

# Baby Becomings

## Towards a Dramaturgy of Sympoietic Worlding

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### ABSTRACT

The article proposes new concepts of dramaturgical thinking for baby theatre productions. With an arts-based research approach, allowing insider perspectives of the artmaking process to come forth, the authors, who are the director and dramaturge of the performance *Baby Becomings* by Teater Fot, discuss different concepts of postdramatic dramaturgical aspects in relation to the work. By adapting Donna Haraway's theories of sympoiesis and science art worldings as a theoretical framework, the article explores how Haraway's philosophy serves both as artistic inspiration and provides new concepts for dramaturgical reflection. The authors ask how posthumanist and sympoietic perspectives connect to postdramatic dramaturgy and wish to propose a posthumanist dramaturgy of sympoietic worlding in theatre for babies.

### KEYWORDS

baby theatre, becoming, dramaturgy, postdramatic, posthuman, science art worlding, sympoiesis, theatre for early years, TEY, worlding

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## Towards a Dramaturgy of Sympoietic Worlding

### Introduction

Baby theatre is an emergent field of artistic practice since the millennium, which has spread worldwide during the last decade. It is an interdisciplinary artform based on the affective and sensuous languages of music, dance, materials, and objects.<sup>1</sup> Research on the topic points to the relational, social, and participatory aspects of this artform,<sup>2</sup> having a connection to performative aesthetics<sup>3</sup> and postdramatic dramaturgies.<sup>4</sup> In this article, we propose that the inclusion of babies in theatre culture, addressing the audience without verbal language, connects with the posthumanist<sup>5</sup> perspectives of our times. In order to make a performance for babies, we adapt and attune ourselves to the babies' interests and ways of communicating. Attentive affective attunement is a mode of improvising and requires a dramaturgical strategy of *co-creation* or, what we wish to name, *sympoiesis*.

This paper presents an artistic work of baby theatre, *Baby Becomings* by Teater Fot,<sup>6</sup> that investigates performative aspects of posthumanism within an established postdramatic dramaturgy of baby theatre. The performance theme is *becoming*, as creative transformation, and plays with the relation between humans and animals, and the spaces in between those well-known categories. The performance deals with the cultural hierarchy of human supremacy and anthropocentrism of life on Earth by trying to take perspectives from other species through physical theatre and dance movements. The performance thus creates unknown species using textile materials of scenography and costumes together with movements by actors, animated objects and puppets,

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1 Hovik 2019a; van de Water 2012.

2 Lehmann & Reich 2007; Warteman 2009; White 2013; Nagel & Hovik 2016.

3 Böhnisch 2010; Fischer-Lichte 2008.

4 Fletcher-Watson 2013, 2016; H.-T. Lehmann 2006.

5 Posthumanism is a broad and complex term. In this article we will restrict our definition to Haraway's conception of the term and focus on her philosophy of decentering human supremacy within the anthropocentrism of western cultures and politics.

6 Teater Fot 2020.

live music and sounds. The 35 minute timespan of the performance aims to give an experience of the creative ongoing transformations of natural life on Earth, but instead of mourning the separation of nature from culture, the performance tries to bring the artforms in nature<sup>7</sup> (back) into the theatre space.



Fig. 1: *The Anemones*. Photo: Andrea Haugerud Hovik

The performance *Baby Becomings* is part of the artistic research project *Neither Fish nor Fowl*,<sup>8</sup> which consists of theatre making (one version for babies 0-2 and one for 3-5-year-olds), film making performances, workshops, and writing. The artistic idea of *Baby Becomings* has been to make an experience for babies that is not fixed in a pre-composed verbal narrative, nor providing a free playing installation space, but to make a performance that connects to the babies' sensuous ways of knowing, in different non-verbal, musical, and affective ways. The title, *Neither Fish nor Fowl*, might sound blurry and unfocused, but is meant to challenge our way of thinking in categories. Through the gaze of a human baby, in a pre-verbal sensuous approach, our connection to birds, fish, or unknown species becomes more obvious and accessible. *Baby Becomings* has been performed in many different versions

7 Haeckel 1899-1904.

8 Hovik 2018.

and thus it cannot be regarded as a fixed product or art object. Rather, it is an artwork which is more like an ongoing process of investigation. Consequently, we will mainly refer to the overall dramaturgical structure of the work with examples from the research process documentation.<sup>9</sup>

