Agathe Israel, Cecilia Enriquez de Salamanca (Eds.)

Baby, Family, Observer

Yearbook of
Participant Infant Observation

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Subjective Processes in Infant Observation

Yearbook of Participant Infant Observation 2021

With articles by Agathe Israel, Peter Bründl and Lisa Wolff

First edition

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Foreword

Cecilia Enriquez de Salamanca and Agathe

Yearbook of Participant Infant Observation 2021[1]

This volume launches a new series entitled *Jahrbuch für teilnehmende Säuglings- und Kleinkindbeobachtung*[1]. The idea to launch a yearbook was prompted by an awareness that there is a relative dearth of publications on infant observation in German-speaking countries. This is surprising, since this approach has great potential, both as a method for training the psychoanalytic attitude and for learning about what infants experience at the very beginning of their development. Many psychoanalytic training courses are already exploiting this potential. However, psychotherapy training in Germany is currently being transformed into a university discipline and learning processes are becoming increasingly accelerated and rationalised. We therefore think that it is important at this juncture to uphold the value of "learning from experience". Such learning takes time and requires commitment and small stable groups. It also acts as a counterbalance to the pressure that society is exerting on individuals to adjust to changes increasingly rapidly. And last, but not least, we also hope that this yearbook will help to rectify the low level of reception of the English school of psychoanalytic object relations psychology in the German-speaking countries.

Future issues of the yearbook will focus mainly on lectures given at the conferences on "infant observation as a place of emotional learning". These conferences have been taking place since 2006 and are always dedicated to a specific theme. They offer supervisors of infant observation groups, trainees and interested members of the caring and health professions the opportunity to receive an introduction to the method or learn more about it by working on observational material in small groups. This first yearbook for 2021 contains lectures from the 8th conference on infant observation held in Berlin in 2019 and a presentation on a two-year infant observation. The conference theme was "How do babies and their families experience and use the observer as a third person?"

The International Journal of Infant Observation and its Applications with its international circle of authors indisputably provides the most comprehensive insights into the use of the method in psychoanalytic training worldwide and into its growing integration into social and psychotherapeutic work and healthcare. The yearbook is intended as a regional addition to the literature on infant observation and will hopefully contribute to the exchange of ideas with international colleagues. The method has spread to the countries surrounding Germany - including Belgium (since 1976; Watillon 2010, p. 43), France (since 1977; Prat 2005) and Spain (at the end of the 1970s; Perez Sanchez 1981) and also across the Atlantic, and psychoanalytic colleagues involved in infant observation for many decades have published a number of books and articles.

International conferences (the last were held in Turin, Italy in 2017 and Dakar, Senegal in 2012) and the international congresses organised by the Tavistock Clinic in London roughly every 4 years (Glover 2014), the last in 2018, have created networks for scholarly exchange.

For the sixth international conference in Krakow the Polish philosopher Andrezej Gardziel did some research on the life history of Esther Lifsa Wander, who later became known as Esther Bick and was the founder of participant infant observation (Gardziel, 2002).

The psychoanalyst Esther Bick (1901-1983) was born in Poland. She was Jewish and had to flee from the German Nazis in Vienna. She managed to get to Great Britain, where she first lived and worked in Manchester, later moving to Leeds to work at treatment and residential institutions for children. After the end of the World War II she worked and taught in London. Esther Bick had studied

[1] *Original German title.* Jahrbuch für teilnehmende Säuglings- und Kleinkindbeobachtung 2021

psychology with Charlotte Bühler in Vienna and written her doctoral thesis on group formation in two-year old children (Datler 2009). Another author gives the title of her thesis as 'Beobachtungen an zweieinhalbjährigen Kindern' (*Eng.* Observations in Two-and-a-Half-Year-Old Children) (Köhler-Weisker 2006). The kind of science with which Esther Bick came into contact with during her time in Vienna is likely to have been oriented more towards collecting facts about children's behaviour than towards investigating processes. Her psychoanalytic training began in Great Britain.

She underwent two training analyses, the first with Michael Balint, who saw the relationship between mother and child as reciprocal (Balint, A. 1952, p. 120) and in whose theory the concept of "object-love" was central (Balint 1969, p. 95ff.), and a second with Melanie Klein, who was investigating the processes that take place between the internal and external worlds in the mother-child relationship and early emotional states associated with them. It can be assumed that it was her experience with these two analysts that prompted her to adopt an epistemological orientation which motivated her to move from a one-person psychology to a two-person (or multi-person) psychology and to become more interested in gaining knowledge *of* things *in participation* than in having knowledge *about* things, in terms of something that can be possessed. Immediately after completing her psychoanalytic training (1943-1948) she was commissioned by John Bowlby to develop a training course for child analysts, the main focus of which was an 'Infant Observation Seminar'. It consisted of one to two years of infant observation in families, which were then recorded in writing and discussed regularly in groups, and the submission of a final paper on the developmental process of the child and the observer.

Esther Bick herself did not publish much, but was a tireless teacher. She even began to work with a new infant observation group at the age of 79. It is therefore not surprising that her advice for observers was distributed among the groups in the form of hand-outs describing the 'two golden rules of observation'.

> "The most important goal of infant observation is - in my experience - really to observe; to learn not to draw any premature conclusions and not to fall prey to any clichés, or to follow any theories or models, but to keep seeing things in a completely new way again and again, since no baby is like any other. It is foolish to make statements such as "the 3-month-old child ... "the 5-month-old child" because that is so dependent on the development of the individual baby and its relationship to its mother. That is why it is so fundamentally important to learn what it means to observe, that is, to bracket all our prior assumptions: you know nothing! That's all, and that's Rule No. 1 for the observer! Only if observers take the attitude, "I don't know anything yet, I will only find out by looking" will their work be really fruitful, even if they have excellent skills. If you approach it with fixed concepts, for example, the breast as an internal object or quite different ideas, you are not really observing, you aren't seeing clearly.
>
> Rule No. 2 for the observer consists in simply being a recipient, i.e. in passively taking everything in, allowing it to flow into one, to allow oneself to be filled, but never to ask for any small change, never to intervene in any way, be it only to ask a question, because if you influence the situation, you are no longer observing the actual situation any more.
>
> Observers should be capable of not interfering in the mother-child relationship, and that's not easy, because they feel with the mother, sense what the baby is feeling and would like to make suggestions or to help, but that would have the opposite effect, because the mother would feel criticised and have the feeling that the observer wants to show her that she does not understand her child." (Ermann 1996).

Bick gives observers very clear rules, however, it is up to the recipients to understand them as

suggestions, not as rules coming from an observer super-ego.

With her "stroke of genius" (Harris 1983) of infant observation, Esther Bick has enabled many professionals, including psychotherapists, pre-school teachers, educators, doctors, midwives and social workers who work with children and their families to have a unique learning experience in which scientific objectivity and emotional experiences of the observer come together The British psychoanalytic community has now been teaching the method of infant observation for over 60 years (Bick 1964). It is a legacy which it has honoured and actively continued to develop, both in numerous books (e.g. Miller 1989, Reid 1997, Briggs 2002) and in the "*Journal of Infant Observation*", which has published three issues a year since 1997. Much has been written in these publications about the benefits of this learning experience, the specificity of the approach, which is on the one hand so simple (a child is simply observed once a week at its home) and the simultaneous emotional intensity that can develop in this field; also about the treasure trove of material that was to prompt infant observers to use their findings as a basis for research (Rustin 1989, 1997, 2002; Reid 1997; Shuttleworth 1997).

All of the publications in the field reflect a passion for infant observation that is tangible, a sense of having received a gift in a special way that gives rise to an urgent desire to continue working with the material and the method both cognitively and emotionally.

It would appear to be inherent in the method that interpretations of the material, most of which is preverbal, are made cautiously and carefully in small steps and utilised in theory development. It was not until almost 40 years after infant observation was initially developed that the first issue of the *Journal of Infant Observation* came out. It provides a forum for papers that present insights from and experiences with infant observation and its applications in a special way. In her review of the first issue Kate Barrows (1998, p. 280) commented that it was worthy of remark that infant observers had previously shown a tendency to be modest and remain silent.

Although Bick herself published so little, she nonetheless had an enormous influence on theory building. Donald Meltzer describes her as a "gifted therapist and teacher" who introduced important concepts to describe aspects of early mental life such as the second skin and adhesive identification, adding that she was less interested in cognitive development and the development of thinking processes than Roger Money-Kyrle and Wilfrid Bion, for whom they were a special focus (Meltzer 1986, p. 300).

> "It is a pity that Mrs. Bick never came to terms with the full scope and significance of Bion's work, for without the *Theory of Thinking* her discoveries about the skin-container, like ours about dimensionality, dismantling and adhesive identification's clinical ramifications, appeared merely as rarities of psychopathology. But once Bion had opened up the vast panorama of alpha and beta, of the symbolic and non-symbolic areas of mental life, we could see that our researches were pioneering the investigation of the non-symbolic area, the realm of beta elements, of hallucination, delusion formation, psychosomatic disorder and basic-assumption mentality. Esther Bick's skin-container personality, our description of two-dimensionality in the post autistic children and Bion's distinction between exo- and endo-skeletal personality structure could be seen as identical." (Meltzer 1986)

Today we infant observers take it for granted that we can draw on this knowledge when we are examining our observation material.

Infant observation did not arrive in Germany until much later. Why were the German analysts so ambivalent about embracing both infant observation and the English school of analytic object relations psychology with which it was associated? While we must ask this question, our answer must remain incomplete because we would need to take into account conscious, unconscious, personal,

professional and societal reasons.

We can only assume that as a method that integrates both practice and theory-building, Esther Bick's participant infant observation must have confronted German analysts with how the development of psychoanalysis had stagnated during the Nazi era. It may also have drawn their attention to their slowness in addressing and dealing with the implications of their own roles as individuals and those of their institutions during this time. They were grappling with their defences against their own guilt about their own responses, which ranged from simply turning a blind eye and remaining silent to actively turning away from and expelling Jewish colleagues (see Lockot 1994). Participant infant observation must also have provoked them because, unlike the training programmes of the German psychoanalytic institutes, it was constantly concerned with what is not known, with primitive anxieties and constellations for which there were as yet no concepts. It may also have been unsettling because it does not assume that apart from their having had more practice in reflecting, the teachers also know more than their students about *the individual baby* they are observing and its mother or family. Constantly living with open questions is a state that is difficult to bear, and we prefer a life with answers. Participant infant observation must also have called into question the German child-rearing principle of teaching the 'instinct-driven" baby that it is the will of the adults that prevails from the start and that they always know better what is right for the child.

The first descriptions of participant infant observation of any length to be published in Germany were authored by Angela Köhler-Weisker (1980) and Ross Allen Lazar (1986). Both authors ran infant observation supervision groups, Köhler-Weisker in Frankfurt am Main and Ross Allen Lazar in Munich and Berlin, and gradually integrated them into the training of psychoanalytic child therapists. At the beginning of the 1990s analysts from both East and West Berlin founded the Berlin Study Group on the Tavistock Model (Berliner Studiengruppe Tavistockmodell (BSTM)), which for seven years provided the framework for essential seminars of the first part of the Tavistock Child Psychotherapy Course (these were seminars on Infant Observation, Young Child Observation, Work Study, Child Development and a reading seminar). This was a unique opportunity to learn, particularly for the East German colleagues, being as it was outside of the fierce struggles over shares in the psychoanalytic work and training in the two formerly separate German states. It was thanks to the kind commitment of Suzanne Maiello, who came from Rome (Maiello 2007), Ross Lazar from Munich (Lazar 1996) and Antje Netzer-Stein from London, that the group was able to work continuously in Berlin. Even if it was not comparable to studying at the Tavistock Clinic itself, this training was highly intensive, and the group developed a strong commitment to Esther Bick's method, attitude and ideas. In 2000 it founded a state-recognised institute providing training based on the Tavistock model. In 2003 it resolutely supported the introduction of infant observation as a compulsory component of the training of analytic child and youth therapists at institutes that were members of the Vereinigung der analytischen Kinder- und Jugendlichen Psychotherapeuten e.V. in Deutschland (VAKJP) (*Eng*. Association of Analytic Child and Youth Therapists in Germany). At this point it should be mentioned that Suzanne Maiello continued to work with the institute for several more years, until 2012, providing excellent supervision for an infant group and a toddler group and case supervision for child and adolescent psychotherapists who were already experienced. This is important to mention because it led, among other things, to the development of conferences on infant observation in the German-speaking countries. Training institutes frequently fail to attach much importance to seminars on infant observation, and yet trainee psychotherapists experience it as having a formative influence on their own development. Susan Reid has also put it similarly in her postscript to her book *Developments in Infant Observation*: "It becomes a passion, and a passion practitioners wish to share“ (Reid, 1997, p. 228).

Perhaps we observers, like babies with their parents, first need to have a clearly structured, familiar, cosy world in which we can explore, pay attention to our responses and reflect.

The conferences on infant observation that we have been holding in Berlin since 2006 have had this more modest, almost intimate character, which arises from working together in small groups. The annual meetings of the seminar leaders during the conferences are also experienced as an important source of mutual support.

Over the past two to three decades a wealth of observation reports have been generated here in Germany too, having developed out of the valuable ideas that have emerged in the seminar groups. Some of these reports have been used in individual publications (cf. Israel 2001/2008, Lazar et al. 2001, Kahl-Popp 2001), while Gabriele Häussler collected papers published in the period from 2000 to 2014 in her book '*Psychoanalytische Säuglingsbeobachtung und Säuglings-Kleinkind-Eltern-Psychotherapie*' (Häussler 2015). We hope that this yearbook will also be a suitable forum.

Ross Lazar (1945- 2017) moved from London to Munich, where he established infant observation in the 1980s (Lazar 1986). In an article entitled "*Erforschen und Erfahren: teilnehmende Säuglingsbeobachtung*"[2] he wrote; "To start with nobody thought about or believed in this method, but at some point no-one could continue to ignore the fact that it has an immense potential for research and has already produced a 'treasure trove' of data." (Lazar, 2015, p. 36).

That article was written 35 years ago, but today we can read it as a legacy that we are glad to accept. And, like children who grow up and go out into the world, we believe that it is now time to make findings and advances in theory obtained in the German-speaking countries accessible not only to the supporters of infant observation who attend our conferences, but also in printed form to a broader range of interested professionals.

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[2] *Engl. transl:* ¨Exploring and Experiencing: Participant Infant Observation"

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Baby – Mother – Family – Observer
Subjective processes during Esther Bick's participant infant observation

Agathe Israel

Yearbook of Participant Infant Observation 2021

Abstract: The author attempts to describe the relationship that develops between baby and observer during a participant infant observation using Esther Bick's method from the baby's perspective and discusses the limitations of this endeavour. Based on observable phenomena, she investigates how the baby communicates preverbally with the observer, how it uses her benevolent interest, her reliable containment and her restraint (she does not actively intervene) to learn to exercise its own mental functions. The child can use them when it is distressed or to digest experiences, or to help forge links between prior, present and future emotional experiences, or to recognize the third other (triad). The parents benefit in a similar way. The child's progressive development transforms his or her relationship with the observer, but his/her inner image in the child remains unchanged. All participants are united by the passion (Bion) to learn emotionally.

Keywords: infant-observer relationship, preverbal communication, intersubjective process, emotional learning from experience, infant observation using the Esther Bick method

Introduction

In this article I attempt to describe the relationship between an infant and an adult that is fed from the start by reciprocal attention and receptivity, but includes hardly any interactive activity. Researchers who use experiments in standardised laboratory situations to study the psyche and who are accustomed to measuring stimulus-reaction patterns are likely to be somewhat disconcerted by participant observation and its findings.

Doing field research by means of participant infant observation

Participant infant observation is a method of field research in which researchers work either overtly or covertly, but are always part of the system. The concept and approach was probably initially introduced in 1924 by the American educator Eduard C. Lindemann in various settings associated with the University of Chicago, and later spread to Europe. Fields of research are characterised by various influencing factors, and in our case these are infants and their mothers (families) and the researcher. The success of an observation depends on whether a way can be found for an outsider to be permitted to enter this field. In social research participant observation is seen as a relational process that requires effort - trust needs to be earned. Importance is also attached to the researchers' perseverance during the initial meetings and their emotional resonance to the individuals in the field, and also to their social skills, such as openness, impartiality and respectful and appropriate interpersonal conduct.

Observers also need attentive awareness, a liking for detail, to use all their senses when observing, to have a good memory, to reflect on what they remember and document it meticulously and to write in a precise, understandable and academic style (cf. Beuchling, O., 2015).

All the factors that I have listed here can be found in Esther Bick's method of participant infant observation (Bick, 1974). But they are of little use if they are not coupled with the attitude that I do not yet know anything, I will only learn by looking. Bick worked with the passive, receptive variation of this research method, since in participant infant research the observer must neither give any input, nor stipulate any conditions, but exercise restraint and take in what arises as a third person. She also added two more steps: a discussion of the individual transcripts in a group of peers led by an experienced colleague, and the creation of a record of these reflections that summarises the entire process, from the direct observation and its writing-up to the emotional resonance and mental processing of the data in the group. The experience that the observers can gain of the laws that govern psychological development and how it unfolds in the individual case is immense. For example, they can observe how at the beginning of life physical and mental experience are still completely interwoven and how, because their physical states are constantly changing, babies oscillate between states of integration in which they can absorb and process stimuli relatively calmly, and states of disintegration, in which they are flooded by powerful stimuli. They are witness to their severe fears of annihilation and despair, but also to their joie de vivre. They can observe how the children's own little containers get bigger and bigger as their mothers/their parents, as understanding others, take in what the infants cannot yet cope with, sense what they are feeling and provide find meaningful thoughts and words for it. In other words, they "digest" it, as it were, and find an alleviating response. They can also observe how dependent children are, how they adjust or how they manage to help themselves and draw on what they have already internalised. Observers are required not only to watch attentively, but also to participate in what happens emotionally. When Esther Bick was developing her method in the 1940s participation was probably not widely used as a research method. Now participant observation is seen as a core method in social research and is used to "capture social action in vivo", i.e. quasi as an insider. The goal is to follow processes of meaning-making as they unfold, from the perspective of the researcher (cf. Hirschauer 2002, p. 35ff.). When we observe babies at the beginning of their lives we find ourselves in uncharted territory, a state of not knowing, in a language- and wordless sphere. We need to be both *in* the scene with all our senses while at the same time looking *at* the scene, in a reflecting, third position. Participant observation is thus also excellent training for the psychoanalytic attitude and for getting to grips with different theories, particularly the psychoanalytic ones. So would it not be fitting to call it psychoanalytic infant observation? As understandable as the wish to do so may be, in order to emphasise the wealth of material and experience that participant infant observation contributes to psychoanalytic understanding, we should nonetheless refrain from using this title. Isca Salzberger-Wittenberg, a student of Esther Bick's and an experienced supervisor and researcher, puts it

> "I believe we only confuse the issue if we speak of psychoanalytic observation of infants. [...]; the primary focus in psychoanalysis is the internal world as it manifests itself in the transference and interpretation plays a central role in testing the correctness of the analyst’s understanding as well as in effecting change. In observing infants, we

> are studying object relations and an internal world in the making. What also makes it very difficult is that we study the relationships which develop between third parties, [...] ones that happen in the inter-woven mental and physical activities. It is this detailed bi-focal attention to body and mind, intra-psychic and inter-psychic events which gives the study of infants its specific character. Wittenberg, I. (1999), p. 5.

