were handed over too more and more specialized services and well-organised and therefore expensive care.

Only the last 15 years, we slowly realize that children and retired people (put away in day-care centres, preschool houses or retiring homes) could also be part of our busy lives again and act as active citizens, contributing to today's society. Commercial companies also rediscover them as a specific target group of consumers.

We all should consider babies and elderly people not as ballast, but as human beings that could give society an active boost: in sharing experience, in giving happiness through timesharing and bringing different generations together.

In their turn they will claim the right to have access to food, work, free space, freedom of speech and art, not as 'becoming' or 'been' humans but as complete 'being' humans.

As art belongs to everybody, all active and not active people, it certainly belongs to children.

So let us focus on this very early aged children and what art has to do with them. If we want to protect our children from the fast, ever-changing society of today and tomorrow, we should look, open up and listen more to them. Let them lead us, as early as from birth, in the adventures and research paths they almost organically take to survive.

Neurologist Allison Gopnik gathers her experience of the last 10 years on brain research on children in her book 'The little philosopher'. She accurately summarizes: "Children are much better scientists and explorers than adults"

Out of a spontaneous and very personal taste, their extreme curiosity leads them to great experiments and creativity. They are not coded with rules or behaviour of an expected consuming attitude and constantly reset the mapping of their environment.

Therefore it is very important that they get time and space for safe experiment. Isn't that the area where art and artists' passion lie?

Isn't that exactly the state artists aspire in this postmodern, 'fast-food' culture?

Both small children and artist search between the abstract and the concrete, between strange, unknown and familiar things, between big and intimate feelings. They are constantly looking for contact to the world around, a world that influences them in return.

In the expressive languages the artist uses, he stylizes, makes abstractions. He transgresses the possible, the concrete, the banal way of live.

He also tries to realize the quick changing times by transforming it into various emotional, understandable and liveable pieces.

Babies have the same unbelievable sensitivity and open communication.

All adults have to preserve the belief in this ability of creating the world.

In my opinion Art is definitively part of this belief.

You can consider it as an emotional contra viewpoint to science, extreme religious beliefs, and directive education. Or, you can rather take it as a form of laziness of the consumerist behaviour.



Why do we create for the early childhood?

**Théâtre de La Guimbarde
(Belgium)**

Young children are explorers who constantly go off to discover the world. They are adventurous, curious, eager to touch, feel, taste, watch and listen to everything that comes their way.

Through repeated experiments between pleasure and displeasure, they make choices, they try to understand the world surrounding them and they build their imagery.

We think that theatre – and art in general – can nourish their imagery and help them grow. The show universe makes them wonder, marvel, dream, contemplate, exult, fear... a little bit. It awakens their curiosity.

Very young spectators move us by their strength and fragility; their strength in their ability to be present, fully available to the present moment, tirelessly curious; their fragility in their absence of barriers in relation to their emotions.

Young children between one and three years old are a real public. However, they watch a show differently than us adults. They watch it with their body, their senses, their heart. They receive the images, sounds, songs, and movements with intensity, in an emotional and sensorial way. Our work therefore often takes a sensorial and organic form.

A show for toddlers has to respect their rhythm. We have to pay attention to the set design, the layout of the places where we play, the number of spectators, their welcome, the attitudes of the adults who accompany the children... But beyond that, our investigation field is rather large: image, music, voice, movement, dance, theatre, object theatre, sensorial material, handling, humour...

Young children question us as human beings. They go against the tide of what is requested of us, i.e. efficiency, profitability. To observe them brings us to reflect on our society, on people, on the fragility of our pace of life. They give room (again) to intimacy, listening, pleasure and sharing.

Artistic International Association Small size

The **Artistic International Association Small size** is open to any European and non-European theatres and artists sharing its objectives: the diffusion of performing arts for early years (0-6) and, more generally, the promotion of culture for this age group.

The Association was founded in 2007 in the framework of the project "Small size, the net", financed by the Culture Programme of the European Commission for a three-year period (2006-2009), and is now supported and promoted by "Small size, big citizens" (financed for the five-year period 2009-2014). Over the years, the Association has evolved from a first explorative stage to a new, more active one. In 2012, it promoted several activities for its associates: the second "On Display" meeting, held in Bologna on the occasion of the festival "Visioni di future, visioni di teatro..."; the workshop "Critical Response Process", held in Galway during the Baboró International Children's Festival, and this publication. Through these activities, the Association promotes training, documentation, debate, information, partnership and friendship programmes among the members. To date, the associates are 28 from 13 different countries.

List of the associates:



ACCIÓN EDUCATIVA

www.accioneducativa-mrp.org

Acción Educativa is based in Madrid and organises the "Semanas internacionales de teatro para niñas y niños", an annual theatre season programmed for children and young people.



ASOCIACIÓN TEATRO ESCOLAR DE ELCHE - SALA TRAMOIA

www.tramoia.org

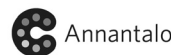
With activities dedicated to integrate theatre and education for children and young people, they organise a long showcase that hosts Spanish and international companies.



BABORÓ INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL FOR CHILDREN

www.baboro.ie

Baboró is now the flagship children's arts festival in Ireland. Based in Galway, it is an annual multi-arts festival for children from 0 to 13 years.



Annantalo

CITY OF HELSINKI CULTURAL OFFICE -

ANNANTALO ARTS CENTRE

www.annantalo.fi

Annantalo co-operates with performing arts festivals for children such as the "Bravo!", "Hurraa!" and "Ruutia!". The Arts centre produces and invites performances for the very young, and runs a workshop programme for parents and children aged 2-6 years.