### Theory and research questions

Based on artistic research in Theatre for Early Years (TEY), our study relies on theories of performative and relational aesthetics as a common ground between art theory and social/pedagogical perspectives.<sup>10</sup> With dramaturgical concepts, strategies, structure, and intentions from the performance *Baby Becomings* as our reference, the postdramatic theatre is a starting point for our investigation. We understand the postdramatic as an attempt to equalize the means of theatre by decentering the text-based narrative, using non-hierarchical, inclusive, participatory or immersive strategies. *Baby Becomings* will be our example of how the different artforms of theatre (music, voice, visuals, materiality, movements) merge into sympoietic entanglements. We believe that highlighting the multi/trans/inter/intra disciplinarity<sup>11</sup> of baby theatre might be of interest for the TEY field in general, but our main contribution will be the philosophical ideas based on posthumanist perspectives, and the way in which these ideas materialize.

Our theoretical entrance to dramaturgical conversations as director and dramaturge of this artistic work has been conceptual, with an understanding of *affect* and *becoming*,<sup>12</sup> *worlding* and *sympoiesis*<sup>13</sup> as guiding principles. Inspired by the onto-epistemology of Donna Haraway,<sup>14</sup> we believe that knowledge and art are deeply connected, and that theatre can be a space for thinking with material and virtual becomings. Haraway's philosophy of *sympoietic science art worlding*<sup>15</sup> describes the transformative ongoingness of life and creation on Earth, in both biology and the arts. She connects to the Deleuze & Guattarian idea of *becoming* in a rhizomatic creative process of ongoing new connections.<sup>16</sup> The title, *Baby Becomings*, points at the creative process of ongoingness, and how new beginnings and transformations characterize this specific dramaturgical work. We have been thinking together with Haraway's ecological philosophies in our dramaturgical investigation of posthumanist perspectives of baby theatre. Having in mind that TEY is influenced by postdramatic theory and performative aesthetics,<sup>17</sup> we will ask

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9 The artistic research process of *Neither Fish nor Fowl* is documented as an exposition in the database of artistic research; *Research Catalogue*, Hovik 2018.

10 Fischer-Lichte 2008; Bourriaud 2007; Jackson 2011.

11 There are different aspects and concepts of what it means to work across artforms; simultaneously (multi), intertwined (trans), back and forth (inter) or mutual dependent (intra). For a discussion of the differences, see Jensenius 2012.

12 Deleuze & Guattari 1991, 2013.

13 Haraway 2016.

14 Ibid.

15 Haraway 2016, 71.

16 Deleuze & Guattari, 2013.

17 Fischer-Lichte 2008; Lehmann 2006.

in which ways the postdramatic theatre connects with ideas and philosophies of posthumanism. We will ask how the post- perspectives, still taking human supremacy as a given point of departure, might be an anthropocentric dead end in “times of trouble”.<sup>18</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte’s famous concept of the *autopoietic feedback loop* describes the relation between the actor and the spectator (or collectively, between actors and the audience).<sup>19</sup> We read this as a model of interaction where the human “species” is given priority. The posthumanist perspective points to the fact that humans always occupy the centre, and this anthropocentrism keeps the human drama in the centre of the theatre universe. Taking posthumanist philosophy into account will deconstruct the human drama, but it is unclear what will be alternative constructions. In *Baby Becomings* we explore the drama of becoming and characters in-between defined categories of species to search for new lines of thought in a dramaturgical sense that might open up some spaces of creation and discovery. Thus, our overarching research question will be:

The baby theatre piece “Baby Becomings” is postdramatic by definition. How can we connect the postdramatic with a posthumanist dramaturgy of sympoietic worlding in theatre for babies?

## **Methods**

Our theoretical approach connects to post qualitative and performative inquiry.<sup>20</sup> This means that our artistic ‘insider’ perspectives are present and critical of the separation of the subject/researcher and object/art relation of traditional qualitative research. Our methods of artistic research in *Baby Becomings* were based in our art practice of directing, scenographic work, and dramaturgical reflection together with the performers.<sup>21</sup> Our research material was the creative process itself though guided by theory and philosophy from the initial idea of the performance, through the many stages of artistic research, until the writing process of this article.