Unique experiences

The extraordinary, one might almost say unique benefit of observation consists in the fact that we are temporarily thrown into unbearable states of being and primitive affects such as we rarely or never experience in our adult lives, due to our defence structures. We call these affects primitive because they can take hold of us or flood us with such force and urgency that we stop thinking. We come into contact with our own inner child (cf. Maiello, 2007). Primitive ideas or convictions rise up in us, such as "I am being threatened, annihilated, attacked, I'm out of place, not wanted, incapable, I am exposed and powerless, torn apart, I am disintegrating, I am being wiped out, I have lost all orientation. They are also primitive because they are often accompanied by strong bodily sensations: our muscles tense, our stomachs become unsettled, or we feel pain in our bodies or feel weak, tired, paralysed or aroused, boundaryless, skinless and vulnerable. Then nothing remains to think or reflect. *But* as field researchers we are in a privileged position, do not have to take any responsibility for the child, the mother or the situation. There is no obligation to act. We perceive these extreme, primitive states, such as cries of hunger, gut pains, freezing and flailing, and experience the infant's primitive feelings, such as annihilation, rejection, disintegration, chaos, hopeless powerlessness, existential anxiety, failure/collapse and devastating rejection - and take them in. We also perceive how the mother is feeling, which is often similar to how their child is feeling. We experience the success or failure of the interaction or the mother's attempts at translation. We are drawn into the infant's world. We can identify completely with the child without this having any consequences, and project all the infant's suffering into the mother, condemn her inwardly as an "evil persecutor who fails completely ", who is "rejecting and cold, impinging" and "refuses" to respond to the child's need for merger, oneness and an absence of separation. Our privileged position enables us to establish, in ourselves and with our supervision groups, a "potential space" in which we can separate out what comes from the child, what comes from the mother or the father, what they deposit in us and what are our own, reactivated early experiences - what are countertransference feelings, i.e. our emotional responses? In this space we can also develop hypotheses about the mental states, forms of defence, relationships etc. and test their validity as the observation progresses. This space makes it possible to do research work in vivo, to go beyond the textbook. Our privilege gives us the opportunity to gain this kind of experience and we can fall back on it later when we ourselves are in situations where we have the responsibility as therapists to be a container for others, to offer containment that transforms their raw states, which to begin with are wordless, and gives them meaning. Thus, for example, if in a therapeutic session we have the feeling that we are being annihilated by our patient and that we can no longer think, we might recognise that they are drawing us, by means of projection, into a state of existential anxiety that they experienced in early childhood. Because we have previous mental and physical experience of such states and have reflected upon them we are able to recognise how massively we are identified. I believe that Klein's, Bion's and their followers' experience in participant infant observation made it possible for them to make theoretical psychoanalytic

concepts such as projection, introjection, projective identification, imitation and countertransference so vivid and easy to grasp, so that they not only serve as cognitive constructs, but can really help to gain access to psychological dynamics, the sense of self and intersubjectivity.

Who is the observer in the experience of the child and its parents?

It is uncontested that the children and their families experience the observers, both professionally and personally, as a beneficial influence. But who or what are they in the experience of the child and its mother? Could their unobtrusive presence, which is different from the behaviour of other figures in their everyday lives, possibly be experienced as a form of rejection or indifference that is similarly stressful for the baby to the rigid face of the mother in the still-face experiment? Do the relationships between the infant and the observer and between the mother and the observer work like a "one-way street"? From this perspective an observer seems like an egotistical training candidate who only wants to benefit from the procedure to further their career. Do the observers take into account that for the baby they may be a traumatising "ghost in the nursery" (cf. Ludwig-Körner, 2020, p. 104)? Do the baby and its mother perhaps feel that they are being monitored or persecuted? Is the observation therefore harmful for the baby and would "objective" procedures such as video observation be less burdensome and safer? Parents seldom express such worries during the initial interview before the baby's birth, presumably because they experience how lively the participant presence of the observer feels. However, observers often ask such questions at the beginning of the observation because they cannot yet imagine that their feeling and thinking presence will have a positive effect if they "merely" observe. According to Aulbert (2011, p. 3), the less an observer needs to be afraid of their own devaluing inner objects, the more likely it is that they will be able to imagine that it could perhaps be so, but if their fear of them is very strong it gets more difficult. Apart from a paranoid attitude, be it strong or less strong, which all of us have, observers sometimes express these worries as a fear that they are intruding, that the parents have a poor opinion of the observation and could devalue or be hostile towards them. Or they fear that they may even be betraying them with their feelings, by writing about their private affairs and by discussing them in their group.

But observers who prefer the so-called "objective" mode of collecting data in social field research have similar questions and are beset by a similar scepticism.

Maria Knott, an experienced psychoanalyst and supervisor of infant observations, has discussed this scepticism in detail. She stresses that consistently showing an interest in a baby and its mother over a period of two years demonstrates appreciation which renders visible the value of taking in and containing for a relationship (Knott, 2017). Knott believes that Esther Bick's dissatisfaction with Charlotte Bühler's "baby watching" procedure - which failed to take into account the experience of the observer - and led Bick to develop her own method - contributed decisively to the development of the analysis of the countertransference that we now take for granted as an indispensable part of our analytic work. Within the field of infant observation several authors have also contributed some differentiated reflections on the effects of observation on the babies (Lazar, 1993; Maiello, 2007; Rhode, 1997; Ermann [later Klinckwort], 1996; Knott, 2017).

The difficulty of capturing the baby-observer relationship

Because babies are not able to communicate to us in words how they perceive observers or how they experience their relationships with them, that is, they cannot give us any direct information about how they experience them, we must start with a question about methodology.

Does it make sense, in our search for an answer to this question - and is it possible - to separate the *relationship between the baby and the observer as a constellation* out of the observation data, to isolate it, so to speak, and to make a systematic study of *the relationship from the perspective of the baby alone*? Will this enable us to find *generalised* patterns?

And why have no such studies been carried out to date? This is certainly not because observers have considered this relationship to be of marginal importance. Rather, this hesitance has been attributed to several different factors, to which I now turn.

The external network

We know from numerous studies that in the service of survival human beings are in relationship with all that is alive in their environments from the moment they are born starting with their mothers as their main significant others. There is no such thing as an infant, i.e. no such thing as a baby without the care of a mothering person (Winnicott, 1960, p. 587, Fn.).

Out of these relationship experiences of relationship, that they internalise, children develop their primary attitudes towards the world, ideas about the other, which they employ as unconscious patterns to assess and shape other relationships. There is no need to expand upon this here since it has been widely researched. So, following on from Winnicott's ideas, we can say that there is no such thing as an infant without internalised relationship experiences that shape its relationship fantasies. If we want to get a better idea of *how a baby perceives its observer*, we must therefore include in our considerations the highly complex web of dyadic and triadic relationships between the mother, the child and the father and also any siblings the child may have, not least in order to recognise specific elements of the baby-observer phenomenon. We cannot therefore interpret observed behaviour as an isolated phenomenon, but must view it in the context of the infant's significant others and situations.

Internal processes

Likewise, the method of participant infant observation must also take precedence, since it's goal is not to gather facts but to examine *processes and their effects*. When observers "see" their *baby*, they do not see an individual, but also carry the mother in their hearts, think about the baby and its mother together, which alters her view of both of them. And when they "see" the *mother-infant dyad*, they include the *father* or the *siblings* who co-constitute this dyad. When a *mother* meets *the observer* or both observe the infant together, the baby "sees" the individuals and at the same time an interacting couple, and its relationship to each of them changes as it compares, distinguishes and links together.

When the *mother* "sees" how the *baby* meets its o*bserver*, it stimulates her to see herself in relation to her baby and to clarify and put some order into her feelings. When the baby sees the *observer* its perception is shaped by its internalised object world. The observer is also not an empty "vessel". While striving to sustain an unprejudiced, open attitude observers must practise disentangling their reactions from their observations. What comes

from the infant and what comes from the other significant others? What comes from myself?

Subjectivity and context

This brings us to another reason why we need to be cautious about generalising about how babies experience their observers. Daniel Stern put it this way: "As soon as we try to make inferences about the actual experiences of the real infant [...] we are thrown back to our own subjective experience as the main source of inspiration." (Stern, 1985, p. 17). This is a knowledge that the observer - and the observed person - create together, which includes the observer her- or himself in the situation as an object of study. Thus *the observing eye alters the object, just as the object alters the observer*. Infant observation has often been criticised for this dynamic, which has often been described as its "weak point", as with all field research projects. But knowledge is neither final nor neutral or objective. This "knowledge" that there is no such thing as context-free events - Alvarez gives the relativity theory as an example - (Alvarez, 1992, p. 9, 1997) - is kept alive by infant observation.

As observing *witnesses* and by co-experiencing a scene as *participants* and with the systematic reflection in their discussion groups observers try to describe how the relationships between the infant and other persons, including themselves as observers, develop and to develop an understanding of the unconscious aspects of behaviour and patterns of communication (Rustin, 2012, p. 13). The *subjectivity of the researcher and their presence* as factors that influence the object of research - and changes that may occur as a result of it - are often considered to be distorting, and not seen as a positive addition. The view is therefore that they should be eliminated by technical means, e.g. cameras, standardised situations, rating scales, etc., or at least limited. "The addiction to objectification that characterises the modern era has almost led us to forget that it we cannot avoid mixing perception and projection and that the difference lies merely in the mixing proportions" Krejci, 1992, p. 18, transl. by the translator of the present article). Objectivity, i.e. the *comparability of data*, serves to eliminate uncertainty about a highly complex situation, but - as the infant researcher Daniel Stern admits -, its usefulness is limited when we are concerned with the *inner experience* of the infant.

Individuality

In my view, another reason for the fact that no general model of how babies perceive observers has been developed to date is that infant observation is *not* considered to be a method of teaching by watching that aims to impart or prove knowledge *about* theories of (development and) relationship. Its goal is, on the contrary, to promote observers' capacity to learn to recognise the mental realities of infants' primitive internal worlds.

This is inevitably associated with the ability to immerse oneself in and commit oneself to the development of an individual child. The object of the research is to study the "emotional learning"[3] of *this child*, as evidenced by its states of being, which oscillate

[3] Emotional learning. From a constructivist standpoint emotional learning is reflective learning about the self and processes and serves to transform interpretive and emotional patterns and test the truth value of feelings. For Bion it is *learning from experience,* which in early development leads interactively (through communication) to introjective identifications via projective identification. It represents the dynamic relationship between the container and the contained (Bion, 1962). Emotional learning is essentially the same as *implicit learning*. It constructs the implicit (emotional) memory, which is linked to the limbic system and

between disintegration and integration, *and* the circumstances in which it learns, following the cycles of the interaction between *this* infant and *his/her/their* mother and other persons in his/her/their environment. Both the observation itself and the next step in the procedure, the intensive process of reflection in the discussion group (supervision group) that accompanies the observation are therefore focused on the *experience of this one baby as an individual* and on *the way in which the relationships of this individual baby are shaped*. This is done by observing both its visible behaviour *and* the feelings, states and thoughts simultaneously evoked in the observer *and* the emotional resonance that this "material" evokes in the group. From these sources hypotheses on the experience of each individual observed infant are developed, the truth content of which can then be checked against *how its psychological functions continue to develop*. By In this way the members of the group can go beyond their own observations and closely follow the *different developmental trajectories of the other children*. The group learns how experiences of the powerful influence that the infant has on the psyche of the observer (Norman, 2001) become visible in the *unique 'relationship histories'* that unfold between the baby and the observer. And each individual member can practise attending to their subjective experience and using it to access the inner world of the baby. This also leads to an understanding of how difficult and yet enriching it is to open oneself up to the diversity and the individuality of human developmental trajectories.

In sum, we could say that "knowledge" about early childhood development that is gained in infant observation is a (subjective) "invention" consisting of individual, inter-connected and context-dependent experiences. This also applies to the description of the baby-observer relationship. While this "invention" does not serve to confirm existing theories, it could give impetus to theory-building. Existing theories can only provide us with a system that suggests how the individual, inter-connected and context-dependent experiences could be systematised on a meta-level.

The research material

With this basic assumption I am concentrating on observable phenomena that arise in infant observation relationships in the form of scenes or as fleeting moments. I have examined the write-ups of 33 observation processes with a duration of not less than two years from this perspective.[4] Each observation process covered between 60 and 80 observations which were supervised in a group after each fourth observation. The observations were carried out in the natural field of "normal" - but differing - family and social circumstances in which the baby (and its siblings), its parents or single mothers experienced good enough holding. The observations began before the baby's birth. At the beginning the observers "met" the *fantasised baby* at the first visit shortly before the birth, when they got to know the expectations of the parents and their fears and fantasies about the newcomer. They then visited the *real* baby once weekly for one hour. This usually excluded holidays and public holidays.

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does not remember experiences, but encodes relational and emotional experiences made in the first few days of life (Fonagy & Target, 2003). The implicit memory regulates/controls the unconscious perceptual and behavioural dispositions/readiness and thus also influences all other memory processes that can become conscious. It grows slowly and never forgets (See Roth, 2001, 2007).

[4] I would like to thank the 33 colleagues from Berlin, Leipzig, Chemnitz, Halle and Erfurt who were kind enough to contribute their data to this study.

Personal myth

If you have the opportunity, as I did, to read through the records of observations and the regular group discussions, to which the reflections of the observers and group members have been added, from beginning to end, and if you repeat this procedure with other observation processes, you cannot avoid getting the impression that although there is much that is similar as regards body care, feeding and moments of meeting, it is possible to discover quite distinctive meanings in them. These connect together and become consolidated into developmental narratives that are highly varied and resemble a *personal myth.* That made a deep impression on me, but it also reminded me that "myth formation is anterior to alpha-function or [...] or is one of the components of alpha-function as the mysterious process of symbol formation." (Meltzer, 1986/2018).

The observer and the triadic relationship

The observer is always a third person, irrespective of whether the mother or the father is present. Not only because they join the family as a third person, but because they occupy a special position. The presence of the observer strengthens the triadic relationship that is made possible by the father. This is due on the one hand to his presence as a real person, and on the other hand to the function that he represents (*the paternal function*). The paternal function, which represents structure, boundary, otherness and reality, makes it possible to adopt a third position. The *third position contains themselves (as both subject and object), and the other (object) and the relationship* between the two. The capacity to develop a third position and the associated reflective processes is not tied to any one sex, but exists in both mother and father. The sensitive phase for the development of this capacity is in the first few years of life and is tied to experiences of being treated as a subject that is both related) and connected, and independent and separate. The observers contribute to such experiences in that they are in emotional contact with the mother and the child, but at the same time convey structure and boundary and are a reflecting container for all sorts of projections.

In this way the presence of the observer promotes development, and in some cases it is even therapeutic, because the task that it fulfils and the attitude represent the paternal function and lead to the third position.

The baby and its family use the observer and the observation

What was conspicuous as I looked at all the observation processes was that the babies, and later on the toddlers, *used* their observers in exactly the same way as they use all other people - and primarily their mothers - in order *to learn and to perform mental functions themselves in order to become independent beings*. The observation records revealed equally clearly that the observers were willing to allow themselves *to be used*. This places the fundamental question of our existence, i.e. "How can we learn to be separate and relating beings at the same time?" at the centre of the early relational processes.

However, we must distinguish between two different aspects of being used: the *serving* aspect and the *thinking* aspect. The significance of the mother and the father for the dependent child derives from both aspects, that is, their physical availability (which includes experiencing their being absent) and their availability as different objects to be internalised. This does not apply to the observers, since they are not generally involved in the physical care

or feeding of the children. Neither do they actively initiate games. They thus do not "*serve*" with a concrete, physical and sensory action. However, they do bring their "*thinking*" aspect into their relationships with the infants (and their mothers and/or fathers) and are therefore able to support their emotional learning processes.

What do observers offer the babies and their families?

The observers do not apparently have much to offer the children and their families. However, when they are present, they are in an active state of inner focusing and emotional resonance to all that comes from the baby which they take to be an expression of its current state. The mother and/or father are in a similar state, but they also act. The baby communicates with the observers mainly via the sense of vision, and much more rarely via the sense of hearing, because they seldom speak. They remain attentive to the baby during the one-hour observation period, irrespective of whether it seeks direct eye contact or bodily contact or not. But every time a baby looks at them, it sees a person whose bodily attitude, eyes, gestures and facial expressions immediately receive its gaze like a message and respond in a contactful way - surprised and questioning, sad, suffering, encouraging, smiling, joyful, concentrated, confirming, or puzzled and confused, etc. Whatever the case, it is an empathic "response", but it is more than an echo because it is enriched with the observers' affective rapport and their thoughts, which are searching for a meaning, and thus slightly modify the baby's experience.[5] "This receptivity is not to be confused with passivity. Before we can register what the other person is like, we have to be wanting to find out - to be attentive, as well as open to receive communications. It is an attitude which in its diffuseness and open-mindedness bears more resemblance to a radar screen than a search light.". Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1970, p. 138). Their silent emotional presence is not hidden to the baby. They show a benevolent interest and offer reliable containment, which, together with their inactivity, provide an experience of contingency[6] that strengthens the baby's self.

This attitude conveys to both the baby and its parents that the observers know nothing about this child or the family. They do not acquire their profile because they feel that they know something, but because they want to find out something about the baby and its family, that they want to get to know them. Bion repeatedly drew attention to this big difference between knowledge in the sense of something that one possesses and wanting to know something, in the sense of getting to know it. The former creates a power imbalance with all that that involves, while the latter is a model of a living relationship that enriches both parties.

How parents can benefit

Mothers (and fathers) notice how the observer looks at their child. When their children are asleep and at rest, especially, or absorbed in play with their own bodies or their toys, they are surprised at how attentive the observer is to the apparently meaningless, empty states. We are often asked, at the beginning, what we actually see. Although we cannot say more than that all that their child does and expresses interests and moves us because it tells us something about

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[5] By means of affective attunement (reciprocal sharing) of patterns that are shaped by both temporal and emotional processes both partners in the interaction create a similar psychophysiological state (cf. Beebe & Lachmann, 2004).

[6] What is meant is that the infant has an experience of contingency as a result of finely attuned emotional communication between (two) people and direct and regular consistent responses to its behaviour.

its inner experiencing and that we are trying to understand it is as well as we can, this *attitude* often encourages the mothers (and the fathers) to trust in their intuitive capacities or to discover that they can rely on the power of development.

Whom the parents see in us gives us an idea as to what "place" they have assigned to us as third persons in the family group. This also always has an unconscious aspect. They have a broad spectrum of expectations of us and feelings about us, ranging from threatening and controlling to friendly and caring, depending on their inner parental objects and the transference.

Sometimes at the end of the observation we learn something about the more conscious aspects of the relationship: "Your interest made us feel valued.", "The years of the observation were a valuable experience for us.", "I became more attentive to S. and looked at him with different eyes.", "It was very important. Your looking enabled me to look at M. differently, it helped me", "Sometimes it was good that I could offload on to you. I hope you will forgive me for that.", "I have learned a lot from you in the last two years.", "To begin with I experienced the observation as a total support, later it was more routine.".

Others give us an *album with photos of their child*, as if they wanted to keep a place in their observers' memory. Some avoid the finality of the separation by asking for advice for the future, e.g. "To what do you think I should pay more attention with N?", "What advice can you give me for his/her future development?".

We remain in the observing attitude right to the end of the observation. We try not to give any advice, trusting that our presence alone will support the parents' ability to think about their child, as demonstrated by the following example.

A few years ago when I was in Rumania observing a Roma baby in its family I had an impressive experience of how after a few months my regular visits, my silent empathy and my consistent adherence to the principle of not interfering, refraining from touching the baby and only watching it attentively had left an impression on the mother. She became more attentive to her child and at the same time more reflective. She also protected her baby more from impingements on the part of the extended family, whose members (who came into the cottage at all times) - would touch, pinch and prod the baby, and pick it up. She distanced herself and her child and there was more intimacy between them. While she would still respond stereotypically by breast-feeding the baby when it cried or was unsettled, she now seemed to have more of an understanding that the child also needed to process flooded states. She appeared dejected, but not hopeless and resigned. She faced the difficulties and no longer looked away. In short, she seemed to feel more and be able to cope with more. Her containment seemed to have grown, she could digest more. These changes in her parenting behaviour were not simply learning by imitating a model, but more an indication of inner growth. In this connection changes also occurred in the baby. The baby had belly pain due to digestive problems and nobody paid attention to or understood them, and thus the baby did not want to have anything to do with them (horizontal splitting). Up to that point his little body had seemed to be split in two, the lower half appearing lifeless and as if split off. Now it began to be interested in its body as a whole because his mother had become more open for unpleasant feelings and states.