Limoges

CITY OF LIMOGES

www.ville-limoges.fr

The Municipal Cultural Centres and the Management of Childhood (Children's Services) organises the biannual festival "Kaolin & Barbotin" in Limoges.



Sines Centro de Artes

CITY OF SINES - CENTRO DE ARTES DE SINES

www.centrodeartesdesines.com.pt

With an art gallery, an auditorium, the public library and the historical archives of Sines, the Arts Center is the main cultural institution in town. The Education and Cultural Service offers several activities for all children, 0-5 years old among the others, and organises the meetings "Arte e Educação", for professionals.



Compagnia Il Melarancio

COMPAGNIA IL MELARANCIO

www.melarancio.com

Produces shows for different age groups, specialising in young audiences and programmes theatre performances and other events.



DA.TE DANZA

www.datedanza.es

A dance company that produces shows for different age groups, specialising in dance shows for the very young.



DRAMMATICO VEGETALE

www.drammaticovegetale.com

Drammatico Vegetale produces shows for children of different ages and since 2008 has organised the "Artebebè" festival in Ravenna and its Province.



HELIOS Theater

www.helios-theater.de

Helios produces shows for different age groups. They organise the biannual festival for young audience “**hellwach**” in Hamm and regularly host conferences and symposia.



KOLIBRI THEATRE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

www.kolibriszinhaz.hu

Kolibri manages 3 performance venues in Budapest, where they present shows for different age groups. They produce for children and young people and organise the “**Biennial of theatre for children and young people**” in Kaposvar.



LA BARACCA - TESTONI RAGAZZI

www.testoniragazzi.it

La Baracca produces shows for different age groups and organises the festival for very young children: “**Visioni di futuro, visioni di teatro...**” in Bologna.



LA PICCIONAIA / I CARRARA

www.piccionaia.it

La Piccionaia / I Carrara produces shows for children of different ages and programmes theatre performances in Vicenza, Mira (Venice) and Padua.



LGL - LUTKOVNO GLEDALIŠČE LJUBLJANA

www.lgl.si

LGL produces shows for different age groups. They organise 2 festivals in Ljubljana: “**Golden Stick**”, International Biennial Festival of Live Actor Performances for Children and Youth, and the “**LUTKE**” International Puppets Festival.



MARDUIX

www.marduix.cat

Marduix produces shows for various age groups, based on a research on materials, tales, literature and music.



NO SOMOS MONSTRUOS TEATRO

www.nsmteatro.es

The company produces shows for different age groups with the aim of researching and exploring new artistic languages.



POLKA CHILDREN'S THEATRE

www.polkatheatre.com

Polka Theatre is a producing and receiving venue dedicated to children aged 0-13. They coordinate the Small size UK micro network.



RIALLES ESPECTACLES INFANTILS I JUVENILS

La Sala Miguel Hernández - www.lasalateatre.cat

La Sala Miguel Hernandez is a theatre located in Sabadell (Barcelona-Spain) dedicated exclusively to children, with a programme open to all genres and disciplines.



STARCATCHERS

www.starcatchers.org.uk

Starcatchers creates performances for babies and toddlers in Scotland. Its aim is to support productions, artist development and educator training.



STICKY FINGERS EARLY YEARS ARTS

www.stickyfingersarts.co.uk

Promotes artistic and cultural programmes for very young children (0-8). Sticky Fingers programmes the “**International early years arts festival**” in Newry, Northern Ireland.



TEATRO ALL'IMPROVISO

www.teatroallimprovviso.it

Teatro all'improvviso is a professional theatrical children's company founded by Dario Moretti, who realizes shows using various techniques and languages. He also founded “**Segni d'infanzia**”, international children festival of Mantua.



TEATRO PARAISO

www.teatroparaiso.com

Teatro Paraiso produces shows for different age groups, specialising in young audiences. They programme “**Pequeña Escena**” for children aged 1-6, in Vitoria.



TEATRUL ION CREANGĂ

www.teatrulioncreanga.ro

Teatrul Ion Creangă organises the International Theatre for Children Festival “**100, 1.000, 1.000.000 stories**” in Bucharest. The company's mission is to produce performances of high artistic standard.



THEATER DE SPIEGEL

www.despiegel.com

Theater De Spiegel is a touring company that combines music with objects and puppets. Every 2 years they organise the “**Babelut**” festival in Neerpelt focusing on music, theatre and art for children aged between 0 and 3 years.



THEATRE HULLABALOO

www.theatrehullabaloo.org.uk

It organises the festival for children and young people “**Takeoff**” currently based in Darlington. The festival hosts a special section dedicated to early years.



TOIHAUS THEATER

www.toihaus.at

Every two years Toihaus organises the international theatre festival for small children “**BIM BAM - Internationale Theater-Festival für Kleinst-und Kinder**”. They produce shows for different age groups.



THÉÂTRE DE LA GUIMBARDE

www.laguimbarde.be

Théâtre de la Guimbarde is a theatre company specialised in young audiences. It produces shows for different age groups. They also created the “**L’art et les Tout-petits**” (Art and Toddlers) festival: an annual gathering of artists and early childhood professionals.



THÉÂTRE O'NAVIO

www.onavio.com

Produces shows for different age groups and programmes the seasonal theatre performances at La Marmaille, a theatre dedicated exclusively to children with a special focus on early years.