Together with taped research conversations and documentary films from rehearsals and performances, we are now looking back at the process and its results. Turning back, we see that the practical and theoretical work has been blurred and intertwined during the artistic processes, with an emphasis on theory in the beginning and at the end of the process, an alternation that is common in this kind of research process. This shifting focus connects with artistic research topology,<sup>22</sup> and points to the necessary movements between art material, theory, philosophy, and writing in the art making process.

A similar oscillation between theory and practice is seen below. After a brief introduction to the scenography, into which the babies are invited, and a presentation of the underlying theoretical concepts, we develop the argument

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18 Haraway 2016, 44.

19 Fischer-Lichte 2008.

20 Østern & Knudsen 2019; Fels 2012.

21 Hovik 2019b.

22 Nyrces 2006.

in two steps. After a brief discussion of existing dramaturgical models and their relevance in theatre for babies, we move on to explore the idea of a posthumanist dramaturgy of sympoietic worlding.



Fig. 2: Lifting and flying the Paper World. Photo: Dag Arve Forbergskog

### Scenographic worldings

The plateau in Deleuze & Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*<sup>23</sup> is a metaphor in a philosophical and abstract sense, but at the same time, it is possible to read this philosophy as an invitation to creative and artistic expressions. In *Baby Becomings*, the philosophical inspiration was given a very concrete expression with five plateaus in a 3 x 3 m square scenographic shape. A flat territory was demarcated by scenographic materials, layer by layer, with 1-meter of distance to the children /audience sitting around on all four sides of the square. The four corners were occupied by musicians and actors, with one or two corners available for entrance and exit.<sup>24</sup> (Fig. 2.) On top of each plateau, strange life forms/weird animals/odd creatures performed. Each layer of material was connected to specific emotional affects and basic feelings like happiness, fear, and curiosity. The affective expressions were composed and mixed with

23 Deleuze & Guattari 2013.

24 The performance can be played by one or two actors, and two or three musicians.

connected layers of singing and drumming. During the performance, layers were uncovered by the actors in different ways; unveiled, eaten, flown up and away, packed, waved away, dug out. In this way, the five plateaus of *Baby Becomings* can be described as affective becoming of five different sympoietic worldings.

World	Material	Affect	Music	Action
1. The Multiverse	Black cloth with white dots	Love	Baroque-inspired composition Echoing	Mirroring
2. Paper world	Strong brown paper	Greed	Flutes & bird sounds	Eating
3. African world	Orange printed textile	Happiness	Rhythmic drumming & singing	Dancing
4. The Ocean	Blue silk	Longing	Melancholic chorus	Flying fishes
5. The Seabed	Woolen plaids	Sadness	Singing, strings	Participation

Table 1. *Dramaturgical Script*

### **Postdramatic dramaturgical models of relevance to TEY**

Bearing in mind that young children experience the world through their senses, we turned to well-known postdramatic dramaturgical tools such as *ritual and play*, the technologically driven model of *video games*, and the biological and philosophical model of *the rhizome*. The existing models were used as a springboard for reflection in order to develop our own suggestion of dramaturgical sympoietic worlding as a tool in theatre for babies.

### **Ritual and play**

Inviting the audience to sit in a square, facing each other, reminds one of a ritual setting and the *magic circle of play* where the transformative act is supposed to be witnessed.<sup>25</sup> In *Baby Becomings* the babies witnessed the theatrical transformations going on, and in the end they were invited to play and to continue discovering treasures on the seabed. This happened, however, without any intention of transformation of the participants. Instead, the focus was on having a common art experience and opening a space for babies and adults to play together. The Seabed of woolen plaids was a safe and inviting environment with playful flat figures inhabiting the space, inviting the audience to a calm world of peaceful playing and sharing. (See Fig. 3)

<sup>25</sup> Huizinga 1971; Turner 1982, 1988.



Fig. 3. *Playing at the Seabed*. Photo: Dag Arve Forbergskog.

The musical refrain was an integrated part of the ritual structure of *Baby Becomings*. The refrain is a well-known way for parents to comfort the baby from the very beginning of baby life. The refrain is also, according to Deleuze & Guattari, a structure of becoming.<sup>26</sup> The animals' framing of their territory, and the demarcation of habitat often comes together with sounds and the repetition of sounds. In animal life there might be a building of a safe centre like a nest, a cave, a house, and then, a possibility of opening up and connecting with a mate or communicating with the surrounding world or the cosmos.<sup>27</sup>

In *Baby Becomings* we framed out the territory, we sang and repeated sounds to ensure a safe and playful environment, and we invited the babies to explore for themselves. The free playing session at the end opened up for new beginnings. These were some of the ritual elements activated in *Baby Becomings*.