My second important source of experience in this observation, in addition to relationship between the baby and its mother , was how the extended family behaved towards me and my associated countertransference feelings. They immediately communicated to me their wishes, needs and hardships, and I was pressured by all to attend to them as a powerful

saviour figure and to fulfil them all "and not to look at this baby, the little "worthless creature who was expected to grow up as soon as possible. My anxiety grew during my visits because I felt coerced and threatened - either literally existentially or at least at risk of being thrown out if I did not go along with their wishes. I suspected that the baby had similar feelings. Only when I had been able to get clear in my own mind that this was the world of the family's pressing wishes and that it was not a real threat, that is, only when I was able to reflect (third position) and thus extricate myself from the projective identification and re-establish myself as observer - in my own mind - did I feel less anxious and was I able to feel like a separate person and assess the situation realistically.

To take the time to pause, to contemplate, to feel, to think about the situation, to look for a meaning, not to have to "know" straight away and to feel the associated inner and outer hindrances (and conflicts) -these are the stimuli that infant observation can give parents without our forcing our attitude on them. By openly expressing our "powerlessness", our not knowing, our dependency on the family's tolerating us and our gratitude we offer the parents a *model* that can be used to deal with these states - with which most of them are all too familiar.

How babies use observers in moments of need

Babies need another person who can "serve *and* think", especially when they are in states of disintegration, first to make available to them their precise observations and their inner spaces, that is, *their own* capacity to feel and think (projective identification). And secondly they need them to give them a "response" that alleviates the unbearable state to enough for them to be able to stand it and no longer have to expel it (via projection), i.e. keep it inside (integrate it). The experience that they have taken in (introjective identification) changes their own feeling and thinking spaces because together with the response they also reintroject not only an improvement in how they feel, but at the same time an object relationship which influences their unconscious relationship phantasies. (In adult language this might be, for example, "Coming together helps") and an external object that is able to keep anxiety inside and to fulfil their need for loving and knowing (cf. Bion, 1963, 2003). In the dramatic moments in which their needs are not understood or are misunderstood, or their mother's containment breaks down, babies can find in an observer a person into whom they can project their distress, and experience emotional resonance and a clarification of their experience. Out of the numerous observations of such moments I want to present a sequence that babies and their mothers often experience in their daily lives.

As the observer arrives, 16-week old J. looks at her "with a fleeting smile. His face looks tense and somewhat strained". His mother immediately says that he has changed and that he's not in such good spirits, perhaps he's bored without his four-year-old sister. She has gone to see her grandmother. In the nursery his mother gives J. a transparent beach ball. The observer sits a little way away.

> "J. concentrates intensely on the ball. I see his face through the ball. He looks with interested, purses his little mouth a mildly ecstatically and kicks his feet gently against his mother's body. The two of them smile at each other. She says that he also loves the baby massage and makes really blissful noises during it. It was never so intense with his sister. But shortly afterwards his mood suddenly changes. For a moment he fluctuates between laughing and crying, then he pouts, grouses - 'gaaah, gaaah', and finally really cries. I sense that his mother would really like to continue playing and smiling with him.

> She wags a soft bunny toy. He reaches for its long ears. I breathe out. But soon he is crying, this time more vigorously. Somehow there is tension in the air and in me. Is it perhaps because of the mother's expectation? She holds the ball out to him. He is happy for a moment, then he grouses again: 'gaaah, gaaah'."

It goes on like this for a long time. The mother wants to get him to play with her, he does so, but then he starts crying again.

> "He's been like that often in the last few days, actually since his sister left, she says to me, and to him. 'See, you mustn't cry like that.' She kisses him. 'Well, what's the matter?' She strokes his forehead. [...] He arches his body away from her as he cries. Then he looks at me. I look back at him, empathically and kindly. He quietens. His gaze wanders round the room. He starts crying again. He looks at me again, I look back silently. He quietens again and only starts crying again when his mother jiggles him and gently taps him on his behind."

Then his mother stands up and tries in vain to cheer him up in front of the mirror. But he looks away from their two mirror images and fixes his gaze on a children's car seat in the background.

> "His mother thinks aloud. 'It doesn't sound like pain, perhaps he's tired [...]. Now she seems more decided about helping him to fall asleep. She lays him down in his playpen, strokes his head and across his eyes, as if she wants to close them. And they do in fact close, and then they open again as he whimpers and grouses. But his grousing decreases and the sleep increases [...]. His mother and I relax and feel relieved. He blinks a few more times and then falls asleep, the back of his hand on his forehead, as if he wanted to think.
>
> His mother then tells me how much fun his sister is having at her grandma's [...] I listen attentively. She doesn't want to come home. That is a little odd, sad, too, although now she has more time for J. As she says that J. suddenly wakes, starts, and then starts crying and waving his limbs. His hands are trembling as if he has been overcome by severe anxiety. His mother picks him up. He buries his head in her. She strokes him and talks to him soothingly [...]. He looks out of the window [...]. She follows his 'reverent' gaze. The two of them look silently outside."

The mother probably wanted the baby to fill the empty space left by his absent sister. She acts out her sadness and discomfiture by stimulating the baby to feel joy and thereby loses her deep unconscious relational attunement to his inner state. He is in a state of inner chaos because he wants to be with her and needs her, but he feels rejected by her behaviour because she is failing to see what he feels and needs. It does not seem to be stimulation. The baby may have used the *dialogue of gazes (emotional resonance)* with the observer to evacuate the unbearable state of not being understood on to another person (projection) and at the same time to feel his own need for support and consolation more clearly (clarification) - since he then quietens until the next stimulus. Falling asleep may be a solution for his dilemma, but it does not rid him of the fear that his mother is not on his side. That makes him wake with a start. His mother also benefits from the observer. Finding words for the feelings she is defending against and a listener for them sheds light on her diffuse distress and she can feel

her own sadness and longing. As a result her containment for the baby grows. She opens herself up to what the baby is experiencing and the two of them meet insofar as their roles are restored: there is a mother who is holding her child physically and mentally, and a baby that does not have to be entertaining, but is held.

How babies can use observers to digest experiences

As we are increasingly discovering, it is not only the dramatic, disintegrated states of high tension in infants that are responsible for the development of mental structure (see Stern, 1985; Lichtenberg, 1983; Beebe & Lachmann, 2004; Fonagy et al. 2004), but the undramatic, relatively tension-free states and interactions that facilitate "low-tension learning" are also very important (Dornes, 2000, p. 26). These are the moments in which the child does not feel *all too* pressured from inside by needs that are too strong or from outside by sensory impressions, but is in a span of time with relative disengagement, that Sander (1983, p. 97) designates an "open space" (Sander, 1983, p. 97). It is all the moments in which children are able to "post-digest" and find some initial thoughts (meaning-giving) as to what, how, why and finally, by whom (object/part-object) their sense of existence was changed and in the process establish connections both to themselves and between themselves and the other person. Observable phenomena are, for example, being absorbed in play with things, looking at things or discovering them by fingering them in a dreamy way.

The following sequence describes how a little boy used the presence of the observer to "think about" his family's moving house. The 14-month observation period, which the very young single mother had accepted with the words, "At last somebody wants to learn from me!", also ended with the family's relocating to a different city. The Youth Welfare Office had placed an energetic family aid worker at her disposal for the first few months after the birth of her second child. In contrast, the observer did not offer the mother any more than the regular visits and benevolent attention for her internal and external chaos, neither did she "tidy up", actively intervene or give advice. She repeatedly had to put some order into strong feelings and secure the setting, in the process also presumably taking on tasks that belong to the paternal function. When the mother pressured her with questions or her inner conflict, she responded not with advice, but with questions. These evidently - as revealed by how things developed as the observation progressed and the mother's remarks - promoted her ability to "notice something in the baby or herself", to think about it and, having weighed up the pros and cons, to come to a decision. In this way, without relinquishing her observing position, the observer accommodated the mother's unconscious longing for a parental figure who would help her to grow emotionally. L. used the observer's capacity for resonance, which his mother was not (yet) able to give him, to clarify his experience and particularly his exploration of relationships between objects. At first he employed looks, gestures or noises to "tell" the observer about what he was experiencing, later he used her attentive presence when he was playing, particularly in order to figure out relationships, for example, together-separate, inside-outside, full-empty, big-small, top-bottom, part-whole. In this way the observer supported the necessary connections between perceiving, feeling, moving and objects enabling the child to grow out of his early anxieties (cf. Durban, 2020). Here is an excerpt from the last observation.

"L. comes towards me in the hallway, raises his arm, points in my direction with his

finger and exclaims "oooh, dadada" (*Eng.* "oooh, there there there"). Then he runs into the living room where I can see nothing but removal boxes. He goes to stand in front of a box that has been tied up, takes each of the two loose ends of the string in one hand, makes circles with them, draws them together and apart again, shouts 'wuhuhuh' and keeps looking towards me seriously as he does so. I stand in the room, feeling lost, feel wretched and think, 'Is that all that's left to L.? Or am I supposed to see how confused he is?' His mother leans against the door frame, says how happy she is that she has already packed so much, how hard she found the work and that her little daughter is therefore staying with her biological father. L. has his eye on us and is listening attentively. He knocks on one of the boxes with his hand, kneels down, shouts 'dadadada' again, allows himself to fall on the floor, crawls to his mother and tries to climb up her. She picks him up. He puts his arm round her shoulder, looks at her attentively and plays with her hair. She tells him cheerfully that they are soon going to be moving into a nice little house that he will like. He pushes himself away from her with his fists, wants to get down and shoots apparently aimlessly around the room, into different corners. I am disturbed and sad. Is he looking for a safe place? His mother says, 'I've rather lost track of things. But that's what it's like when you move.' I am still standing around somewhat awkwardly. She suddenly seems to notice that and pulls out a chair. L. immediately comes up to me, supports himself against my leg with one hand and points in one direction with the other, shouting 'daddada'. Then he switches, uses the other arm and points in the other direction. I allow myself to be guided by him and notice how urgently he wants to show me how everything is changed (and dismantled). Then he runs to his mother. She thinks he may be thirsty, gets a bottle and sits down, with L. on her lap, on a box close to me. He drinks fast, his gaze wandering between his mother and myself. She says it's really hard for her to say goodbye to me and that she's always looked forward to my coming. [...] I reply that it has also been an important time for me and that I'm grateful to her for letting me observe L. so intensively. L. seems to be listening to us. His bottle is empty. He is still absorbed in looking at us, the fingers of one hand apparently absent-mindedly playing with the teat, as if he were feeling its shape. When his mother continues that it's not yet certain when the removal van is coming, but she's glad she's decided to leave, she's had enough of this city [...], he gets down and runs, this time purposefully, into what used to be the "car corner", where there is still one lorry left standing. First he pushes it back and forth and makes engine noises - 'brrrbrrr' - , then he palpates the driving wheel inside, moves the cargo area up and down and finally puts a screwed up paper tissue on it and tips it off. He keeps repeating this, quite absorbed in the loading and unloading. His mother looks at her playing child. 'Yes, yes, L. has grown in the meantime'. Long pause. I have the impression that she is going back over this time. [...]."

This child used the observer as a container for the feelings of loss welling up [inside him] so that he could fall back on useful experiences that had given him security. In the group we remembered that his mother had started to give him a bottle only eight days after he was born and that when she was feeding him she had given him her full attention - which she otherwise hardly managed to do - and how harmonious and satisfying these moments had appeared to be. Also that on the rare occasions when his father had visited, father and son had seemed to come together most reliably during bottle-feeding. We also remembered how as a baby L. had

soothed himself by playing with his mouth and tongue and tirades of vocalisations when his mother was emotionally absent or not in the room and that at the time we had had the hypothesis that when he had filled his mouth in these moments of emptiness he been feeding himself with the good "bottle mother". We surmised that, while L., now a toddler, was dreamily fingering the teat, he might have been reviving the affectionate aspects of his very early experiences of his mother, and even of his rare feeding encounters with his father that gave him security. The good feelings associated with the teat seemed to balance and soothe him, so that he could - as now in his play - pick up and take something used and drive away - look towards the future. The presence of the observer made it possible for the mother to calm down and feel something important, which she had not previously been able to do. She was able to feel the separation, be a little sad and remember and accept her (developmental) history. - Perhaps this also permitted her to move on from the position she had occupied up to that point, and to expel or cut off the past.

How babies use the observers to achieve continuity of being

Emotional (implicit) learning takes place not only during experiences *of this* kind, in which children project feelings into their mothers (and other significant others) and reintroject their capacity to think (horizontal axis), but also when they need to distinguish between and link together different states of being (e.g. being held together and falling apart, separate and united). Here the time axis (vertical axis) and "Nachträglichkeit"[7] or, here, sustainability over time, come into play. Even if the time axis is very short, the process of remembering or recalling emotional and relationship experiences (in that it takes place a posteriori or after the fact) has a decisive task to accomplish because it gives rise to thoughts (meanings) that the child can use for thought processes that build bridges and create a continuity of being. In my view, learning from experience is a horizontal and vertical *process* that is *constantly* ongoing, and is not even interrupted when we are asleep - as we can see during sleep sequences that we observe. (For more on the neurological perspective see Friedrich et al., 2015). In order to achieve continuity of being in this way, babies need a mental space for this process of transformation into meaning and their needs must be protected and paid attention to.

In our observations we can witness how babies use observers in order to be able to be a posteriori. Particularly when observers are alone with the babies, they move into first place, where otherwise the mother or father would be. But they are also present in a different way. The baby "knows" them as a witnesses who were present when they were in distressed states and stayed with them - irrespective of how the distressed state ended -, and who conveyed to them their alert empathy. They "know" that they exercise restraint in regard to action.

In the following observation sequence little T. was five months old, and his sister three years older. His parents had a small farm with a farm produce shop. They were still in the

[7] The German word used here is *Nachträglichkeit*. It is a term that has certain connotations. It has been variously translated it into English, James Strachey in his translations of Sigmund Freud using constructions with the word "deferred", e.g. "deferred action", (cf. for example, Laplanche & Pontalis (1988, pp. 111-114), Eickhoff (2008, p. 1454), Dahl (2010, p. 272 ff.). Laplanche and Pontalis (1991, p. 31) have suggested "afterwardsness" and Modell (1990, p. 60 ff.) "retranscription"., while Lacan's "après-coup" (Lacan, 2006, p. 213, p. 446) has also been adopted into English. The term denotes an unconscious process that originates in implicit memory, along two time vectors (and their circular complementarity) (Loch, 1962-3, cited in Eickhoff, 2008, p. 1461). In the backward direction in time it refers to unconscious, primary process-like scenes and phantasies. In the opposite direction it is an attempt to *construct* the subjective truth of past events in the transference in the here-and-now.

process of building them up and hoped that "some time" they would " *finally have finished*". Their relationship with their children was warm but their priority was clearly their work, which could abruptly "call them away". The roles were clearly defined: the father took care of the external world, the mother of the house and children. T.'s mother often had to "*quickly run downstairs*" when the shop bell rang. His sister was already able to run after her, but T. could not. He was left behind, lying on his blanket. In the past he would react to such sudden separations by crying despairingly and fixing his gaze on the observer. Then he was able to compose himself a little.

> "I am sitting in 'my' armchair. T. is lying on his cuddly blanket. He has a large cloth book in his hands and has pulled it half over his body and head. He is gazing past us. Now he pulls the book right over his head and leaves it lying there for a while, before pulling it further down so that he can look past it. His mother, who has evidently followed my gaze, talks to him gently. 'What are you doing there, are you playing peek-aboo?' The shop phone rings and she hurries away. T. keeps the book clasped in his hands and emits little cries. His mother is only gone for a brief moment. When she comes back she looks at him. T. pushes his body upwards with his legs. He is clearly showing that he wants to go to her. She sees that, but does not respond. She takes the book and complains how wet he has made it by sucking on it. T. stretches out his arms towards her. She puts the book back on him and fondles his tummy. Then she goes into the kitchen. T. looks after her and stretches one arm out in her direction as if he wants to bring her back again. Then his arm goes to a figure in the mobile that is hanging over him. He reaches for it purposefully and pulls it towards himself with the rubber band. Perhaps it is a substitute for his mother, whom he cannot bring back [...]. He lets go of the figure and looks towards me [...]. He stares at me for a long time. I smile at him encouragingly. He seems to contemplate and after a while he smiles, too. This shared moment lasts a long time.
>
> In the silence that has arisen the baby's mother calls from the kitchen, "Is he asleep?" When T. hears her voice he separates himself out of our contact, removes his arm from his stomach and reaches unerringly for a wooden rattle beside his head. He grasps it firmly. He puts one of the balls in it in his mouth and sucks [on it]. Then he lifts his arm and looks at the hand holding the rattle. [...] His mother goes up to him and grasps the hand that holds the rattle. 'Yes, you love that [...]. I know, you like to put everything in your mouth if you can.' [...] She has to go back into the shop again and he goes on sucking the rattle. He sees me on the edge of his field of view but does not seek direct contact. It seems to be enough for him that I am simply there. He reaches for a little soft toy, puts it on his face, searches with his mouth until he has found a paw and sucks it. He pulls it out of his mouth, lifts the toy up a bit and then he pushes its paw back into his mouth. This goes on for a while. I think, 'Now he's trying to cope with the separation from his mother." Suddenly he screws up his face, emits a few cries, calms down again and sucks vigorously on one finger. Then he yawns with a loud snore, reaches briefly for the mobile and then for the rattle, yawns again and falls asleep. His arms are lying loosely beside his head and he is holding the rattle in one hand [...]."

Although T. was still so small he was already able to symbolise the sudden separations in playful actions so that while he did experience being alone, he did not have to lose his inner contact with his absent mother. We can assume that his first exchange of gazes with the

observer anchored his bodily experience of his mother's hand with an encouraging feeling, and that when T. repeated this gesture himself it was simultaneously enriched by that feeling.

At the same time he used the observer as an other. And when he was alone he needed her not as a comforter, but as a protector to enable him to maintain his continuity of being. When he filled his mouth with the hard wooden ball, the soft paw of the toy and finally with his own firm finger he was able to create in his memory bridges between how he had felt while his mother was touching him with her hand during earlier experiences of breast-feeding, and how he felt in the here-and-now, and calm himself.

How babies use observers to discover the third other - The triad

When a baby looks towards the observer during an intensive interaction with its mother, thus moving outside the dyadic field of interaction, it meets in the observer an other who reacts differently, a position that is held - or should be held - by the father from the start. It can compare this other with its mother and notice differences without feeling threatened by the unobtrusive presence of the observer, but will probably experience that there is also a live non-mother world. The third person is not a destructive "disturber", but stimulates the baby to accumulate experiences in the relational triangle.

K. is a little girl whose parents respond sensitively to her needs and allow themselves to be guided by them. It was important to them to schedule the observations in such a way that both of them could usually be present. K. was in intensive and lively contact with both of them. What emerged - as soon becomes evident - was a strange triad in which the father offered himself more as a second caring and nurturing "mother figure" than as an alternative other, and thus the parental functions were not clearly separate. The more successful the emotional interplay between the mother and the baby - especially during breast-feeding - and the more K. became balanced, grew psychologically and became physically upright, the more the father fought to be perceived as attractive. This became evident in the ritual-like play scenes in which the differences in physical sexual attributes between father and mother were blurred, particularly after the baby was 6 months old.

> "He lies down on his back on the floor, puts a round red brick in his mouth or a small toy on his chest and coaxes K. affectionately to come to him. She drags herself to him on her belly - later she crawls -, lies down beside him, puts the brick in her mouth or presses the toy to her face. Then she puts the brick back into her father's mouth or the toy back on to his chest and the play begins again. Both of them laugh and appear excited."

The mother seems to feel uncomfortable during such "breast-feeding imitations". Sometimes she goes out of the room, but she also does so when the father feeds his little daughter. He often appears sad (almost offended) when K. ends the game because he likes it "that K. is particularly interested in everything I have in my mouth". But in addition to his wish to offer his "good breast" in concrete terms he also supports other options in which K. practises "gone-there" and letting go and keeping, thus stabilising her inner maternal object.

The observer notes that the parents try to get close to her .For example, they arrange it so that she sits (must sit) close to them and the baby on the sofa and is thus perceptually almost merged with the group and no longer recognisable as an other, a third person.