26 Deleuze & Guattari 2005.

27 Ibid., 397.



### **Video games**

The dramaturgy of video games often builds on the mythical journey of a hero. The game will follow an avatar who has to pass different quests and levels on the screen, and in this way progresses slowly but steadily towards a goal. Often, the movement direction is from left to right, but the hero almost always searches for gateways from one level to the next. Each level offers different actions, shows different elements, and forces the player to attune to its logic. Video games constitute complex worlds composed of many different sub-worlds and transitions.<sup>28</sup>

We find some resemblances in *Baby Becomings* with its composition of many consequential worlds/levels, very different from each other, but still able to offer a unique experience within a clearly defined concept.<sup>29</sup> The five material plateaus follow the same structure as the levels of a video game and offer the same kind of world experiences, except for the *liveness*<sup>30</sup> of materiality. Moreover, in *Baby Becomings*, the movement is downwards, reminding of an archeological excavation, layer by layer down to the bottom of the seabed where the treasures are hidden. The transition from one plateau to the next comes together with a changing of creatures that inhabit each world, and with movements, sounds and music that change accordingly. Thus, a changing world logic is applied to each of the worlds similar to the worlds of video games. The cues for change and transitions are hidden in the synchronized movements of materials and musical composition. However, rather than the classical adventurous journey of the hero towards a goal, the worlds of *Baby Becomings* contained a multitude of unpredictable possibilities of movements and playful connections that occurred In Real (material) Life.

### **A thousand plateaus**

In *Baby Becomings*, the movement and singing through different worlds worked as an overarching structure that underlined the ritual and gaming aspects of the performance. The transformations between the plateaus became a (ritual) refrain of passing from one level to the next. Yet, the liveness and the bodily material presence eliminated the predictable and rigorous structure of ritual and games. Instead, the performance opened up towards the playful and improvised present moment of being and becoming together.

In each of the worlds, there were materials, songs, rhythms, and movements which were affected by each other and synchronized in different ways in the present moment. In this way, the material movements and musical improvisations were not only objects for sensuous exploration but became agents themselves. As material agents they were playing together: musicians, musical instruments, music, movements, human bodies, costumes, objects, puppets, textiles, air, light, space, voices,

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28 Salen & Zimmerman 2003.

29 Montola, Sternos & Waern 2009.

30 Auslander 2008.

babies, adult companions, and so on.<sup>31</sup> The combinations were sometimes unexpected and surprising, especially when affected by the babies' curiosity, interactivity, and intra-actions. Thinking within the frame of posthumanist agential realism,<sup>32</sup> these entanglements of the material world invited us to search for non-human perspectives of dramaturgy. New materialism invited us to 'meet the universe halfway' (to use Karen Barad's expression)<sup>33</sup>, and to recognize the agencies of non-living and non-human actors in the world and of the stage. Still, the babies' lively contributions and our animalistic acting experimentations called for a more organic dramaturgical model.

### **Rhizome**

The philosophical (non-) structure of the rhizome, which is a kind of biological organism, is not vertical like a tree, but horizontal and flat with a connecting organic network of roots, similar to the root and procreation systems of grass and fungi. The rhizome presented by Deleuze & Guattari is a manifold alternative to the unity of a tree. Rhizomes spread out in a flat (not hierarchic) way and make connections in every direction, endlessly. The rhizome as a dramaturgical model thus connects to the ongoing transformative progress in our performance. The rhizomatic connections, made in one moment of the timespan, transform into a different set of connections in the next.

Working with the *Baby Becomings* performance dramaturgy, we noticed how non-verbal languages like music, movements, costumes, and materials connected, interplayed, and synchronized during our improvisations. The careful structuring of transformations between the different worlds became crucial dramaturgical nodes in the ongoing connections across the artforms. The ongoing process of new becomings (both inside the performance and between different versions of the performance) also resembled the ever-growing connections of a rhizomatic structure.<sup>34</sup>

Looking closer at the transformative and ever-changing world-making of this piece, the rhizomatic model pointed to the way in which progressive connections are made but did not account for the material differences between modes or artforms. The multimodality and interplay between the artforms, and the manner in which the material languages of music, visuals, movements, and sounds actually connected across their differences, called for yet another way of thinking. The communicative interplaying aspect, not only inside a specific system, but between different disciplines, languages, and systems, was what characterized the inter/intra disciplinary dramaturgy of *Baby Becomings*.

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31 Taguchi 2012.

32 Agential realism is a term from Karen Barad (2003), pointing to the significance of matter in opposition or addition to the linguistic and constructivist perspectives in science studies.

33 *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007) is a widely known contribution to the natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities by theoretical physicist and feminist theorist Karen Barad.

34 Deleuze & Guattari 2013.

## A dramaturgy of sympoietic worlding

In this section we will introduce the key theoretical ideas that inform our notion of dramaturgical sympoietic worlding followed by a discussion of the term in relation to *Baby Becomings*.

### Poiesis - autopoiesis - sympoiesis

Sympoiesis is (as far as we know) not an established concept in dramaturgical theory, even if the *poiesis* of theatre goes back to the very origin of European theatre as an artform. We have borrowed the concept sympoiesis from Donna Haraway, who in turn refers to Beth Dempster (1998), suggesting the term in contrast to autopoietic self-producing autonomous systems within environmental studies.<sup>35</sup>

Aristotle writes in the *Poetics*<sup>36</sup> about the art of composing dramatic theatre. This theory is based on the poetry of verbal language, though deeply connected with the other arts of the dithyrambe (music, dance) through rhythm, choir etc. The concept of *poiesis*, meaning 'making, creation, production'<sup>37</sup> of theatre, as it manifests in the *Poetics*, has a long history of being *the* dramaturgy of theatre. Postdramatic poiesis contradicts this *poetics*, and the supremacy of written poetry. In this section we will suggest how the dramaturgy of postdramatic poiesis can connect with Donna Haraway's philosophy.

In her latest work, "Staying with the Trouble" (2016),<sup>38</sup> Haraway proposes new ways of thinking and becoming together with other species in an ongoing process of *sympoiesis* or co-creation.<sup>39</sup> In her view, humans are not exceptional beings, but equal to every other species on our planet, in an ongoing rearrangement of cells, organisms, microbes, and earthly compost. We eat and are eaten, we infect and become infected, we affect and become affected by one another in a process of ongoing creation or sympoiesis. Haraway's conception of sympoietic becoming is in dialogue with *autopoiesis*, which in biology and environmental studies refers to a system capable of reproducing and maintaining itself. Autopoietic units tend to be centrally controlled, homeostatic, and predictable.<sup>40</sup> In biology, human beings have been defined as autopoietic systems, and social sciences have theorized for example schools, prisons or the art society as autopoietic units.<sup>41</sup> In theatre, the feedback-loop of Erika Fischer-Lichte's performative aesthetics<sup>42</sup> is a well-known theory of autopoiesis. This self-referential system of response and feedback between actors and audience produces and reproduces itself in an autopoietic loop of what she calls co-

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35 Haraway, 2016, 61.

36 Aristotle 1970.

37 Aristotle, 1970: ποίησις (*poiesis*), meaning 'creation, production'.

38 Haraway 2016.

39 Ibid., 58.

40 Beth Dempster 1998 in Haraway 2016, 61.

41 Autopoiesis has been applied to the fields of cognition, systems theory, and sociology by Niklas Luhmann and others.

42 Fischer-Lichte 2008.

presence.

Following Haraway, sympoietic systems are, on the contrary, “collectively producing systems that do not have self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries. Information and control are distributed among its components. The systems are evolutionary and have the potential for surprising change”.<sup>43</sup> She argues that we can no longer think in terms of autopoietic systems, and that sympoietic understandings are necessary to think with both human and nonhuman ecologies, evolution, and development. What is interesting in our dramaturgical perspective is that Haraway’s ecological philosophy also works with history, affects, performances, technologies, and more.<sup>44</sup> She calls for *science art worldings*<sup>45</sup> as sympoietic practices for living on a damaged planet. Artistic practice is for Haraway a site for alternative stories as opposed to deconstructing existing structures, a site for imagining, feeling, and even rehearsing new worldings.

So, what would be the sympoiesis of theatre making? We are aware that sympoiesis is not a concept well established in the field of art theory, but we find that the creative processes of artmaking are in general compatible with the conception of sympoiesis in many ways. Theatre is never a work by one artist, or one art discipline. There will be sympoiesis in coproduction and collective creative processes of assemblage, where all artforms merge and play together. This happens not only in theatre making, but also in performance events. Sympoiesis might be understood as a process of collective worldmaking or worlding through the arts.