However, this is less because there is not enough warmth or closeness in the family. Their interactions and communications give reason to suspect that it is difficult for both parents, and particularly the father, - - not to experience separation, difference and being by themselves as a loss, devaluation or exclusion, even if this is for different reasons (originating in childhood). But K., who must now practise this, needs her parents' encouragement to be able to move in that direction. And she wants to. She repeatedly approaches the observer in order to find a balance between independence and dependency. To start with it is her lively gaze, later her legs, to pull herself up with and from there to look across to her parents, and then her lap, as a place to deposit her own things and be a starting point for her own actions. In the following observation vignette K. is 15 months old and greets the observer after not seeing her for 4 weeks (the family has been on holiday), beaming.

> "She flops on to her behind, looks at me and cries 'That, that' again and again, pointing towards me with her finger. Then she gets up, walks a few steps towards me, turns round and walks to the sofa. There I can see lots of soft toys sitting on the armrest. K. points to them: 'That!'. Her mother, who is sitting on the floor, asks which of them she means, the big bear or the little bear, the moose, the glove puppet, the fantasy bird? K. then fetches one soft toy after another from the sofa, brings them to me, looking each time to see how they are sitting in my lap, which is soon full. Each time she smiles at me. Then she looks towards her mother and goes to her, holding her arms out towards her. After cuddling and resting against her briefly she goes back to the sofa and fetches the next animal. Her mother is surprised. At this moment her father comes in with two full mugs of coffee. K. says, 'Papa, Papa' and stretches her arms out towards him. He does not notice, being focused on greeting me and putting the mugs down [...]. He sits down a little way away from the mother on the floor and explains to me straight away that K. now constantly wants to be with her mother. [He says that] When he is alone with K. for a while she starts to miss her mother [...]. K. runs towards me and stretches her arms out towards a teddy in my lap, which she takes to her mother. After cuddling briefly she comes back and gets the next teddy, which she takes to her father. Both parents are pleased. The mother then gets the moose [...]."

In the following weeks similar scenes developed again and again, in which K. went to the observer and moved across the room from there, purposefully, in a straight line and standing upright, and then deposited soft and hard toys in her lap, which she sometimes later took elsewhere. K. seemed to experience the observer as an especially suitable (emotional) place where she could pull herself up and from which she could "survey the world' and create threeness. Her restraint enabled both parents to respond with interest, and not jealously compete with each other or with the observer. When she started to talk, K. called the observer 'Papa' (and continued to do so for several months). Why not Granny or some fantasy name? Was the observer a man? K. was much too smart not to know who her 'real' Papa was. She was probably using this 'name' as a symbol for the internal position that she had assigned the observer. *As if* you are a papa, whom I consider to be different from me and Mummy. When she was almost two years old, when the parents once again responded to her growing independence with separation anxiety, K. often appeared excited and tried to captivate the observer, as in the following situation.

> "[S]he twizzles round and round, looking at me again and again. 'Are you putting on a

> show for Ms X?', the mother asks. Both parents watch her, smiling. 'She likes to do that [...]. She hardly slept at all last night, nor this afternoon.' How does she cope? [...] K. lies down on her back on the sofa and puts a cushion on her tummy. She raises her head a little and looks at me, then buries her head in the sofa [...]. I see how tired she is."

The parents do not seem to notice that K. is exhausted and that her twizzling has more to do with orientation problems than with a desire to put on an entertaining show. Her father laughs at her posing. A week later she does not respond to her father's offers to play, but

> "plays alone a lot, explores the space [...]. Then she comes to stand in front of me. She puts one hand on each knee and looks intensely into my eyes. She makes an emphatic movement with her head, nods slowly, and when I smile at her she turns her attention to her toys [...]. After a while K. puts the little naked doll in the pot that she had previously put in my lap [...]".

K. probably introjected first the image of the observer (the other) and *then* acted out her relationship fantasy. I want to be held in you. That there is a place - the observer's knee , where the pot is - opens up a play space for this symbolising action in which she can render her phantasy visible and at the same time remain independent.

I have frequently been witness to children discovering that their parents are whole and different objects whom it perceives from the position of an observing subject in infant-toddler-parent therapy when the children - usually at the age of roughly eighteen months - set up a space for themselves in the therapy room from which they can look at both parents alternately from a distance. They often do that with an unexpected tenacity and expressing themselves decisively, for example, leaning back into the cushions with a satisfied expression ("I am"), allowing their gaze to wander, looking searchingly into the parents' faces to compare them, addressing them as "Mama" and "Papa" (identifying them) and probably also to thinking about the (differing) connections. Although the parents are often very surprised, they usually allow their child to use this play space and refrain from actively intervening because they feel held in the therapeutic setting. In this way everyone involved can experience "I am", "you are" and "you too". We are connected to each other and at the same time each of us is a separate person.

Growing and becoming change the relationship with the observer

In the post-natal period

In the first few weeks after birth the observers appear in the infant's environment or world as persons who, unlike its other significant others, keep at a certain distance from them, but remain easily discernible and the baby can reach them by looking at them. It also hears them speaking. They use their hearing and visual senses. There is no contact through the other senses (skin, taste, smell and kinaesthetics) and no active interventions by means of touch, rocking, carrying, body care, feeding or playing. Babies have their first experiences with observers at a time in their lives that Stern describes as the phase of the "emerging self": "All learning and all creative acts begin the domain of emergent relatedness. [...] This domain of experience remains active during the formative period of each of the subsequent domains of sense of self." (Stern, 1985, p. 67f). *Inner* objects begin to develop, following the introjection

of external object experiences, which sustain their ability to "go on being" (Winnicott, 1956/1965, p. 303f). In this early phase babies' *physiognomic perceptions* of the other play a leading role in their communication.[8]

Observation vignettes from the first ten weeks of life.

"The father sits down on the couch with H. (a boy, 8 weeks old) in his arms. 'Look, here's your visitor.' H. looks at me penetratingly and for a long time. I greet him with the words, 'Hallo, you' and smile. He doesn't smile back, does not vocalise either, but simply gazes for a very long time, as if he wanted to take me inside of himself."

"The mother hops with A (a girl, 9 weeks old) on a Swiss ball. She is sitting her mother's lap, her back leaning against her. Now A. looks at me for a very, very long time. After a while her mother, who notices that, becomes very active and starts talking intensely to A., stroking A's head with her hand. A. looks and looks at me. Then she shifts her gaze upwards to her mother. Then A. looks at me again, as if she were comparing."

" She asks me to sit down at the kitchen table. From there I can see F. (a boy, 9 weeks old) well in his pram. He turns his head and looks at me attentively, then he smiles, looks towards his mother on the other side and she looks at him, which he sees immediately, and laughs with her. Then he looks at me again, smiles, then back to his mother. It goes back and forth like this between us."

In the first few weeks after birth in the phase of "dependence" (Winnicott, 1963/1965, p. 83ff.) the observer is probably perceived as a living creature in the environment who is "useful" to the baby for experiences with the non-maternal world. Here the baby meets with an other who is constantly benevolent and interested and who responds to communications without wanting to actively influence. The babies show us that these are not merely transitory phenomena when we "reappear" after a week.

"The mother opens the door to me holding S. (a boy, 10 weeks old) in her arms. He immediately smiles at me cheerfully. His mother says, 'Do you recognise Ms. K. already?' She comes every Monday."

"When I arrive the grandfather is squatting down with the twins in their playpen. A. (a boy, 10 weeks old) turns away from him towards me, looks at me for a long time and looks happy. He seems to be in quite a dilemma - having to decide between his grandfather who is squatting beside him, and paying attention to myself. He decides to give me his whole attention."

"The mother opens the door to me carrying M. (a girl, 10 weeks old) in her arms. M.

[8] The face of the significant other is of central importance for this development. It is an interactive transmitter of the highest emotional significance - the ultimate social organ. As a "social interface" it communicates important information to the environment via inner affective states and has an enormous variety of possible expressions at its disposal. Large areas of the brain are dedicated to recognising the identity and expressions of the human face (Adolphs, 2002). The networks of neurons in areas of the right temporal lobe that respond selectively to faces (Halgren et al., 1999; Haxby et al., 2002) are probably trained and optimised in the early years of childhood development, in dependency on interactive relational experiences (Parker & Nelson, 2005; Batty & Taylor, 2006).

looks at me immediately and continues to keep her eyes on me."

The voice of the observer

The above examples described how babies keep up a lively dialogue with the observer by means of gazes. But the baby *also hears the voice* of the observer. Many parents (and siblings) make use of the opportunity to talk about what is on their minds. As they do so the whole spectrum of their feelings can be heard. The experience of the sound of the observer's voice is somewhat different, even if they speak to the child , because it conveys the intention to empathise and be with. The sound of the observer's voice is more enfolding than stimulating.

The second six months after birth

When the first extreme states of helplessness and disintegration abate, new modes of experience open up for babies that allow them to develop a feeling for their own agency and a consciousness of their own actions. They are supported by their mother's or their caregiver's willingness to respond with reflective interest to their initiatives, within a two-object relationship. As a result they begin to notice that "*I have an effect on her*" as an agent, and thus to feel and think that "*she is and I am*". If this relationship is expanded by a third object, and if the mother (or the caregiver) is willing not to interfere, but to step aside and wait for a moment as soon as the baby turns its attention not to them, but to a third object, this can help the baby to develop a consciousness of its own actions. This is how babies begin to feel and think, "*I am together with an object that is able to wait until I have explored the other object enough*". Babies' exploration of the world is always two-tracked because it is shaped in the background by (internalised) relationships (cf. Alvarez & Furgiuele, 1997, p. 124f.).

I was interested in the situations in which babies and observers look at a third thing together. This can be a sock that the baby pulls off its foot - and in the process discovers, "It is part of me, the sock is not". It looks questioningly at the observer, "Eeeh, eeeh? [What do you think about that, is that right?]". Or a baby investigates its teething ring, fingers it, examines its smooth, hard, cool surface, which feels similar to and at the same time quite different from its mother's warm skin. Or its gaze wanders back and forth between the observer and an "exciting" light-shadow contour on the wall, as if it were ensuring itself that the two of them want to find out together what this is all about. As soon as babies are able to move away we often observe how they attract our attention to something they have discovered by pointing at it from a distance or calling to us - as if they want to ascertain whether we can share their experience. And our restrained "response" - such as a nod or an encouraging look - is sufficient for them to continue exploring.

We can see how children expect observers to behave in a focused way anyhow they use their (restrained) empathy. We could conclude from this that it supports a new relational quality: using the other to look at a third thing together, to pay attention to a third thing.

The second year: the observer is perceived as a whole object

We cannot fail to note how children seek and maintain contact with observers from the start, especially through gazing and gestures. But why do children continue with this kind of

communication ("proto-conversation"), even when they get older? Why do they not later, when they can walk and talk, *insist* on making the observer into a playmate, an active helper or a dialogue partner? And why do they not go up to the observer, even when their parents frustrate them, and even though they have not been forbidden to do so or told to keep their distance. Their interaction with the observer has led to the formation of a representation (which to start with is rudimentary).[9] In this regard, for the baby/toddler the observers are "simply" partners in interactions. The specific quality of the two relationships is familiar to them from recurrent experiences ("she takes in every thing I communicate to her, want to put in her or to share with her and I know how she 'responds"). The pattern has become established early on and has its own inner structure. It should not therefore be surprising that children retain the "visual facial language" associated with it. The creative potential of this form of communication is also not unknown to adults because it remains available for spontaneous, symbolic communication and dialogical short cuts throughout our lives. This became evident in the following observation, most of which was carried out during the child's settling-in phase at nursery school. B. was 22 months old and an active and curious toddler.

> "Having protested strongly in front of the nursery school [...], inside B. allows his mother to take off his shoes. I also do so and when his gaze falls on me his eyes light up as if he wanted to say, 'Aha, you're going to stay here too?' On the threshold to the playroom he clings to his mother's leg. She picks him up. The nursery school teacher greets him warmly and gently. A few children also greet him and pat him when his mother puts him down, but then stop when he doesn't react. I am assigned a place behind the teacher's table. B.'s mother tells the teacher about last night, which was difficult. [...] B. remains completely motionless. When his mother has gone the teacher picks him up and asks him if he'd like to drive a car. 'No!', he says energetically. She then carries him to a toy castle in the corner of the room farthest away from me and sits down near him. B. pushes small cars through the gate of the castle and back out again. His movements are slow, as if in slow motion. He looks at a car in his hand, but his gaze is turned inward. He looks as if he's in a trance, only physically present. Then he looks into the room. When his gaze falls on me his eyes light up and for a moment his movements become more lively, as if he is drawing the strength to be emotionally present across the distance [between us]. He stays in the corner for a long time. Then he slowly pushes himself up close to the [toy] motorway where many of the children are playing. They keep asking him if he doesn't want to join in their play or stroke him gently. B. now pushes himself to a "boy's table" at which three bigger boys are playing a board game and watches them. He keeps searching for me with his eyes. His serious face lights up again and again. He moves slowly but determinedly towards me through the children who are milling around (to me it looks like he is hovering) until he is standing in front of me, separated only by the table-top. His head is visible above the table. He does not try to go round it, but looks at me. He holds on to the table and then very slowly bends his knees until his head disappears, and then re-appears. He looks at me seriously as he does so. He repeats this a few times. I am deeply moved that he is falling back on our familiar dialogue in order to hold himself [together] and orient himself in this new world full of new people and relationships. I am so caught up in

[9] The interactional reciprocity is based on the child's repeated and consistent cycles of attention and prolonged gaze contact (cf. Klann-Delius, 1999).

> [watching him] that I blot out the world around me and now it also seems to have completely disappeared for him, too. He looks into my face and the feelings that it reflects. I have the impression he is using me, as a witness of his past, to actively enact his mother's disappearance and return, while at the same time practising feeling the painful feelings of separation retrospectively - and to reinforce the hopeful feelings that he will have when he sees her again. The teacher has noticed him moving away and asks him if he wants to go to the cars with her. This time he answers with an energetic "Yes!". She takes him by the hand and leads him back to the toy castle, which has now been occupied by the three big boys. He sits down there, plunges in, joins in their play, and from now on he no longer looks back at me."

B. had to do some intensive exploration without his mother and falls back on shared relational experiences with his observer and the associated "visual facial language". The empathic presence of the observer probably enabled him to integrate the emotions surrounding his being here at the nursery that he had previously split off (his initial dissociation).

Some concluding thoughts: two (three) learning people meet

It is unrealistic to assume that the presence of the observer for an hour once a week could be enough to make them a primary attachment figure. The frequency of the infants' experiences with them (and their level of activity) are much too low in comparison to those with the real mother/father/significant other or other caregivers who have an active influence on the infants' lives and experience. But, as we see from their live contact with children up to two years of age, the presence of the observer is sufficient for an introject of this other person to grow out of the assimilation of many small experiences of containment which is extremely useful in supporting the child's own communicative activity, its inner play space and thus also its capacity to think and be psychologically independent.

Babies also observe the observers and, as with other significant others, they develop hypotheses from their observations about how they expect their observers to behave. The observers they come together are others, others who feel their longing to share psychological experiences with them. The babies see and feel the warmth and openness that emanates from the observers, their respect for their boundaries and their interest in everything that comes from them (the infants). In this context Bion speaks of *passion*. It is the "evidence that two minds are linked" (Bion, 1963, pp. 12f.). For me, captures the quality of the relationship between observer and child extremely well.

Mothers and fathers are also connected to their children in this way. Their passion is the (emotional) basis if for getting clarity about errors, misunderstandings and not knowing ("What is going on? What is happening in my child?"). They also observe the observer, and watch *how* they look at their child. I have described above what they "learn" and how they can profit from it elsewhere.

An observer can never, any more than tests or imaging procedures, draw "objective" conclusions about the internal "subjective" experience of a child directly from their external communications (see Roth, 2007). Stern says "The discoveries of developmental psychology are dazzling, but they seemed doomed to remain clinically sterile unless one is willing to make inferential leaps about what they might mean for the subjective life of the infant." (Stern, 1985, p. 5). Observers therefore want to learn to observe *precisely,* to be nothing more than a "receiver", repeatedly to tolerate not knowing something or being confused - and also

to *separate out* what is their own experience and what is that of the child. At the beginning of an observation, in particular, when the baby is overwhelmed by extreme and strong affects, it is difficult to remain attentively focused on the child and not to "protect" oneself by means of identification or by splitting things off into a "bad mother". This offers us observers a chance to recognise the complexity of human relationships and the links between development and relatedness and to develop a respect for the creativity of the individual. It has often been emphasised that these social and mental activities strengthen the psychoanalytic attitude (see, for example, Maiello, 2007; Lazar, 2000). We therefore need infant observation as a fixed component of our training.[10]

Because we want to learn we are drawn into the situations of those who have to learn: children, mother-child dyads and parent-child dyads. Everyone involved is a learner. It is my belief that this is where the special potential of infant observation lies: in *learning by experience.*

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[10] The observation of toddlers conducted in nursery schools in once-weekly sessions lasting one hour, which builds upon the infant observation in homes, also provides us with insight as to how toddlers enter into relationships with adults and peers when they are not with their primary caregivers, how they are understood and how they find their bearings and develop in the world outside their families, which is concerned with adjustment, achievement and independence, and ultimately also gives us some insight into the quality of the institutions.

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What kind of baby is it?
Discussion of Agatha Israel's presentation "Baby - Family - Observer"

Peter Bründl

The nuanced and exciting way in which Agathe Israel has described the process of Infant Observation developed by Esther Bick has made a strong impression on me. This process, which is usually conducted over a period of two years, unfolds between the infant or toddler, his or her parents and the observer.

Esther Bick's infant observation for training candidates was originally carried out at the London institute, as a preliminary to the actual psychoanalytic training. The candidates, who had already begun their training analyses, participated in the infant observation before the clinical seminars the subsequent treatments of patients under supervision. Esther Bick believed that the infant observation prepared them for treating patients under supervision in that it provided them with the opportunity to experience a relationship process that they could explore and understand in a safe and consistent setting and with a regular frequency. In a similar process to that practised with the session notes in the Kleinian department of the London Psychoanalytic Institute, seminars were held with equal regularity in a secure and consistent setting, in which four participants reflected together on the session notes. The same procedure was later used for the notes on the clinical treatment sessions. In contrast, candidates in training with Freud in Vienna were not permitted to bring written notes to their supervision, so that they could themselves "free associate" in their sessions with their supervisors, who applied the technique of "evenly suspended attention", in analogy to an analytic session, as it were. Whereas in the analysis of adults the analyst sits behind the couch and is therefore not visible, only their voice being perceptible, infant observers do not communicate verbally with the baby, but are completely visible to them. It was expected that learning by experience in the course of the Infant Observation Curriculum would help the candidates to be able to empathically engage in their relationships with their first analytic patients with the analytic attitude that they had already developed in their observation sessions.

At my instigation, in 1986 the Münchener Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Psychoanalyse[11] (MAP) introduced infant observation for all their candidates in training for adult analysis, both those who were doctors and those who were not. It was made compulsory, initially for three semesters at the beginning of the training, and later for four semesters. Prior to that infant observation had been an obligatory part of the training at some German training institutes for analytic child and adolescent therapists. At the MAP this step was taken with the intention of expanding opportunities for the adult analysis candidates to develop their perceptive skills. The idea was that they would thus develop perceptive skills that would be as little theory-driven as possible, and yet at the same time sensitive. At the time, the information we had about the quite different perspectives on babies in Vienna, London, Barcelona, New York, San Francisco, Cleveland, Chicago, Paris, Geneva etc. helped us to keep an open mind in regard to theory and not to feel obliged to commit ourselves exclusively to any single theory of development. One of the two parallel observation seminars was led by the infant psychiatrist Dr. Lamby and the other by myself. I was adequately prepared for this task by the experience

[11] *Transl. note*: *Engl.* Munich Working Group on Psychoanalysis

I had gained during my clinical training in child and adolescent psychotherapy in New York from 1977 to 1979, which was oriented towards Anna Freud, and also my work in the Toddler Group Observation and Wolf Pappenheim's supervision of my child and adolescent cases there. Wolf Pappenheim had been analysed by Bion. I had also profited from stimulating discussions on Bion with Ross Lazar, who had only recently relocated to Munich from London.

From 1989 onwards the infant observation seminars at the MAP were led by students of Lazar. Together with the highly intensive optional complementary training in child and adolescent psychotherapy that the MAP offered to candidates training in adult analysis starting in 1984, they helped to make the MAP appreciably more attractive for future candidates.

It was also noticeable that the participants of the baby observation seminars liked to stay together later on when it came to doing the case seminars. Later on the compulsory four-semester long infant observation played an important role in the close links between the training in adult analysis and the full training in analytic child and adolescent psychotherapy that was founded at the MAP in 1999. The two trainings remain closely linked today. I am still grateful to Ross Lazar for being willing to fill the post of the required fifth supervisor when the child and adolescent department was first established at the MAP.

In the observation process, both in the respective individual sessions and throughout the continuing observation process, the baby observers creatively open themselves up to their unconsciouses with their own early childhood experiences as they were recorded in their implicit memories, while at the same time staying in contact with reality and their perceptions (Anzieu-Premmereur, 2019). This corresponds to the observed baby's capacity to continue developing its self and its self-agency, especially in face-to-face play involving facial expressions and gaze. James Herzog, a child psychiatrist, psychoanalyst and child analyst from Boston had already pointed out in the 1980s that children develop a relationship to their mothers starting right from birth, and that they also relate to their parents' couple relationships (Herzog, 1983). The latter is particularly important for the focus of our discussion today because the couple relationship between the parents themselves - whatever form it takes psychologically - is not perceptible to toddlers in a concrete sensory, motor or figurative sense. We must therefore, like Daniel Stern (1992 [1986]), assume that infants are born with the capacity to be in activating mutual psychological contact with their fellow human beings, or, as Joyce McDougall put it pointedly, the first external reality that an infant comes up against is its mother's inner world.

The maintenance of a calm, unobtrusive and attentive presence, that is regularly repeated by the observer, this conveys to the child the certainty that they will not place demands on it or pressure it, that it need not fear any manic hyper-arousal, even if "[w]hen two personalities meet, an emotional storm is created" (Bion, 1979); cf. also Israel, this volume). When the baby senses the "warmth and openness (that emanates from the observer) and respect for the boundaries" of its own inner play space and that of the observer, then according to Bion there is '*passion*' , "evidence that two minds are linked" (cited according to Israel, this volume, p. 34), but in this intersubjective process the two minds that come into contact with each other differ in their level of maturity.

I mainly agree with Agathe Israel that a Winnicottian potential space opens up, not only between the mother and the infant, but that the infant gradually also comes to share a potential space with the observer in which the mental play between the baby and the observer

unfolds and in which phenomena such as "being absorbed in play with things, looking at things or discovering them by fingering them in a dreamy way" arise (Israel, this volume, p. 24).

It is well-known that play in the sense that Winnicott (1974 [1971]) conceived it is a universal characteristic that is found not only in human beings, but also in animals. Play is a manifestation of all transitional phenomena and promotes development and health. In the psychoanalytically oriented, participant observation relationship the play between the mental spaces of the infant and the observer opens up a window on to the inner worlds of the participants with their unconscious representations (Pretorius, 2019), and even on to what is not forgotten, but also cannot be remembered, including communications that have remained unheard. And play renders intense pleasure, surprise and humour possible.

Children are happy when they start to be able to surprise adults in a humorous way, thus making them feel good, and this strengthens their sense of agency. Small children employ preverbal symbols, move their fingers and bodies in a decisive way, play the clown and exaggerate their movements and vocalisations in order to generate humour between themselves and, primarily, their parents, but also other significant others (Anzieu-Premmereur, 2019). K., the infant that Agathe Israel presented (this volume, p. 29), would seem to me to be playing out this wish to surprise: "When she starts to talk K. calls the (female) observer 'Papa' [...]. K. is much too smart not to know who the 'real' Papa is.."

K. seems to me to enjoy humour. While we are told how the observer understood this "Papa" from the perspective of developmental theory, unfortunately we do not learn what she spontaneously felt when "her" baby first called her "Papa", which K. was surely curious to find out, and she may already in a fun way have been creating a triad with the adult couple mother and "Papa".

It is my conviction that, as a child analyst in training, every observer needs to be aware of their own inner playfulness. The ability to surrender oneself to the mind-gaze-gesture-play dialogue with the child is an ability that the observer can use in many different ways. Play is always potentially present in the inner space of the observer and in the infant. In play we can regulate the distance between ourselves and the children and help them to understand that if they can adopt an "as-if" stance, use surprise and humour, this opens up a space in which they can express their feelings and affects. In certain circumstances this undisclosed "reverie" of the observer that opens up to the play space may promote the mother's "reverie". In the regular meetings the observers not only takes in the parents' difficulties, but can also permit themselves to be pleased when the parents' creativity and their pleasure in playing is revitalised and they are thus better able to be in contact with their infants again. Being able to engage in inner play is associated with being able to be surprised and not to know and understand everything - particularly as the infant's self (and that of the observer), in Winnicott's sense, can only be discovered and strengthened in play. The baby brings an active readiness to play to its sessions with the observer and increasingly expects the observer to take in and support what it comes out with and participate in the play in this way. That adds to the sense of a continuity running through the shared experience of being playful.

For example, B., a 22-month old boy, experienced difficulties on his first day at a nursery school. Later, after he had calmed down, he moved determinedly towards the observer. He then stood close to her, separated only by a table.

> "His head is visible above the table top [...]. He holds on to the table and then very slowly bends his knees until his head disappears, and then re-appears. He looks at me

seriously as he does so. He repeats this a few times."

Perhaps he is making his observer into a witness of his past, but he is no doubt playing that by making the eye contact disappear he can make his observer/his mother disappear and then actively find them again himself. In this game he is not passively at the mercy of the circumstances; in his as-if play he has creative, almost omnipotent powers. This element of magic is so crucial to B. because after the experiences of disintegration triggered by his first day at nursery school he needs it to maintain his sense of being alive and to face the future with hope.

Five-month-old T. seems to be experiencing something similar when he indicates to his mother with his bodily gestures that he wants to go to her, but his mother fails to respond to them and goes into the kitchen.

> T. looks after her and stretches one arm out in her direction as if he wants to bring her back again. Then his arm goes to a figure in the mobile that is hanging over him. He reaches for it purposefully and pulls it towards himself with the rubber band. Perhaps it is a substitute for his mother, whom he cannot bring back [...]. He lets go of the figure and looks towards me [...]. He stares at me for a long time. I smile at him encouragingly. He seems to contemplate and after a while he smiles, too.

It seems as if something was going on in T. before he happily discovered and communicated to his observer that she has reflected something back to him in a preverbal mode that made sense to him and that she helped him to actively bring back his mother; and that he did this by displacing his wish on to the mobile figure in the as-if mode, which allowed him to send her away again, instead of simply having to passively accept that she had turned away from him and disappeared.

These two excerpts from the observations remind me of Freud's first observation of a small child, his grandson, when he watched his game with the cotton reel in 1920. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud describes what happened after his grandson was temporarily left by his mother.

> "He was in the first place passive, was overtaken by the experience, but now brings himself in as playing an active part, by repeating the experience as a game in spite of its unpleasing nature. This effort might be ascribed to the impulse to obtain the mastery of a situation (the 'power‘ instinct), which remains independent of any question of whether the recollection was a pleasant one or not. [...] We see that children repeat in their play everything that has made a great impression on them in actual life, that they thereby abreact7 the strength of the impression and so to speak make themselves masters of the situation. But on the other hand it is clear enough that all their play is influenced by the dominant wish of their time of life: viz. to be grown-up and to be able to do what grown-up people do." Freud, 1922/1948, p. 14

At the MAP from the senior levels onwards quite a few advanced trainees from both departments also participate in the infant, toddler and parent therapy training, where they can bring in all their playfulness from the infant observations and their confidence in the infants' high level of passive speech comprehension, but can play, interact and talk with the infant (and optimally also with both parents) in a way that is more sensory in nature . Gisela

Schleske from Freiburg originally conducted the infant, toddler and parent therapy pilot project with Fernanda Pedrina from Zurich. She then did it with me at the MAP. In its fully developed form it was later run for a long time by Susanne Hauser, with a baby out-patient department. The following charming vignette is taken from an article entitled "*Lust und Liebeswünsche im Spielraum der analytischen Arbeit*" (Schleske, 2019)[12] that Gisela Schleske wrote on her infant, toddler and parent treatment and sent me for the *Jahrbuch für Kinder- und Jugendlichen-Psychoanalyse 2019.*[13]

I would like to conclude with a quote from this article, with an eye to whether infant, toddler and parent therapy might not possibly in turn have an enriching influence on infant observation, especially since infant, toddler and parent therapists sometimes later lead infant observation seminars.

"The Kissing Baby". The vignette is about an eleven-month-old boy. I saw him and his mother, who was suffering from post-partum depression, once weekly from the age of seven months as part of my work at the baby outpatient department.

> "A tacit ritual had become established between the three of us. To begin with his mother left him alone with me in my room when she went to the toilet, where there was not much room. However, sometimes she would take him with her if he protested too strongly against the brief separation. But usually he and I were well able to bridge her absence, which would only last a few minutes. He was rarely really at ease and free. This time it was different. He immediately crawled towards my glove puppet wolf and couldn't stop laughing when it greeted him by wagging its tail. It was the first time I had heard him laugh out loud. I was entranced by his exuberant delight . His mother joined us and noticed the high spirits we were sharing. She reported how he was now able to interact freely and easily with his two "surrogate" grandmothers and how she felt relieved by that.
>
> However, after that the session became tense and I was torn as to how to reconcile the differing needs of the mother and her child. The mother was sad and preoccupied by an imminent death in the family, while he wanted to get us to play. She responded only little. In the previous weeks a leave-taking ritual had developed between him and me which he now wanted to initiate prematurely. I told him that today he apparently did not expect much for himself and therefore wanted to say goodbye to me. When he insisted on continuing with our ritual, I joined in his game but incorporated a few variations to show him that this was not about saying goodbye. I was surprised how well he understood me. But at the same time the mother was absent-minded and not involved and I turned towards her again. He became increasingly restless. When he was not able to get her attention he crawled towards a picture to try to pull it off the wall. The mother brusquely denigrated herself as a mother, and also her son, saying that he was hyperactive and lacked concentration. I then said to him, 'You would like your mother to take notice of you, but she is not looking for you right now. So you would rather end the session, but we only listen to you for a moment. Now you're showing us how you're feeling upset. What might your mother think if I don't want to let her speak badly of you, but tell her that you are clever, funny and simply adorable?' He immediately stopped trying to grab the picture and crawled energetically towards me. His mother

[12] *Transl. note:* Engl. transl. of title: "Pleasure and Love Wishes in the Play Space of Analytic Work"
[13] *Transl. note:* Engl. transl. of title: " Yearbook of Child and Adolescent Psychoanalysis 2019"

called out, "Felix, be careful!', in the same tone that she had just used to stop him pulling the picture off the wall or from being too heavy-handed with glass objects. I said, "I don't break as easily as a vase". But his mother had accurately assessed the urgency of the situation. He was initiating a "love attack" on me, already having pulled up my pullover in order to get at my breast. I stopped him, but lifted him on to my knee. (That was unusual for me, usually I keep a distance between me and children in the therapy room.) Felix then stood up and kissed or licked my cheek unrestrainedly with an affectionate "Mmmh!" Startled, I immediately looked at his mother and was relieved to see that she was watching this scene with sparkling eyes and laughing, quite carried away. A little later I was witness to the most beautiful and intimate breast-feeding scene I have ever been privileged to observe. Mother and son were immersed in each other and taking time for each other."

What kind of baby is it? Who does this baby belong to - this baby that looks for the breast of the infant and parent therapist and then correctly finds his mother's breast? Who is creating whom with love and humour in the session when the infant calls the observer 'Papa'? But whom will the babies create and possibly internalise in future in an even more digitalised world if the mother's gaze has to be split between her child and the computer or smartphone that constantly demands her attention?

The infant observers and infant, toddler and parent therapists will probably be confronted with quite new and challenging scenes. These scenes will require them as "child experts" (Anna Freud) to engage in a new kind of thinking and exploring which will no doubt be beneficial to the further development of psychoanalysis as a science.

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What kind of baby is it?

Abstract. Esther Bick developed "infant observation" at the London institute as a preparatory course to foster candidates' psychoanalytic attitude and participation in dynamic processes, and for (group) supervision. Infant observation has been obligatory for adult candidates at the Munich psychoanalytic institute (Münchner Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Psychoanalyse - MAP). since 1986. Observers access their own unconsciouses and their own childhood experiences in order support the observed infant's self-agency in mutual exchanges of gaze and facial expression. The potential space that develops enables babies to use humour to surprise adults playfully, as seen in several vignettes presented by Agathe Israel. Infant observers often later undergo training in psychoanalytic infant, toddler and parent-psychotherapy in order to become Infant Observation Seminar Leaders. Whether intentionally or not, they will bring new ideas into theory and practice of baby observation.

Keywords: infant observation according to Esther Bick, psychoanalytic training, Münchner Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Psychoanalyse (MAP), potential space, mutual nonverbal exchanges, the humorous infant, future modifications of infant observation

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Introduction to Sina - Observation of a Baby by Lisa Wolff

Agathe Israel

Yearbook of Participant Infant Observation 2021

The following text is based on a final paper the author wrote on a two-year infant observation as required by our institute at the end of the first section of the training in analytic child and adolescent psychotherapy.

The observer visited the baby and its family once a week for two years. There were breaks in the observation during holidays and on public holidays. After every fourth observation session the observer presented the baby to a group with her write-up. A record keeper is assigned to each baby and keeps a record of the group discussions throughout the entire observation period. This record is then read out at the next meeting, in order to be able to make the connection with the child's developmental history. This procedure may appear time-consuming, and some supervisors may hesitate to expect observers to adhere to it, but on the contrary, this fourth step in the processing - Suzanne Maiello called it "mental digestion" - brings relief, because each member of the group carries out another exercise when they put the discussion on the data and the group's reaction precisely into words, summarise it and add some thoughts of their own.

This text gives us a close-up impression of how the observer, the baby and the mother (family) are together, in what ways the observer manages to gain access to what the baby experiences, how the baby develops and interacts and how it evidently also uses the observer to do so. We discover what it means to her to observe, to practise evenly hovering attention and to ascertain the origin of the feelings that emerge: what comes from whom? We obtain insight into how she has to receive the family's projections and also into the work of the supervision group, which helps her to behave in an impartial and abstinent way while at the same time remaining in contact. And the long quotes from the observation write-ups can stimulate our own thoughts and phantasies.

Sina –Observation of a Baby

Lisa Wolff

Yearbook of Participant Infant Observation 2021

Abstract. The article describes the two-year observation of an infant which was part of the author's training in child and adolescent analysis. During this time she visited a family once a week for one hour as a participant observer, following the development of the baby, Sina, from the first meeting with her parents before the birth until the last meeting, shortly after her second birthday. The text focuses on how the observer ~~/~~managed to obtain a sense of the baby's inner experience. To do so she employed evenly suspended attention and attended to both her own internal processes and her observations of the family. The text quotes extensively from the notes which the author wrote down from memory after each visit and subsequently presented to her supervision group for discussion and reflection. Thus the story of Sina's development in these two years parallels the learning process of the observer.

Keywords. dyad, early infant development, holding function, infant observation, internal objects, object relations, psychoanalysis, rapprochement crisis, separation conflict, supervision group

Prelude
"Yes, what can I do for you?"

I found the family in which I carried out my observation of Sina through a work colleague. When I phoned the mother, Ms K., for the first time, she knew immediately what I was calling about and responded with a friendly, "Yes, tell me, what can I do for you?" It was no problem to make an appointment for a preliminary interview - Ms K. was very obliging from the start. My first impression was that she wanted to do me a favour. It soon became clear that beneath her obliging attitude, which she would maintain throughout the observation, she was also very needy and had her own wishes and hopes. One and a half hours before the time at which we had agreed to meet Ms K. phoned me and asked if I could come a little earlier. Our supervision group had the fantasy that she was waiting for me and lonely, and much loneliness, sadness and despair did in fact emerge in the course of the observation.

The K. family is a Greek family. The mother grew up in Berlin, the father in Greece. They already had one son, Kimon, who had just turned five years old. The parents run a quite large shop in Berlin-Steglitz, where the initial meeting took place. Because Ms M. had asked me to come half an hour earlier we started with just the two of us talking together before her husband and their son joined us. Ms K. is a pretty woman in her early thirties. She is smartly dressed and although it is not long before her due date, she appears to be very busy and not at all cumbrous. We also talk about the setting and Ms K. is able to express her uncertainty.

"Will I observe just the baby, or herself too? Will I only observe or will I join in, pick the baby up or something like that? When she imagines that I will be sitting in a corner observing her she naturally feels nervous [...]. Then she'd like to know how we would organise it. It's very difficult for her to agree on a fixed time every week, with the shop and so on, would it be possible to be flexible about it? She had not known to begin with that it would go on for such a long time and it would be easier in the first few months. Would it later be possible for me to come and do the observation at the shop or come outside with her?" (from the initial interview)

From the start I had the impression that my insistence on a regular time - which would, of course, as time went on have to be adapted to what the family can manage and there could be exceptions made things easier for her. But at the same time the tension between flexibility and stability remained an issue throughout the observation. I only gradually came to understand how strongly Ms K. felt that she was under an obligation to me, how difficult it was for her to cancel an appointment that was not convenient for her and what a relief it was towards the end of the observation that it was also possible to handle the stable setting flexibly. Contrary to the expectations of my supervision group - where we imagined that the shop was also a lifespace for the children and fantasies of a "shop baby" and a "shop observation" emerged - the jointly run business and especially the mother's share in the work disappeared almost completely from the observation in a way that was striking. Only once was I asked to go there for a session. Apart from that the group only suspected once in a while that the fact that the mother was overburdened for long periods during the observation might also have to do with her responsibility for the business.

Mr K., who arrived later with his son, is a slim man with rather soft features and smartly dressed. I put his age at the mid-thirties. He was also friendly and open to my request.

"Yes, that was doubtlessly a good thing [to do]. He likes the idea and asks if I will be visiting them every day? Ms K. laughs. 'No, only once a week' But that's not enough, he quips, no, no, he's only joking. Ms K. says but it might also be that after the first few months that I would sometimes observe when the father was with the baby. Yes, he agrees, but that would be good, too" (from the initial interview).

As it turned out Mr. K. was actually less and less often present during the observation sessions. At times I would not see him for months, and he was also not present when I said goodbye. When the parents talked about the imminent birth together during the initial interview and reminisced about their son's birth, the issue of the different cultures that the family moved between came up. Contrary to the expectations of their Greek relatives, before their son was born they had decided that just the two of them would spend the first few hours of their baby's life together with him.

"They had of course enjoyed that, but the others had complained. Yes, said Mr. K., they had been really angry and this time he would phone them, regardless of whether it was in the middle of the night or whenever" (from the initial interview).

Overall as this first talk with the family progressed I had the feeling that they were well able to imagine what the observation would be like. They seemed to have a sense that it could be good thing for all involved - perhaps they imagined a relationship that included *being able to*

do something for each other. When their son, who had been playing in the background for most of the time, came and joined us and wanted to know who I am, his mother explained to him matter-of-factly that I would be coming to see them once a week as soon as the baby had come to see what it did. After he had gone away with his father, Ms K. reported that she was worried about Kimon. The second child would probably be a girl and I noted down right after this first interview that I had the fantasy that the mother had always wanted to have a daughter.

The beginning - My first meeting with Sina

My first visit to the family's home took place three weeks after the baby's birth. Her mother had not contacted me until two and a half weeks after the birth because she had mastitis. I was very excited as I stood at the door of their apartment and rang the doorbell.