### Science art worlding

According to Haraway’s *science art worlding*, artists collaborate with scientists to be able to imagine new worlds together. Donna Haraway’s worlding proposes that the world is not a closed, static entity separated from humans, but being made and reproduced continuously by us. She borrows the term “worlding” from the philosopher Martin Heidegger who, in his work *Being and Time*<sup>46</sup>, turned the noun “world” into a verb “worlding” to stress its openness and performativity. Haraway’s worlding turns against the anthropocentrism of Heidegger by connecting to the idea of *multispecies entanglement*.<sup>47</sup> In her view, there is no one species more important than the other, but all species play an important role due to how they are deeply entangled in complex relations with one another. If we want to care for life in the world, we need to improve our entanglements: that is, having relations that are democratic and balanced, based more on *symbiosis* and less on *competition*. Being entangled can be both conflicting and painful, but rather than withdrawing from relations or ending them when interaction becomes difficult, one needs to *stay with the trouble* and work on improving

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43 Beth Dempster 1998 in Haraway 2016, 61.

44 Haraway 2016, 63.

45 Ibid., 71.

46 Heidegger 2007.

47 Haraway 2014.

our relations with the species we are in contact with. In sum, worlding refers to the co-operative and conflictual ways of world-making in which different species interact with each other and with their surroundings.

How can we understand this theory within the arts? Haraway has a deep interest in the arts as they are concerned with imaginative *Science Art Worldings for Staying with the Trouble*.<sup>48</sup> The arts projects which she refers to problematize troublesome relations between species and propose imaginative solutions for new ways of living with other species in the future, also sometimes referred to as bio-art or bio-performance.<sup>49</sup> In addition to this kind of artwork, where species entanglements are the topic, she is also interested in interdisciplinary art-processes, where we find different collectives such as designers, visual artists, performers, community activists, etc. working together in, what she calls, “sympoietic collaborations”. We also see her engagement with the arts in how she has incorporated it as an integral part of her academic work. In her writing, she often uses artworks as case studies for her worlding theories;<sup>50</sup> she incorporates artistic strategies to her own public appearances,<sup>51</sup> and is even involved with science fiction writing.<sup>52</sup>

In what ways has our baby performance *Baby Becomings* contributed to the ways in which sympoietic entanglements of artforms, collaboration, and worlding are performed? How can we sketch out a dramaturgy of sympoietic worlding in theatre for very young children? We have chosen to discuss three aspects of this (large) question; the question and role of posthumanism within this specific postdramatic theatre context, the sympoiesis of different artforms within performing arts for babies, and the dramaturgical worlding of transformations, rhythm, and refrain.

### **Posthumanism and postdramatic theatre**

Posthumanism is a term which points to a new understanding of humans in relation to other species and to the material world as a whole, after or beyond humanism.<sup>53</sup> Looking at the connection between posthumanism and the postdramatic theatre, we find the same aim of decentering the human perspective. With the terms postdramatic and posthuman, humankind is still put at the centre, but indicating that this centre has now shifted or been displaced. The anthropocentrism of the term posthumanism is thus criticised by Haraway, who prefers to talk about human relations with companion species instead of talking about who is placed at the centre and who is placed at the periphery.<sup>54</sup> Following Haraway, the term posthumanism might be troublesome in light of sympoietic entanglements with companion species.

Postdramatic approaches to theatre making indicate in the same way a

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48 Haraway 2016, 71.

49 Žukauskaitė 2019.

50 Patricia Piccinini (in Haraway 2014) and the Crochet Coral reef (in Haraway 2016)

51 Terranova 2016.

52 Haraway 1984, 2014.

53 Barad 2003, 2007.

54 Haraway 2016, 13.

decentering of the dramatic text but keeping the human drama as the main reference. Postdramatic theatres often have a focus on deconstructing hierarchies where the text is the centre together with the character (most often a human). The term postdramatic theatre was introduced over 20 years ago in Germany,<sup>55</sup> and is still widely used today to come to terms with theatres that deconstruct dramatic texts, juxtapose all the means of theatre, and resist classical categorization. In *Baby Becomings*, baby humans are placed at the centre of attention instead of the adults, prioritizing a vulnerable “species” instead of the stronger counterpart. This deconstruction of traditional text-based theatre has already been applied through postdramatic approaches, together with research in baby theatre,<sup>56</sup> and provides us with a relevant dramaturgical perspective to help us think about *Baby Becomings*. Still, we feel the need to construct a new sympoiesis based on a “more than human” set of thinking.