> "It is a moment before Ms K. opened the door to me. I can hear the baby in the background. I do not yet know her name and am not certain whether it is a girl or a boy. [...] I start to step inside, but then hesitate. I see the carpet and ask if I should take off my shoes. 'Yes, please!'. They always take their shoes off here, she adds apologetically. Then I go into the living room, follow the baby sounds and find the cot with the baby [lying in it]. I see immediately that it is a girl. She is wearing a pinkish orange playsuit and has fine black hair which is already quite long. Her eyes are open, but she does not look at me. Ms K. joins us a moment later." (1st session, Sina: 3 weeks).

Her mother told me that her name is Sina - with a very soft "S" - she corrected me when I repeated the name - and that the birth happened very fast. Her daughter had been born one week before the due date. She joked that she had hardly had time to put her shoes on. She told me about her painful mastitis and that she was still breast-feeding despite it because she thought it would be so convenient later on. She then did in fact feed Sina a little later, although the baby hardly appeared to be hungry and did not really want to drink, but just sucked a little at the breast. The issue of food intake would continue to be an area of conflict between mother and daughter through much of the observation, long after Sina was weaned. And while the two of them appeared to be nicely in contact and attuned with each other in this feeding scene, I noted that I felt very tense. I wondered whether I was sitting at the right distance for the observation and was busy thinking about the question of the right balance between closeness and distance.

It is interesting that my very first meeting with Sina took place without her mother - that I "visited" her more or less on my own in the apartment, which was still completely unfamiliar to me and where I was still a total stranger. It would remain characteristic of this observation that I was often alone with Sina, and for long periods, while her mother withdrew, leaving me to observe "undisturbed" and Sina alone with "her visitor". It was already clear during this first session that Ms K. attributed great importance to the observation and that she was doing her best to do everything right. She told Sina to look in my direction, started to worry whether she was talking too much and disturbing me as I observed. She was only able to give voice to her feelings shortly before the end of the session.

> "Ms K. comes and sits down next to us on the sofa, bringing her coffee with her. She drinks, looks out of the window and appears to be uncertain how to handle the situation.

> At some point she looks at us and laughs. I look up and laugh a little, too. She says, 'Sorry I'm laughing, but it's still so funny.' She said it was strange that somebody was sitting there like that, not moving at all, and observing. She would probably miss me later, but now it was still strange." (1st session, Sina: 3 weeks).

In this way she was able to relieve both of us of much of the uncertainty associated with the newness of the observation, which creates a special situation which is somewhere between being highly intimate and totally strange. And yet when we discussed this first observation session in our supervision group the idea came up that the mother might be neglecting her own needs too much in her strong endeavours to ensure that I could observe without being "disturbed". Something seemed sad and lonely and I had an image of uprootedness. This was matched by the group's fantasy that as observer I could fulfil the function of a "German godmother" to Sina, and that I was thus a sort of cultural link. The supportive element that was implicit in this fantasy was present at several points already in this first session. Twice Sina's head fell backwards and I had the impulse to hold it. And at the end of the session Ms K. remarked, looking at her sleeping daughter, that it must be my effect [on her] - in the subsequent sessions she would often draw a connect between Sina being calm and my presence.

The first few months - Between inner calm and crisis

In the first few months after Sina's birth I was usually alone in the apartment with Ms K. and Sina during the observation sessions. I only saw Sina's father before he went to work and their older son Kimon was only present twice. It was made easy for me to find my position as observer: Sina's mother held back a lot and made an effort to ensure that I could observe Sina in peace and her husband and son would not "disturb" me. Sometimes I had the impression that something was being avoided as a result and that the uncertainty involved in the situation was being defended against.

Sina was often very calm during this initial period and soon started to initiate extended gaze contact with me. She put up with her mother being absent for an astonishingly long time. In other sessions - usually when she was not feeling so good, had wind or was hungry - she hardly seemed to be aware that I was there and appeared to be in close communion with her mother.

> "Sina, who has been quiet for a moment, starts to double up, whine and screw up her face in a strained way. At some point her right hand wanders in the direction of her mouth and for a moment she catches her thumb. Ms K. helps her and guides her hand to her mouth. She stretches her own index finger towards her and Sina makes searching sucking movements and then sucks hard on the finger. Ms K. sighs. 'I don't want to put her to the breast.' She then does haltingly decide to do so. This time she places a transparent cap on her nipple. 'I know you don't like this', she says, 'but otherwise it hurts me'. Sina gets very excited when her mother picks her up and puts her to the breast. She immediately starts to suck greedily and with loud smacking noises and I think how strong she already is [...]. Sina drinks for a long time and in between Ms K. remarks, half laughing, 'Now you feel good and I have the pain!' [...] At some point Ms K. cautiously removes her nipple from Sina's mouth and puts her down next to her on

> the sofa, whereupon she starts to protest loudly. Ms K. takes the cap off her nipple and puts Sina to the breast again. She immediately starts to suck energetically again and makes satisfied, pleasurable-sounding noises. Then she stops drinking. Her mother lifts her up briefly and looks at her for a while. Her little head falls slowly backwards and her eyes are closed. The colour of Sina's face has changed. She now looks darker, the red patches that she had before are no longer to be seen and she is completely calm. Ms K. puts her over her shoulder, where she suddenly looks very tiny again. She is asleep. At some point her face turns in my direction. It is now completely relaxed. I have also fallen into a sleepy, dreamy state in the meantime [...]. Ms K. is clasping Sina lightly in both hands and for a moment both of them seem to be asleep, as if merged with each other, and for a brief moment I become immersed in this lovely picture." (3rd session, Sina: 5 weeks old).

In this situation the central importance of close bodily contact in this early period became very tangible. I perceived the intimacy that had arisen between mother and daughter as pleasant and for a moment I allowed myself to be completely sucked into a paradisiacal image of the two-in-one. This was congruent with a strong feeling that I must not disturb this state. When my time came to an end I hardly dared to allow my presence to be felt.

In many sessions the extent to which the dyadic relationship is in the foreground in these first few weeks became clear. I felt the enormous difficulty associated with integrating the third especially in my own reaction. I felt most relaxed when Ms K. left Sina with me and did something else. I then often had the feeling that I could in fact calm Sina with my presence and that her mother was not needed. After such intense moments alone with Sina I often had a strong desire to bring Ms K. back in again, would become active and make a spontaneous remark about what I was observing. In other situations it was I who felt excluded and alone. There did not yet seem to be much room for something in between symbiotic intimacy and complete separation in the relationship between mother and daughter. That this is a shared process of seeking and balancing would become particularly evident in the sixth session. At the beginning Ms K. wanted to "park" Sina with me, but then the separation became unbearable for both of them and they therefore remained in very close contact throughout the entire session.

> "Ms K. puts a little blanket on the sofa between us and says to Sina, 'Your visitor is here again.' The two of them appear to be in very close contact with each other today. Then Ms K. lays Sina down on her back on the blanket. She comments that she is now handing her over. Sina does not seem to like it at all. She immediately starts to complain and quickly gets louder, screws her face up and kicks with her legs. Ms K. gets up and goes into the kitchen. She then folds a few cloths on the baby's changing table [...]. Sina is still unsettled and Ms K. picks her up. 'Hungry!' She puts her on her lap and takes out her left breast and I have the feeling that today she is a little embarrassed as she does so. Sina immediately starts breathing fast and excitedly. Ms K. remarks that her breast is really very full. 'You're right.' She offers the nipple to Sina and she takes it into her mouth straight away. She starts to drink greedily, I here loud lip-smacking and gulping sounds, she is short of breath and inhales deeply between swallows, with a rattling sound [...]. She drinks in fast gulps for a while and Ms. K is in very close contact with her [...]. From time to time she calms down for a moment, sucks evenly, emitting pleasurable-sounding soft, but melodious sounds as she does so. Then she starts to drink

hectically again, gulps, smacks her lips, her body squirming as if it were already engaged in digesting. Ms K. strokes her belly soothingly and massages her. She laughs softly, again and again, and I have the impression she is really enjoying Sina [...]. She lays Sina over her shoulder, "Perhaps better like this?' She strokes her back in circular movements. Sina burps twice in succession, and almost in the same moment an audible poop escapes her. Ms K. laughs. 'Did you swallow so much air?' Sina seems to be working hard, she pushes and squirms, and air keeps noisily escaping from somewhere. Then she begins to be clearly dissatisfied again and Ms K. puts her to the breast again. Once again she starts to drink frenziedly [...]. Finally both of them seem to be asleep. I try to see something of Sina's face, it looks as if her eyes are moving under the lids and her mouth is also moving, it keeps looking as if she is sucking. I notice how my thoughts are drifting. I think about Sina's father, who is away on a trip, and I wonder whether the close connection that I am perceiving between Sina and her mother today has to do with that. I notice that Ms K. has been present during the whole session, which has never been the case in the last few weeks, and that I have almost felt a little excluded" (6th session, Sina: 8 weeks old).

Ms K. had in fact told me about her husband's being away at the beginning of the session and that she had therefore had to go into the shop in the mornings. And during the session she also received a call from there. Her inner preoccupation with her work may have brought a separating element into her relationship with her daughter that is still difficult to tolerate. The alternation between greedy incorporation and expulsion in the scene described above could also be seen in this context.[14]

In the 7th session Sina was ten weeks old and an intensive eye contact developed between us for the first time. I was very moved by this contact and began to strongly identify with her, to the extent that I was suddenly sure that the colour of her eyes had changed and that they were blue, like mine.

"Sina's gaze meets mine, she looks at me with large, awake eyes. Her gaze remains fixed on me and she raises one eyebrow and then wrinkles her forehead. Her mouth starts to move and she stretches her arms out towards me. She vocalises. She has clenched her left hand into a fist, and stretches her right hand towards me, spreading her fingers. Her legs are also moving. She stretches them, kicks, bends the left leg and then the right leg, and then stretches both legs straight out in front of her again. She keeps looking at me for a long time and then starts to make a repetitive movement with her right arm - towards me with stretched out fingers, then back again to her own body, closing her hand. As she does so she keeps pointing her index finger towards herself again and again. Her left arm stays stretched away from her body, her hand clenched in a fist [...]. She repeats this several times, accompanying her movements with noises and keeping me locked in her gaze [...]. I think that the colour of her eyes is different, they look deep blue, before they seemed darker to me. She looks at me curiously again. Her whole body is moving, she squirms, stretches, stretches her arms and legs towards me and accompanies all this with noises that today somehow already have something to do with speech. She poops briefly, concentrating her gaze on me as she does so and then relaxes

[14] Melanie Klein described such introjective and projective mechanisms are the earliest forms of defences against anxiety in what is termed the *paranoid-schizoid position* (cf. Klein, 1952, p. 62).

> a little [...]. After looking at me for a long time, she turns her head away, looks towards the armrest of the sofa, stays like that for a few seconds, and then turns her head back towards me, searches for me with her eyes and fixes her gaze on me again. She repeats this several times and it seems to me that each time the process gets faster and faster, it looks almost like a game. She accompanies it with very mobile facial expressions, screws up her (closed) mouth into a round shape so that her face takes on an astonished, almost indignant expression. Once I involuntarily lick my lips with my tongue, and Sina sticks out her tongue too. From time to time her body tenses, she squirms briefly and poops again, which visibly relaxes her. She looks at me expectantly and I involuntarily raise my eyebrows. She appears to me to be smiling a little. Her gaze locks into mine again and she lies completely quiet for a long time, continuing to move her arms, legs and mouth, but making no sound. She stretches towards me again and again and I have the impulse to pick her up" (7th session, Sina: 10 weeks old).

Our meeting of gazes was very intense and it felt almost as if we were falling into each other. For a moment we were merged with each other - at least in my imagination. Sina's play with her facial expressions and mine seemed like an experience of early mirroring, as if she expected her inner states - tension, poops, relaxation - to be in me, too. My strange perception of the colour of her eyes probably had to do with the fact that I had also immersed myself in this state and also found myself in Sina. At the end of this session her mother managed to create a nice situation with the three of us together when she attended to Sina and commented, laughing, that we had really observed each *other* today. And she repeated that the fact that Sina had been so quiet, despite having wind, must have been due to the atmosphere that radiates from me. It is a holding function that she has attributed to me from the start and which I also accept. The sense that I had right at the beginning of the observation that Sina's head needed to be supported went in this direction, likewise my tendency to respond to visible tension in the baby by breathing especially calmly myself. In my supervision group the image of "mental breast-feeding" suggested itself to us as a response to the very early, long and intense episodes of eye contact. But the calm that Sina radiated during many observation sessions also had a flipside. When the separation became too much for her, her mother was stressed and too busy with other things her success in being alone with me became exclusion. My feeling that Sina found support in contacts with me collapsed in such situations and in the countertransference I was dealing with fears of dying.

> "Sina turns her head back and forth, her whole body moves excitedly, she stretches, waves her arms and legs and then falls asleep - to me it looks like from one moment to the next. She sleeps deeply and without moving for about half an hour [...]. My thoughts drift and I am startled when I suddenly think of the first-aid course that I did three weeks ago and wonder whether I could resuscitate Sina if she simply stopped breathing. I push the thought away fast." (8th session, Sina: 11 weeks old).

In the next session I had the feeling that no connection was developing between me and Sina and at the same time it is becoming clear how Ms K. was feeling the urge to go back into her "own" life. She gave the impression of being very busy, changed Sina's nappy hectically and gave her a bottle, and I wondered sadly if she was getting the breast at all any more (her mother actually continued breast-feeding her until she was nine months old.)

> "When my time is almost up Ms K. walks past the sofa, sees Sina, who is looking out into the room, and sighs. 'Oh Sina,' she says, and fetches a plastic frame with figures dangling from it. She places it over Sina. "Now you can look for a bit.' She goes again. Sina looks at the dangling figures. Her gaze follows them for a long time, but her face shows hardly anything. To me her gaze seems to wander/waver, and to be somehow empty and foam develops in front of her mouth. She hardly moves. I think that it looks somehow as if she is imprisoned under the plastic frame and although we can still see each other between the figures it seems as if she can't see me behind the frame." (9th session, Sina: 12 weeks old).

This situation developed into a crisis-like climax during the next week when for once Kimon was at home. With the words, 'Look, now you've got a visitor, too!' Ms. K left Sina and me alone in the bedroom and closed the door behind her. I was alarmed at this exclusion and the state into which Sina slipped in the course of this session reminded me of concepts of disintegration and inner fragmentation. I am unable to get into contact with her and find the situation increasingly unbearable. In our supervision group we discuss my countertransference and how I increasingly desperately attempted to make some meaning out of the situation and Sina's mute movements, while she herself appeared to slip more and more into a state that might fit with Bion's concept of *nameless dread* as a reaction to failed containment (cf. Bion, 1962, p. 183). Am I so shocked myself that I can no longer take in this state?

> "Sina has started to turn her head from side to side again. I increasingly have the impression that there is something desperate about this movement. She flails around with her arms, her face is quite unmoved and her gaze is still directed towards the door [...]. I note how I am finding the situation more and more unbearable, how I can hardly sit still and keep making involuntary movements that are audible and visible. I wish that Sina could see me and have a strong impulse to offer at least a finger to her hand, which looks so desperate [...]. I hear Ms K. speaking. Sina seems to respond to the sounds by keeping her head turned towards the door for a moment longer before she lapses back into turning it from side to side. She gets faster and faster and all at once I think that she is now looking really crazy, as if she is cracking up. Once she stretches her whole body as if she wants to resist. I wonder why she doesn't scream and wish she would somehow call attention to herself." (10th session, Sina: 13 weeks old).

But it only makes sense to scream if there is an object that one wants to reach. Perhaps Sina's state in this situation can be understood against the background of what Melanie Klein described as an early threat of annihilation. The absent object cannot yet be represented and thus becomes a bad and persecuting object that is present in the baby's own psyche (cf. Klein, 1952, p. 62). Sina's turning her head back and forth mutely, which appeared crazy, could be thought of as the motor expression of such paranoid anxieties. I was drawn into this as observer. One could say that my attempt to take in Sina's experience for a moment made us both into abandoned orphans. When Sina finally did fall asleep after her long struggle with her tiredness - during which I got the impression that she wasn't able to let go in this frightening situation - I was also quite exhausted. Her mother, from whose perspective Sina was not alone, but together with me, nonetheless seemed in retrospect to have accurately sensed that the exclusion went too far in this session - such a situation would not be repeated for the rest of the entire observation. I was impressed by how Ms K. had evidently thought

about what had happened. At the end of the following session she spoke about the setting of the observation. She said it was difficult to imagine what I was doing, but she did not have to understand it, and she usually left me in peace and did what she had to do. I took the opportunity to say that it was very nice for me to be able to do the observation at their home and that there was no need for her to take care of me. She confirmed how good it was with the regular appointments and that she could adjust to fit in with them. She also shared with me something of the great difficulty she was having in meeting the needs of both children. Here too it was still difficult with three people. In our supervision group we discussed the father. He seemed to have disappeared, together with the shop world.

In the next few weeks I noted a very close bond between mother and Sina and had the feeling that the difficult session described above had also helped to provide some clarity about the setting and my position. While in this period Sina's mother repeatedly stressed how good and quiet she was - unlike her older brother - I marvelled at how she was developing. She often focused intently on her hands and fingers, her movements were becoming more and more co-ordinated. I was frequently pleased about her dexterity and amazed at all the things she could already do. During these weeks Sina evidently felt good. In my write-ups I described her as a "well-fed bundle of joy". She seemed to feel comfortable in her body. At the same time she made strong contact with me and in our supervision group we often talked about her mental abilities, which appeared to be very highly developed. She discovered her own voice and seemed to be able to use it to calm herself and bridge distance, allowing for the development of an intermediate stage between concrete physical connection and separation. Winnicott (1971, p. 5) refers to this early use of the baby's own voice as a *transitional phenomenon*, which enables a first in-between zone between outside and inside, me and not-me to take shape.

> "Sina is not looking at me, her body is moving, her legs are kicking in my direction, she is waving her arms around, with her hands open. She moves her head slightly from side to side and her gaze passes over me briefly without changing her expression. Then she looks at the ceiling and starts to talk to herself. I am fascinated by the sounds, which are so different in quality from how they were only a week ago, with a cadence that Sina seems to become absorbed in. She listens to herself, coos and vocalises and sometimes it seems as if she is imitating adult speech [...]. She grasps the cloth with her hands and briefly pulls it across her face. Then she moves her head from side to side again. Her parents can be heard talking softly to each other in the background.[15] It seems to me that Sina listens to their voices for a moment. Then her gaze passes over me briefly, without pausing. She seems to experiment with her voice, squeaks, babbles and coos and sometimes it almost sounds like singing. She brings her palms together in front of her torso, leaves them like that for a moment, and then her arms wave apart again [...]. She moves her head, looks at me briefly, listens again and brings her hands together again. Her fingers play with each other and in her right hand she is holding a corner of the cloth. Now she moves her hand to her mouth and starts to suck her thumb. She slurps, and her left hand is still touching her right hand." (15th session, Sina: 18 weeks old).

[15] The week before Ms K. had asked me to come half an hour earlier for the observation sessions. As a result Sina's father was often still there for the first half hour. That seemed to make the observation situation more relaxed, for the mother, particularly. In connection with this scene it seems important that for Sina speech was connected with her father, especially. Ms K. had commented in an earlier session that she did not talk much to the baby and that her husband assumed that [task].

In this phase there were also some changes in regard to breast-feeding. Highly intimate situations arose in which I almost felt like a voyeur. Sina's mother also seemed somewhat embarrassed. She would warn me apologetically that she was going to breast-feed. Sina's relationship to her mother's breast had changed. She looked, grabbed and played with the breast and there was an erotic, sexual element in her movements. Afterwards she would look at me with moist, shining eyes and a broad smile. At the same time the issue of her food consumption and ambivalence about it became evident. On the one hand there was often a worry that Sina could eat too little (which frequently confused me, with my image of the "well-fed bundle of joy"). On the other hand Ms K. would often remark how fat she was because she did not yet get proper exercise. "It's not milk that comes out of Mama's breast, it's cream" she said in one session - again, not without pride - to her son, who had expressed surprise at his sister's fat legs.

In this connection an issue started to emerge that was to become more highly charged in the next weeks and months. While I marvelled at how fast Sina was developing, in her mother's perception the "good, quiet" Sina was at the same time a Sina who did not move enough, was not active enough and whose development gave cause for concern.