In *Baby Becomings*, there is no verbal storyline, and music leads the action. There are no characters, and actors are playing in-between animal/human/nature categories. There is no attempt to make a rational logic of narration, but the co-creation or sympoiesis between acting, music, and material transformations creates a kind of journey through different worlds. We put forward a line of transformational logic based on the agency of material and musical elements. This material transformation creates an ongoing movement in time and space where the babies are welcome to explore five different worlds, one after the other. The transitions between the worlds add a sense of uncertainty and chaos, but once established it becomes a new safe place for the babies to explore. We are not so concerned with simultaneous action (which has been a typical postdramatic (un)structure for years) but more with a carefully arranged ongoing transformation or “becoming”. Improvisation through playful soundscapes, repetitions, and imitation work as communicators with the babies, and provide the feeling of story and development; the dramaturgy of ongoing sympoietic worlding.

We have been working within philosophies of posthumanism, but we cannot claim that we do not put the human baby at the centre of our performance. In fact, this is the very reason for making baby theatre. Still, we have challenged our adult human supremacy in a way that connects with posthumanist ways of thinking. Babies are normally located at the periphery of both the adult world and the art world. Placing this “species” at the centre, we have created a format that appeals to them. In order to make a performance for babies, we have attuned to them, and chosen material and sensuous elements that are important in their world. Through sound, movement, animals, objects, and puppets we create connections and associations that correspond with babies’ life experiences. Babies are vulnerable and need to be cared for, just like any species in its early stages should be cared for, but by searching for posthuman and post

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55 Lehmann 1999, 2006.

56 Fletcher-Watson 2013.

dramatic perspectives we wish to challenge the logistic hierarchy of the adult anthropocentric theatre world.

### **The sympoiesis of artforms in *Baby Becomings***

As explained earlier, we understand sympoiesis as a term for multispecies entanglements. We find the concept useful in our context because it can be used to understand the entanglements of differences and how artforms meet and affect each other. The artists have different skills, and they are connected in a bodily way in the time and space of rehearsal or performance. The entanglements of a specific moment of a theatre performance are multiple.

Looking at the sympoietic entanglements of artforms in *Baby Becomings* can help us understand the sympoietic dramaturgical practice: How does music affect movements, how does movement affect materials? Materials are affected by human hands and feet; bodies are in turn touched by the materials. Singing and drumming are sympoietic actions where the materialities of voice and rhythmic vibrations affect the musicians' bodies. Their actions and vibrations in the performance space make the child audience move. The babies' engagement affects their parents and adult companions, who attempt to experience the art event through their babies' perspective.

Within a performance of baby theatre, all the art disciplines of theatre (scenography, music, bodily actions) affect each other, and are able to connect in different and mutual ways. The sympoiesis of *Baby Becomings* is thus a question of how the co-creation of weaving together the artistic skills of making scenography, singing, and moving is actually acted out. Improvisation will be a relevant method in this context but is often focused on human interrelations. Sympoiesis requires a dramaturgical openness towards the process itself, where both human and non-human agents and actors will contribute and be affected by one another. Each of them will act differently at different stages, according to their own ongoing processes. Sympoiesis is co-creation on the level of complex theatre making with all the elements and means of theatre in play in a specific moment of time and place.

Directing and discussing this artistic process has been a slow, thoughtful, and curious becoming of unexpected combinations and creations. Playing with the elements of each world over time was really a discovery process of worldmaking, connecting material and musical elements, letting be what came and refining the details of synchronized action. By making worlds with elements that are synchronized rather than juxtaposed, we have aimed at creating theatre that doesn't prioritize one element over another, but lets the process guide the result. In this way, our method can be understood as a form of sympoietic devising.