The second six months - A phase of forgetting and concerns about the baby's development

Retrospectively it could be understood that the crisis began as the stability of the observations was lost. Ms K. "forgot" the observation sessions, which was increasingly unsettling for me, although it only happened once that a session actually failed to take place. It was more that Ms K. was regularly surprised when I arrived at our usual time. Once we conducted a whole session on a bench just in front of the front door of the family's apartment, where Ms K. left me alone with Sina in her pram for a while, while she went to buy some coffee with her son, and several times appointments were postponed or cancelled. At the same time in many sessions I had the impression that a particularly deep, holding and calming contact developed between me and Sina.

> "From time to time, when we are alone, Sina becomes calmer, looks at me intently and very seriously, turns [the corners of] her mouth up into a slight smile and brings her hands together in front of her body. I have the impression that she feels good. Her gaze keeps falling on me and this is usually followed by her hands moving together while she fixes her gaze on me. Somehow I have the feeling that the movement has something to do with me [...]. Her gaze keeps landing on me again and again and it almost seems to me that she is making sure that I am still in the same place [...]. After a while she starts to emit soft, tearful-sounding noises and screws up her face, and I think she will start to cry any moment. But soon the nature of the sounds changes and it's almost as if she had discovered something nice. She starts to vocalise to herself and no longer sounds discontented. She opens her mouth wide, emits a long, melodic-sounding tone and looks at me [...]. She starts to suck her fingers with enjoyment and plays with her tongue. Once she puts almost her whole hand into her mouth, then pulls it a few centimetres away from her face, but immediately puts it back into her mouth. As she does so she seems to be quite self-absorbed, to be pleasurably preoccupied with herself and the sensations that her own fingers produce in her mouth. All the time she keeps looking at

me. Then she starts to vocalise with her fingers in her mouth, to make noises and melodies that sound pleasurable. Her gaze is as if turned inward and her right hand now puts more pressure on her left hand, as if she wanted to push it even further into her mouth. Then she pulls her arms apart and beams all over her face, waving her arms and kicking her legs. She seems to be joyful and excited and gurgles to herself. I am absolutely fascinated and wonder what she is experiencing." (20th session, Sina: 24 weeks old).

This scene makes me think of Winnicott's concept of the *capacity to be alone* (Winnicott, 1958, p. 29 ff.). It is amazing how much Sina was able to cope with in this overall situation, in which her mother was struggling to manage the difficult balancing act between her two children. But not only that - she replaced the loss which she seemed to express in tearfulness with a creative and pleasurable exploration of herself. Winnicott's concept describes how the capacity of an infant to bear separation and loss develops alongside the early experience of *being alone in the presence of an other person*. Paradoxically it is the presence of the object that enables the child to be alone. In the situation described above, Sina may have used me to be alone in this sense. My role as participant observer with its unobtrusive presence - which she is likely to have internalised to a certain extent by this time - would seem particularly conducive to producing this experience. And perhaps my presence and the holding function associated with my gaze made it possible for the threatening situation of separation to develop into something nice and pleasurable.[16]

In our supervision group we tried to understand the forgetting as the other side of idealisation: the family had ascribed great importance to me - especially for Sina - and Ms K.'s feeling of being overburdened, which was inevitable since both children's nursery schools were closed for the holidays, created a conflict for her with me. She must have found it difficult to cancel a session and so she "forgot" me - just as Sina frequently seemed to be shut out from the rest of the family in these sessions. But neither of us was forgotten. At the end of a session in this period Ms K. explained to her son that Sina already knew who I am. "Lisa is coming for two years, she won't forget her." However, it became evident how central the issue of separation was for Sina's mother - in regard to both Sina and myself. At the end of the session described above she accompanied me to the door and commented that Sina was now almost six months old - so big already - before long she would be two and then ... She looked at me with wide eyes and I thought, "Yes, then we'll have to say goodbye."

Following the forgotten sessions Ms K. became increasingly concerned about Sina's development. She was worried that her daughter was always "so completely quiet" and considered that she moved too little. She described her as lazy and kept laying her on her stomach to encourage her to crawl. In this period Sina was sick a lot, it almost seemed that this was her way of reacting to having too much demanded of her. But even while she was sick she was not allowed to be little, but was expected to be active and not such a '"lazy madam". In a session like this when Sina was seven months old she was sat in a corner of the sofa. For a moment I was amazed how big she was, but then the mood changed and the situation took on a humiliating character. Sina seemed unhappy. She was expressionless, like a grown-up doll and both parents looked at her. They were currently too burdened with their

[16] A discussion of the question as to the extent to which Freud's concepts of auto-erotic satisfaction and hallucinatory wish fulfilment (see Freud 1909, pp. 321ff.) can be connected to the idea of being alone in the presence of an other person is beyond the scope of this paper.

own worries and seemed temporarily to have lost their feeling for her. They told me that their apartment had been broken into. Kimon had reacted with severe anxiety and the whole family was feeling highly stressed by this incident. In the weeks immediately following the burglary Ms K. seemed to look to Sina for support and protection, in a kind of role reversal. She said Sina was the only one "who [was] still cheerful". Although she reported that Sina had had a high temperature for three days she tried desperately to stimulate her to move more, to sit up. A little later in this session I began to feel sad when Ms K. breast-fed Sina, who wanted to be close to her and held.

> "Sina becomes restless. She frowns, making deep wrinkles in her forehead, and starts to cry. I am moved. I have never seen her cry like this. It sounds really unhappy, not demanding or discontented, but unhappy. Ms K. puts her to the breast again. She immediately begins to suck. This time she drinks for a long time, while Ms K., who is evidently suffering a lot with her cold, is busy with her running nose. I feel sorry for her. I imagine how strenuous it must be for her at the moment. Sina drinks and moves her legs in a new way, as if she is tensing the muscles of her thighs. Her right hand, which is free, makes grasping movements, first at the breast and then in air. She is grasping at nothing. Then she touches her mother's face with her hand, and finally holds tight to her mother's pullover. Her eyes have closed but she continues to drink [...]. I get very sad during this feeding situation and think about Ms K.'s request that I help her with her son. I feel that I have not yet given her an answer. Sina seems to have finished drinking and Ms K. picks her up. She looks briefly in my direction and then buries her head in her mother's shoulder. She burrows into the material of the pullover. I have the feeling that she does not want to see or perceive anything right now, but would rather hide herself away." (24th session, Sina: 30 weeks old).

One could think that Sina needed to cling to her mother precisely because she was so dissatisfied with her, that if she could she would crawl into her. To put it differently, refusing to accept the regression, being small and needy, is actually thwarting Sina's impulse to develop and move away.

In addition to depressive elements (Sina's mother said that nothing had any meaning any more after the burglary, that there was no joy) she was increasingly aggressive towards Sina, when she hectically and impatiently pushed her to move more. And yet she hardly noticed the progress that Sina was making in her development and that often amazed me - she was too worried that something might be wrong. When she was alone with me I was frequently certain that Sina was about to start crawling any moment - just because she was then not pressured to do so. In this phase I experienced her father as supportive. He was happy about how much his "big" daughter was already able to do. Sina was sleeping extremely badly at night during this time and in some sessions her mother seemed so exhausted that I suddenly had the feeling I was observing two small children.

I had great confidence in Sina's development and in our supervision group we discussed at length what her mother's worries might have to do with. Here, too, there seemed to be a difficult separation conflict, which had to do with growing up. It could be that a wish that Sina would stay small and close to her was behind her mother's concern that her motor development was retarded. Perhaps her fears about her child's development were due to the conflict between letting go and holding on - and that was what was making it especially difficult for Sina to start crawling. In many sessions I felt a strong desire to relieve the burden

on her mother and communicate to Sina a little of my confidence in her ability to develop. And she did in fact react strongly to my gaze:

> "I notice that I am worried about what will happen when Sina's mother disappears from view in a minute. Sina's face does in fact freeze in that moment. Then she frowns deeply, screws up her whole face and starts to scream. She closes her eyes tightly as she does so and turns her head from side to side. I feel helpless, I am sorry for her. But only seconds later Sina opens her eyes for a brief moment and meets my gaze. I am baffled, because in that moment she stops crying, keeps her eyes open and looks at me for a long time, intently and very intensely. I look back calmly and am riveted. Continuing to look at me, she lifts her arms and brings her hands together in front of her face, as she has so often done in my presence. Her fingers are playing with each other. For a moment it is quiet, and then Sina starts to talk to herself softly again." (27th session, Sina: 33 weeks old).

At the end of this session I found it difficult to leave and when Sina could hardly take her eyes off me from her mother's arms as I said goodbye I had the impression that our feelings somehow paralleled each other. And while her mother continued to forget me, I started to strongly identify with Sina, who remembered me and who seemed to be pleased when I came.

When Sina was 9 months old weaning emerged as a new separation issue following a family holiday in their home country - and once again, everybody fell ill, including Sina. While things were moving in the direction of weaning, already before Sina's mother told me about it I noticed that Sina was focusing on her mouth and objects in a new way. It seemed pleasurable and orally aggressive and I often had images of attack and incorporation.

> "Ms K. brings Sina a little bag containing a number of medicines. 'Look, you can empty this again, that'll keep you busy.' Then she leaves the room. Sina literally pounces on the bag and starts wildly removing one box after another and putting them in her mouth, making wild, aggressive and pleasurable noises as she does so. She is absorbed in what she is doing with the objects, but still keeps looking up at me for a moment from time to time [...]. She babbles and vocalises and "eats" one box after another. At some point she has a box of paracetamol in one hand and a plastic syringe in the other and looks back and forth between these two objects. She seems not to know which she should put in her mouth first. She keeps needing to cough and then looks at me, but soon immerses herself in her play again." (29th session, Sina: 38 weeks old).

Two weeks later Ms K. told me that she had stopped breast-feeding Sina. She said she had no more milk because Sina did not suck. Not until I looked at my write-ups did I notice that I had observed a breast-feeding scene the week before and described Sina as "sucking greedily". Her mother later reported that Sina had "weaned herself", and that she had actually wanted to continue breast-feeding for a year. Here again, when it was a question of a concrete step towards separation she showed ambivalence, since at the same time as she was weaning she started to be very worried as to whether Sina was eating enough. She reported that Sina did not want to eat anything and that she had lost so much weight that they had almost taken her to hospital. I thought about the guilt feelings associated with weaning as a move towards separation and what Sina's refusal to eat could have to do with them. In my fantasy it was her

mother who did not want to feed her any more.[17] At the same time Ms K. talked wistfully about newborn babies (a friend of hers had just had a baby), which was a clear indication of how much pain Sina's mother was experiencing in connection with the separation and the associated feeling of no longer being needed in such an existential way - despite her pleasure in Sina's development. What was interesting was that in this phase of the weaning Sina slept from beginning to end of a few sessions, so that I had the impression that she did not want to wake up at all and I almost felt as if I were an intruder. Shortly before my Christmas holiday, Sina was ill again and the crisis surrounding her not wanting to crawl - her in some way undecided state between being big and small - escalated again. And in the following scene the issues of letting go and holding on, being over-taxed and ambivalence, and Sina's mother's aggressive tendencies became evident again.

> "Ms K. comes in with some baby cereal. She picks Sina up and puts her in a high chair that I notice for the first time. She gives Sina a mug of water to drink, but Sina spits more into the mug than she drinks. It looks very hectic and Ms K. is somehow hasty in what she does. Sina does not want to eat anything. She turns her head away and makes noises that are clearly refusing. Ms K. says she only has to try and then she'll discover that it tastes good. But it does not work. Sina turns her head away vigorously and starts to complain more loudly, almost screaming. Ms K. becomes clearly annoyed and angry, and speaks to Sina in Greek in an increasingly strict tone of voice. There is something desperate in the scene again. I feel sorry for both of them and I would really like to help somehow. Sina's gaze keeps falling on me and then she looks at me with wide eyes. At some point Ms K. gives up. She appears angry and sad, disappointed in Sina [...]. She sits Sina on the table briefly, and then on the floor. I notice that I have slipped into a very sad mood myself. Ms K. stands up - 'Bye, Sina! I'm going to have something to eat.' She goes into the kitchen. Sina looks confused for a moment. Then she tries to catch my eye, is happy and smiles at me [...]. Ms K. speaks in my direction and says that she wishes so much that Sina were a bit more cheeky. That she would do more, be more active. She says she is always so quiet, never makes a sound - and that you don't notice when she wakes up because she is so quiet. You could simply sit her down and go away, leave her alone for an hour or so, she doesn't mind. She picks Sina up and I think that she's sorry about her own feelings - and I'm sorry for her. When doing my write-up I note that a child that was "cheekier" and "more active" would of course offer her mother more opportunities to express her aggressiveness and anger." (35th session, Sina: 44 weeks old).

In a situation in which Sina expressed her independence very impressively, asserted herself against her mother's will and seemed content with that, her mother's complaints that she was *too quiet* were confusing. Her mother seemed to have very clear expectations as to how her daughter should be, so that there was little room for Sina's own will, which she showed so clearly. In our supervision group we discussed Sina's mother's wish for a "cheeky, noisy and active girl" at length - an image that may have accommodated her own unfulfilled wishes. We also discussed again my function as "godmother" under whose gaze and protection Sina's

[17] Whether this fantasy of mine was capturing something of the unconscious process that was taking place between mother and baby remains, as often, an open question. Hypotheses that arise in this way can only be followed up or clarified to a limited extent within the framework of an observation.

development was supposed to take place. Sina did in fact start to crawl over the Christmas holidays, that is, while I was not there.

Moving away, rapprochement and separation crises

Although she was very excited about her daughter's crawling, and immediately demonstrated it to me proudly, Ms K. was late for our first session after my holiday. As a result I was first alone in the apartment with Sina's father and he told me that she was crawling before I saw her. I was surprised in this session how Sina at first slowly seemed to recognise me, very seriously, and then - as if she had discovered a memory trace - picked up exactly where we had left off at our last meeting before my holiday.

> "She is now sitting with her face turned directly towards me and prolonged eye contact develops between us, during which she first seems very serious and then beams at me and stretches out her hand in my direction. I smile back. Shortly afterwards she stretches the other arm towards me and smiles at me expectantly. When I do not move, she lets her arm fall, exhales deeply and brings her hands together in front of her stomach. She puts her palms together and interlaces her fingers [...]. She is now sitting very close to my foot, which is hanging in the air because I have crossed my legs. I remember the last session before my holiday, when I sat in a very similar position and Sina dared, after some hesitation, to touch my foot. Today she only looks at me briefly and then reaches purposefully for my foot and holds on to it for a short time. Then she lets go of it again and crawls [forward] a bit so that she is sitting right next to my legs. Now she touches my foot again, almost leaning against my leg as she does so, leaves her hand on my foot for a bit longer and looks up at me with wide eyes. I am moved." (36th session, Sina: 47 weeks old).

Overall it seemed as if something resolved itself here following this important step in Sina's development. Her mother, especially, appeared relaxed and light-hearted in contact with Sina in the weeks that followed - she must have been very relieved. Sina also seemed enthusiastic about her new motor capacities. She looked big and proud. And yet she showed clearly that becoming a big girl was also associated with marked fears of loss, that it is, in fact, only a slow [process of] getting bigger and that she was still very small. She often crawled tearfully after her mother, was very clingy, and remained in close physical contact with her.

> "Ms K. has gone into the bathroom but to begin with Sina stays sitting in the hallway. She looks back and forth from me to the bathroom and seems undecided. Then Ms K. closes the bathroom door from the inside and leaves Sina sitting in front of it. I feel a little stab and I see that she is also looking at the closed door with wide eyes and that she then crawls towards it. She sits motionless in front of the door for a while and then moves towards me a little, but soon stops again. To me she looks a little lost as she sits there, waving her arms, and then touches the back of her head with her right hand. Then a noise can be heard out of the bathroom and Sina immediately starts to crawl towards the closed door. I stand there [watching], likewise lost and undecided, and debate whether I should clear a nearby chair for myself or simply go to my place in the living room and wait to see what happens [...]. While I am still busy thinking about my position, things evidently get too much for Sina. She starts to cry loudly in front of the

bathroom door." (38th session, Sina: 49 weeks old).

Around Sina's first birthday she started to have new problems sleeping at night and nausea. At the same time in the observation sessions it seemed that the positions in the family had changed. Sina was now confronted with a parental couple and when she followed her parents as they moved around the apartment it always looked as if she wasn't managing to keep up, as if she were at risk of being excluded and left behind. Her parents' worried remarks that they did not know why Sina kept becoming nauseous can be understood in this context. Psychologically Sina was dealing with difficult and serious issues (in the observation session I noted several times that her gaze was serious, almost pensive) and she probably had a lot inside her that was "undigested". When her mother was all too preoccupied with her own concerns and while Sina's concrete motor development stagnated the mother may have had little internal leeway to respond to Sina's inner states in a receptive and understanding way. Perhaps her containing function (Bion, 1963) was not sufficiently available during the period of crisis - but it probably was not now, either, when she was so relieved and happy about Sina's developmental successes. She herself seemed to put her finger on it when during the observation session after Sina's first birthday she said she did not know what it was, but Sina simply could not sleep at night. As if she had eaten something that was not digestible. At the end of this session Sina clutched at my hand and did not let it go, so that I had to pull it away after a few seconds.

During this period in the countertransference I had the strong feeling that I had to be there for Sina, not turn my gaze away and that I had to understand her. And feelings of being left alone and that things were too much for her also landed with me. Sina reacted by being ill often. She had a middle ear infection that needed several courses of antibiotics. The illness brought her back into close contact with her mother. She was allowed to sleep beside her parents again and I thought about what it must mean to her to sleep in her own bed and how being ill made her very small and dependent again. At the same time in several sessions I was amazed how fit and active she was. I admired her developing abilities and perceived her as a really big girl. Some lovely [moments of] contact arose, both in the relationship between Sina and her father and also between her and her mother, whom I observed together in long, playful situations for the first time. Usually I only noticed when I came to do my write-ups that she was in fact sick and that this was masked by the antibiotic - and I was alarmed at the thought that she was not really allowed to be sick.

Around this time, when Sina was one year and one month old, I noticed for the first time that the nappy-changing process had taken on a new quality and that Sina was preoccupied with her excretions in a new way.

> "My fantasy that she was filling her nappy at that moment comes mainly from her gaze, which seems somehow strained, but also frightened. When the smell confirmed [my impression] Ms K. remarks that her nappy will soon have to be changed. Sina does not want to and it seems to me that she is pushing something into her nappy. She looks towards her mother, her face strained and contorted, then slides backwards a bit, not really defiantly, but I think: she wants to keep it. Ms K. leaves her for quite a long time, but then picks her up and goes to the changing table with her. I can't decide whether to change places. I'm too far away to see anything of Sina, and at the same time I am curious how she will react to being changed. When I get up and try to move closer, Ms K. stops me. She tells me not to come close because it stinks. Sina wails and whimpers

unhappily while she is being changed and it is really as if something is being taken away from her." (44th session, Sina: 1 year, 1 month old).

Here again the issue was holding on and letting go - a relationship conflict which was being played out through Sina's own bodily functions. Sina was correspondingly wild and aggressive in the way she handled external objects. Now the priority at the oral level - putting everything only in her mouth - had been replaced by a playful taking possession of things. It seemed fitting that the issue of nursery school was first mentioned in this period. Sina was to start nursery school in August, when she would be one and a half.

A few weeks later, when Sina was one year and two months old, the stability that I had observed in the relationships between the parents as a couple and between Sina and her mother, but also in connection with my own observation sessions, seemed to be have been lost again. Sina "still can't walk", her mother had gone back to work for the first time (although only for half an hour, to open up the shop), Sina stayed at home with her father, who had been annoyed with her just before. It was the last session before the Easter break and I had a strong feeling that I had been left in the lurch by Sina's mother - who had left without a word and not mentioned that she would soon be back. In this situation Sina seemed to lose all her energy and strength and appeared hopeless and lost. As I watched her crawling slowly I was reminded of the "swamp of sadness" in the *Neverending Story* (Ende, 1993). No real contact developed between Sina and her father and they finally "escaped" into sleep. In our supervision group we talked about the infectious depressive mood associated with separation. Here Melanie Klein's description of the depressive position (1952c, p. 124ff) seems very fitting. What is involved is object loss and the infant's fear of having destroyed the good object herself, that is, guilt feelings - Sina looked hopelessly towards the door out of which her mother had disappeared.