Another take on the sympoietic worlding of *Baby Becomings* is proposing a way of communication that does not exclude the early, vulnerable stages of human life. Our working methods based on musical ways of communication

become alternative to the dominating verbal language of theatre in line with the postdramatic decentering of the text. Affective languages and attunements<sup>57</sup> open up not only possibilities for better relations between human babies and adults, but also for better relationships with other species. Children and babies will relate directly to animals because the possibilities of understanding each other through bodily engagement are present. Exploring the evolution and transformation of species is the theme of *Baby Becomings*, and we have been curious about the babies' relations to animated objects, different materials, sounds, and nature/animal inspired elements in the theatre. What we have seen so far is their attentive interest in what is going on, and when given the possibilities of connection and participation they most often willingly enter into the entanglements of our play. The parents/adult companions sometimes express surprise by their babies' capacity to adapt to the ever changing scenes and how they relate to the strange creatures on stage.<sup>58</sup> The sympoiesis of theatre as multidisciplinary art connects very obviously to the preverbal and sensuous ways of communication that we find in our conversations with babies and animals and maybe in our relations with natural life in general.

### **Dramaturgical Worlding**

While the science art worlding projects that Haraway refers to are activist political art projects involving and entangling society in many different ways, worlding is for us a more art-specific and material exploring activity of imagining and crafting in theatre, and thus a useful dramaturgical concept in our work. According to Palmer and Hunter: "Worlding is informed by our turning of attention to a certain experience, place or encounter and our active engagement with the materiality and context in which events and interactions occur. It is above all an embodied and enacted process – a way of being in the world - consisting of an individual's whole-person act of attending to the world."<sup>59</sup>

Following Palmer and Hunter's definition, worlding is a word for becoming and creation; it is a word that describes an attitude towards how we engage and entangle with the world, and how we think about other beings different from ourselves. Worlding is becoming together with the world, through non/human, non/animal, and material agencies. In this way, worlding is a word for creating theatres and dramaturgies. With *Baby Becomings*, we have been "art-science-worlding" our relationship with babies and with unknown species, imagining different worlds in the theatre, trying to explore what is outside our well-known human categories and definitions. By creating, for example, the figure we eventually named the *Dancing Mushroom* out of the *African world* (Fig. 3), we wished to open the space for curiosity and imagination, and possibly remove some boundaries of the experience of an object and the person enacting it.

The five different worlds that we travel through in *Baby Becomings* are

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57 Stern 1985.

58 These observations are gathered from our taped research conversations. Privat archive.

59 Palmer and Hunter 2018.





Fig. 4. *The Dancing Mushroom*. Photo: Andrea Haugerud Hovi.

made out of ordinary materials of everyday life, such as viscose, brown paper, cotton, silk, and wool. In fact, these material layers are industrially produced, then crafted, and recirculated for scenography, and contain their own histories of becoming. Being a part of our performance brings each of the material stories into our entanglement, and into the artistic structure of worlding preparation, introduction, playing, rhythm, and refrain.

The musical compositions of *Baby Becomings* are based on rhythm and singing,<sup>60</sup> and – as noted earlier - the liveness of musical rhythms, refrains and the human singing voice give the babies a feeling of safety. Rhythm structures the performance and moves from the opening scene of welcoming rituals into transition and change, then moments of stability, then transition again, and then stability again, repeating five times, becoming a kind of seasonal rhythm. This structure of ongoing sympoietic worlding speaks to the capacity that babies have of staying with the trouble of changing worlds, holding on in symbiosis, and even thriving. Sometimes the babies seem to teach their parents about a capacity they did not know existed. Worlding seems to be a useful dramaturgical concept for theatres working with sympoietic entanglements across artforms, materialities, and species.

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60 The performance music is composed by Tor Andreas Haugerud, Siri Gjære and Rohey Taalah.

## Conclusion

Returning to our research question about how we can connect with a dramaturgy of sympoietic worlding in theatre for babies, we have proposed how to do this in three specific ways based on our performance practice and dramaturgical thinking. First, by leaving the verbal language aside, we apply a posthuman approach to explore the affective languages of children and other species. Secondly, we point to the sympoiesis of artmaking processes across art disciplines, focusing on the ongoing connecting and synchronizing process itself. In the end, we propose a dramaturgy of sympoietic worlding working with an attitude of changing perspectives, entanglement with material transformations, rhythms, and refrain.

The dramaturgy of sympoietic worlding in *Baby Becomings* connects deeply with how we relate to one another as human beings, both as babies, adults, and artists across differences and artforms, how we are able to imagine new and non-human worlds together, and how we enact and transform our sympoietic worldings through the entanglements and sympoiesis of artforms in the theatre space.

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