Sina learned to walk during the Easter holiday - again during my absence. Although the family had assigned me such an important role in regard to Sina's development, she took these two big steps towards moving away when I was not there. I thought about the connection with the holidays, i.e. times during which her brother and father were presumably present for much more of the time. Precisely in view of her mother's impatient urgency, which tended to reinforce her regressive tendencies, one can imagine that having the opportunity for *other* relationship experiences during the holidays may have prompted a spurt in development. My impression is that in her relationship to her mother this initially reinforced Sina's whiney clingingness and Ms K. reacted with increasing irritation ("You can do that yourself now." "You don't always have to be with me.", etc.) I had a feeling that may have come close to Sina's feeling and fear that she would somehow drop out and get lost: I had difficulty in feeling in contact with her and had the impression I was sitting a very long way away from her, not able to see her properly. I could not find a good place to observe from and felt excluded and forgotten. At the end of the sessions in this period Sina's mother did in fact note, in connection with Kimon's birthday, that everything was so stressful, also co-ordinating the appointments with me. And only a few sentences later, she added that she would have preferred not to have Sina there at the birthday party at all. In our supervision group we talked at length about how Sina's mother‘s feelings towards me could correspond to her feelings towards Sina.

It seemed that the better Sina could walk the stronger was her opposing tendency to get back on her mother's lap or to want to her mother to pick her up.

"Ms K. leaves Sina on her own and goes to the ironing board. Sina stays still for only a moment and then her mood changes suddenly. She stands up, walks towards her mother and the ironing board, gets tearful, and then starts to emit little cries again [...]. Sina has arrived at her mother's side, who initially ignores her and continues ironing. Sina stretches and tries to grasp the ironing board, and then she pulls at her mother's clothing again. She gets louder and louder and more and more impatient, almost a little desperate. 'Mama, Mama, Mama!'. It sounds very woeful and Ms K. does not really respond. 'Mama, Mama!' Sina shifts the emphasis [from one syllable to the other] and I think she's switching from Greek to German [...]. Ms K. picks Sina up, but irritably. Sina calms down and immediately seems content. She looks at me, too." (51st session, Sina: 1 year 3 months old).

Scenes like this took place often and as I observed I fluctuated between identifying strongly with Sina, who was evidently having to fight for her mother too much at this time, and understanding for Ms K., who had a lot to do, was not left in peace for 5 minutes and reacted increasingly aggressively to Sina's demanding clingingness. She was hardly able to tolerate Sina's oscillation between being big and being small and between wanting to develop and wanting to cling.

"Ms K. picks her up, it looks like she's lost her patience. She picks Sina's pacifier up off the floor, puts it in Sina's mouth and sits down on the sofa with her. 'Alright, now you must go to sleep, this won't do.", she says. Sina is lying on her lap and seems to be quite happy there. She sucks on her pacifier for a moment and snuggles her head up to Ms K.'s breast. After a few seconds she turns round, looks at me, laughs, lies down again with her head on her mother's legs and then sits up again. Ms K. sighs. 'O.K., you can play and everything, but you don't have to have me with you.' She puts Sina beside her on the sofa and shows her a cardboard box with tissues in it and a few magazines. 'Look, you can take all these and read them.' She stands up, leaves Sina sitting there and goes back to the ironing board. Sina sits there, a bit as if absorbed in herself, her pacifier in her mouth and gazing out of the window, somehow into space. Beside her is a magazine and she turns its pages as if detached, but without looking at it. She sits like that for a long time, it looks somehow thoughtful and sad." (51st session, Sina: 1 year 3 months old).

Sina did not manage to make contact with me until right at the end of the session. It was a special kind of contact that was not dependent on how close she was to her mother. It seemed to reflect the big issue of closeness and distance that needed to be processed anew in her relationship with her mother in this phase.

"While her mother is on the telephone Sina crawls to be between us again, across her legs, and now she is approaching me with wide eyes, half laughing. She stays sitting very close to me, laughs, stretches her arm out cautiously and touches my arm lightly with her finger. I open my eyes wide and laugh, and she giggles loudly and touches me again in the same way. Ms K. comments that she probably thinks I am somehow untouchable. Sina seems visibly pleased and she touches me again very cautiously." (51st session, Sina: 1 year 3 months old).

The typical difficulties of this development were heightened by the fact that a crisis was developing in the relationship between Sina's parents at this time. Her father disappeared almost completely from the observation sessions and her mother flew to Greece without him for a few weeks, taking the children with her. The crisis escalated on her return. To begin with Ms K. appeared to me to be in low spirits and absent-minded. Finally she had a complete breakdown in which I was involved. In that session Sina was almost one and a half. A kind of depressive state seemed to have gripped the mother and both children and I slipped into it with them. Ms K. spent the session more or less crying on the phone, Kimon besieged me, kept his eyes on Sina and was desperately trying to produce liveliness and activity. Sina stayed close to her mother, but without being tearfully demanding as in the previous sessions.

> "Ms K. is sitting with her back to me and Sina opposite her, so that I can see her well. She seems to me to be sad, as if collapsed into herself and keeps looking at her mother, wide-eyed and with a serious expression. Her mother - totally absorbed in her conversation on the phone - absent-mindedly takes different things out of the basket. Sina sits there watching and hunches her shoulders, as if she were crawling into herself. Then she reaches, apparently randomly, first for a plastic pistol, turns it round briefly and then shows it to me, too. I note how I involuntarily respond more strongly than usual, as if I need to bring some liveliness into the situation. But Sina hardly reacts to my offer of contact. Ms K. keeps starting to cry as she talks on the phone, while she gradually completely empties the basket in front of Sina. Sina reaches for various things, but also seems somehow absent-minded and keeps looking at her mother, as if questioning or concerned." (54th session, Sina: 1 year 5 months).

It seemed to be a state of threatening inner emptiness that was taking hold. For me it was also difficult to bear. I started to question my observation abilities and was infected by the despair. Several times I found myself thinking about leaving the session before the end - but at the same time I had a strong feeling that I was especially needed right now and felt powerless because I could not do anything. In this session I was overcome by increasingly catastrophic fantasies about Sina - I feared that she would bang her head on the sharp edge of the table, had an image of her choking on the little rubber ball that she kept putting in her mouth, and even imagined that she would fall on to a plastic pistol that she kept running around the apartment with, getting wilder and wilder and more and more frenetic, fall and stick it into her eye. I also had the strong feeling that I was partly to blame for the whole unbearable situation since it was because of me that Ms K. kept feeling she had to come back - into my field of vision - with Sina. Later I thought about the depressive position and what a fatal effect it must have on the inner state of a small child when the object is in fact lost.

Against the background of Sina's mother's own depressive tendencies that were now becoming so evident, the "rapprochement crisis" (cf. Mahler, 1975, p. 91 ff) I described above now appeared in a different light. Sina's own aggressive impulses, which she needed to be able to separate, must have been difficult to bear because they appeared even more threatening when the object did in fact seem so jeopardised and unstable. That may have exacerbated the typical developmental conflict between autonomy and dependency between Sina and her mother in a specific way. At the end of the despairing session Sina fortunately seemed to manage to achieve a little reparation - as one might say in the light of that concept. She leaned against her mother's back, grasped her hair and buried her face in it. Her mother was at least able to respond to this gesture by letting her hair down, which she had had tied

up. Following this scene, which Sina's brother joined in with, Ms K. was able to finish her phone call and turn her attention to her children a little. Before I left she asked me to help her find professional help.

In our supervision group we talked again about the special supportive function that I as observer assume in this family - despite my own despair in the above session. The following week Sina and her mother fell asleep together on the sofa and I had a vivid image of two small children whom I was watching as they slept.

The last six months: Sina calms down and turmoil involving her brother

After my three-week summer holiday this severe crisis seemed to have been overcome. Ms K. appeared visibly better, Sina's strenuous clinging to her had disappeared and she now went to nursery school. Although Ms K. told me how difficult it had been for her to get used to it and that she did not yet let her go, Sina seemed proud [of herself]. At the same time a new closeness had evidently developed between mother and daughter. They lay down together to take a nap after lunch - Ms K. said that that was the best thing, she did not care about anything else. During the first session after my holiday the two of them fell asleep cuddled up to each other in my presence. When I left quietly at the end of the session the father was just arriving home. I had not seen him for a long time and when I told him that Ms K. and Sina were asleep he said gratefully, "It's a good thing that you are here ".

In the following period Sina developed rapidly. She seemed to learn new things from one week to the next and increasingly gave the impression of being quite a big girl. At the same time Kimon became more and more the centre of attention in the family. He had started school and a growing number of difficulties arose. He became a "problem child" and his teachers and above all his mother were very worried. Since I had been coming to observe Sina mainly on Saturdays since she had started nursery school, Kimon was also always present. I experienced many sessions as extremely noisy, over-excited and strenuous and things often seemed to go too fast and become too much for Sina, too. There were also renewed difficulties with our appointments and I increasingly had the impression that Ms K. "no longer needed" the observation, and in real terms the end of the two years also began to loom on the horizon. There was certainly also a concrete level: with Sina going to nursery school and Kimon starting school and the new difficulties that arose in that context, which created stress and reduced the available time for appointments, the observation was an additional burden for the children's mother, who felt under a strong obligation and did not easy to simply cancel an appointment. But in the noisy, hectic and highly charged sessions I also often thought about a kind of manic defence against the severe depression of the previous period. In this phase I had the impression that Sina was increasingly regularly using me as a calming influence. From time to time she would withdraw to the sofa where I was sitting and watch what happened from there or busy herself with her own things. In these situations it almost seemed as if she was appropriating something of my position as observer and as if she could use my function for her own attempts to understand something. And she seemed to manage to represent much of what was so strenuous for her symbolically and to process it. Thus at the beginning of one session she played out falling out / being thrown out by emptying a box of crayons in front of my eyes. She then left them lying on the floor and took no further notice of them. In this session, which was very noisy and chaotic, so that my head started to spin more and more, I had a strong feeling that I must not look away from Sina, but must stay where I was sitting

and remain as calm as I could. And Sina, who had kept looking towards me the whole time, finally seemed to return to what she had played out at the beginning.

> "Towards the end of the session Sina comes with a small plastic toy - with a round surface and an oblong piece that belongs on the top of it - and climbs agilely on to the sofa. For a few quiet moments she is occupied with the toy. She shows it to me, puts it together, and then takes it apart again. Then she looks at me, opens her mouth wide and pushes the oblong piece deep into her mouth, staring at me as she does so. When she spits it out again she laughs. Then she puts the two pieces back together again, after which she 'bites' the round piece off again. Again she looks at me with wide eyes, her mouth open and the round piece sticking out of it." (58th session, Sina: 1 year 6 months old).

While Sina was playing I was thinking about coming together and coming apart, and also about what *fitted into each other* there. I thought of Sina's mother and father and wondered whether Sina's strong interest and curious exploration of this two-piece object was a an expression of how she was inwardly grappling with her parents as a couple.

It seemed to fit in with my impression that she was portraying things symbolically that Sina's linguistic abilities were developing from week to week. Moreover, she had discovered her first transitional object, a cushion with a green plush cover. A second one - made of red velvet - soon followed. This became particularly evident in the sessions after the family returned from a two-and-a-half week holiday in Greece in the autumn.

> "Ms K. sits down on the sofa again and now Kimon goes to her and cuddles up to her. Sina looks for a moment and then runs into the hallway, right up to the front door of the apartment. She rummages around there and a jacket falls on the floor. She has pulled out a cushion that is familiar to me from earlier sessions and whose apparently enormous significance for Sina I noticed for the first time a few weeks ago. She comes back with the cushion, puts it on the sofa next to the red velvet cushion and climbs up on to the sofa herself. She cuddles up to the two cushions, while Kimon gets up and disappears into his room. Ms K. comments: 'These cushions.' She says she made sure to buy a second one in case one of them got lost, but it was dreadful, now they always had to take both of them with them. They couldn't do anything without the cushions." (62nd session, Sina: 1 year 8 months).

For Winnicott (1971/1953) the "discovery" or "creation" of a transitional object is always also a sign that a child is developing well, that it has managed to cope with a certain degree of separation.

Sina's relationship to her big brother also became increasingly important in the last few months of my observation. They were able to relate to each other in a new way and Kimon's room - when she was permitted to enter it - became the place of being big. Each time she left her cushions and pacifier outside on a little bench in front of the door. Sometimes, when Kimon was watching television or doing his homework with his mother, Sina would stay alone in the room. I would then, from the hallway, observe her sitting at the children's desk, quite absorbed, her legs dangling, obviously feeling fine there on her own. While things were getting more and more difficult with Kimon, his mother's worries increased and I was really irritated in many sessions and got headaches from the over-excited noise, Sina seemed

to be able to use my presence for herself to relieve the strain of the hecticness that was too much for her, too.

> "Kimon scuttles around, sometimes beleaguering me. I notice that I am very distracted and experiencing the whole situation as extremely strenuous [...]. Sina now comes running to the sofa. She looks at me and then her gaze falls on her green cushion that is lying there. She points to it, 'There!', looks at me again, and then walks past my legs to it. She reaches for it and pulls it towards her, strokes her hand across the soft fabric several times and lays her head down on it briefly. Then she sees her pacifier at the end of the sofa, which she goes to get. She crawls on to the sofa, sits down on it, gripping her cushion under her arm, and puts her pacifier in her mouth." (69th session, Sina: 1 year 10 months old.)

I was impressed by how accurately Sina seemed to have understood what was special about my position. She maintained contact by looking - i.e. distance - and only rarely failed to keep a certain [physical] distance. When that happened it was very noticeable - and probably usually had to do with a feeling of aloneness that made it impossible for Sina to tolerate having so little concrete contact with me. In one session which her mother spent almost completely in the bathroom and Kimon paid hardly any attention to her, this became particularly evident.

> "Sina fetches a toy mobile phone from her basket and crawls on to the sofa with it. She sits down close to me and plays phoning. She holds the phone out towards me, too, first cautiously, and then, when I only smile at her, she holds it right close to my ear. When I do not talk into it, she takes it away again and holds it to her own ear. Then she begins to threaten me with the phone, holds it up high and then acts as if she wants to hit me with it. In her gaze there is a mixture of curiosity, anger and superiority. I have the feeling she wants to test what she can do with me, after I have failed to respond to her invitation to play. She laughs at how I involuntarily screw up my eyes. She gets more and more vigorous, until she finally really strikes out and his me lightly on the shoulder with the phone. I say, 'No, don't hit [me]' She looks at me triumphantly and continues for a bit, but then stops really hitting me.." (65th session, Sina: 1 year 9 months old).

Perhaps here Sina was - in a very playful way - putting some of her aggression towards her mother, who was being withholding in this situation, - into me, i.e. displacing it.

As the time for me to say goodbye drew closer, old issues re-emerged: I was forgotten, Sina was sick, and her mother's worries about Kimon and his development - which reminded me of the very first interview with her before Sina was born - were so much in the foreground that we also had to keep actively coming back to focus on Sina in our supervision group. Beside her brother she had become the "easy" child and all her mother's worries about *her* development seem to have evaporated. I also perceived her as being very stable; overall she was doing well in these last few months before her second birthday. Even when her mother was completely wrapped up in Kimon and his homework, Sina was able to occupy herself on her own or try to be in contact with me.

> Ms K. wants to help Kimon learn [something] for school [...]. Sina seems to know very well that her mother and Kimon are now busy. She stays at her table for a moment and

then comes to the sofa, crawls up on to it and sits down beside me. She appears to be completely calm, looks at me, then reaches for her book, shows me something, but is somehow focused on herself. She says 'Kimo' several times while Kimon is arguing with their mother. At some point she gets down from the sofa and walks round the room a little. Although she still seems quite calm I have the impression she does not really know what to do with herself. She keeps looking at me and I notice that I am careful not to allow my gaze to falter. She walks round the dining table and disappears briefly from view, and then I see her face between the chairs again. Her gaze lands on me from this "hidden" position, it seems more by chance [than intentionally]. Almost a little surprised, she keeps her eyes on me, she looks pleased that I am looking at her. She laughs and the two of us remain absorbed in this contact [with each other]: I hear hardly anything from Kimon and Ms K. Sina comes round the table and slowly draws closer to the sofa. She seems pleased when we look at each other. Then she laughs out loud." (71st session, Sina: 1 year 11 months old).

Saying goodbye

In the last few weeks before Sina's second birthday Ms K. pays little attention to the subject of saying goodbye. Although I keep telling her how many sessions are left she seems to be ignoring [the fact that] we will actually be parting. At my request we arrange to bring the last session forward two days. The previous week I had discovered that Sina's birthday party with the whole family was to take place on the Saturday and although Ms K. would have liked to have me there, I insisted on our making another appointment. I had a strong feeling that our leave-taking could otherwise be completely ignored and that it would not be accorded sufficient space. The last session therefore took place on a Thursday afternoon, on the day after Sina's second birthday. When I read through my write-up I had the strong impression that something was being acted out. Kimon had been given a new canary, which kept escaping from its cage and flying around the apartment so that my head was reeling and I found it very difficult to concentrate on Sina. It seemed as if the calm that I had hoped to achieve by changing the appointment had to be avoided at all costs. Perhaps there would otherwise have been too strong an awareness that we were about to say goodbye. In a way the bird that was whirring through the apartment as if it had been flushed out could be understood as an acting out of what was "not held" and had kept re-emerging in the course of my time with the family. It was Sina herself who somehow managed to create space to say goodbye to me after all. She was not interested in the bird, but focused on things that gradually come to an end. First it was the chocolate beetle that I had brought with me and off which she kept biting only a little piece at a time and then laying aside again, hesitating briefly and then biting another piece off. She later repeated that with a little yoghurt drink which she even deliberately placed on the table after each gulp in such a way that she had to make an effort to pick it up again. When a box containing popcorn was finally empty, she cried despairingly, 'All gone!', as if she had realised that it would come to an end sometime. A scene in which she cut things up with a pair of scissors made a particularly strong impression on me.

"She deftly reaches for the scissors, sits down with them and the paper and starts to cut. She holds the paper in her left hand and cuts into the edge of it with her right hand. The further she gets from the holding hand the more difficult it gets, the scissors then have no purchase. Sina seems to understand that and then cuts closer to her fingers. She cuts

the side of the paper twice, then turns the page and continues cutting the next side. She goes on until she has cut into each side of the paper. She lays the piece of paper down and picks up the next one. She appears to be concentrating very hard, as if she really has a task [to complete]. I have the impression that she has to make exactly two cuts in each side of the paper and am also concentrating to see whether that is true. When she once makes only one cut and then turns the paper again I am really disappointed." (75th session, Sina: 2 years old).

Whether it corresponds to what Sina was experiencing or not, I had a strong feeling that in these two years we had become a couple that was now parting. In our supervision we talked about the cutting as a gesture of separation which - as regards the observation - was linked to Sina's second birthday. I later heard from her mother that she had told Sina before I arrived that I was coming for the last time today. And Sina said my name for the first time that day. At the end of the session Ms K. was able to create a calm farewell situation. She called both children to come and join us and we sat together on the sofa for a few minutes. As we looked back together over the time it became clear how confident Sina's mother had become about her development - and it was in fact as if we were thanking each other. And right at the end, when all of them accompanied me to the door, Ms K. was able to tell me a little of what she had perhaps kept too much to herself: if she could do it all again, she would perhaps do it differently. She would perhaps not simply let me in and then let me go again. Here something of her own neediness showed through again and a strong wish to have something of me herself. But Ms K. was also conveying to me an important realisation, namely that she could do more for herself. And thus what she said did not seem demanding, and I was able to leave with a good feeling.
Sina herself had apparently paid enough attention to our parting: as I was leaving and said goodbye to her, she simply waved goodbye and went back into Kimon's room.

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