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**Behind the Picture: Theatricality
and Gruppe 38's Production of *I've Got Everything***

A Thesis Presented

by

Amy Elizabeth Jensen

to

The Graduate School

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Abstract of the Thesis

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Through the lens of theatricality, this thesis examines the development of the production *I've Got Everything* by Gruppe 38, a professional Danish theatre company performing for children and adults. The company is introduced in the context of contemporary Danish theatre for young audiences, Josette Feral's 2002 definition of theatricality, and their own principles of theatricality. In application to this production, on the macro- and micro-level, theatricality is both a practical as well as a powerful conceptual tool in generating and evaluating devised work.

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Behind the Picture:

Theatricality and Gruppe 38's Production of *I've Got Everything*

For many years, Bodil Alling's grandfather had been a film projectionist in a small cinema in Randers, Denmark, and in his old age he bought a cheap camera, to try to take his own pictures. When he went on a bus trip with other senior citizens, he took his camera with him. But when he came back from the trip with a single photograph, no one understood. He had taken a photograph of a garbage can and a parking lot. When asked to explain, Alling relates that he said, "Oh, no, no, no, that is not the picture, the picture is behind. Because there was this wonderful place where we had *lavkage*, [cake] with whipping cream, and it was so wonderful, and it was a beautiful place." He had left his camera on the bus in order to keep it safe. Alling explained that "all of his pictures were like that. 'What is this supposed to be?' 'Oh, you see it was behind....'" (May). The picture could not fully capture or communicate his experience to an audience. It not only required that he tell his story, but that his audience imagines it. Alling, the Artistic Director and a performer at Gruppe 38, told this story by way of introducing their approach to their new performance *Jeg Har Alt/I've Got Everything*. Gruppe 38, located in Aarhus, Denmark, is a company of professional theatre artists who perform for children and adults. Alling is also a writer, and *I've Got Everything* started out as a collection of her seventeen poems for a children's book. Loosely connected by a theme rather than a story, each poem is about something the speaker owns or claims to own—including her father, mother, goat, dog, chicken, uncle, aunt, goose, and robin.

I have a robin so handsome and fine—
How wondrous to have a robin that's mine.

He is up and away, never comes when I call
 Some might say I don't have him at all (Alling, *Everything* [14])

Underneath the poems' wordplay and humor, there is a sense that the speaker also cannot capture or own these things. They have their own will, and they are also impermanent, which is most clear in the final poem, in which her cat dies suddenly and the speaker says farewell to it.

When they began working on the production of *I've Got Everything*, Gruppe 38 started with these poems and the idea of melding theatre performance with film through their *biografteater*, or a picture palace theatre. They did not have a central story line in which a single character faces a conflict that builds, reaches a climax, and resolves. They did not have a script. Although the devising process is foreign to many U.S. companies, many Europe companies are known for their devised work, which is created according to each company's interests, ideas, and aesthetic.¹ As described in "A Manifesto of Sorts," Gruppe 38 "consciously chooses not to use the language, the form, or the solution that seem most obvious in order to make it necessary to examine and re-examine possibilities which we weren't able to reach beforehand. We trip ourselves up, so to speak, during the entire process" ("Manifesto"; see appendix A). In conducting this examination and reexamination throughout the devising process, Gruppe 38 draws upon not only principles of dramatic construction, but principles of theatricality as they generate, evaluate, and structure material. Identifying their relationship to theatricality enables greater understanding of their process, as well as their aesthetic.

¹ See Merete Elnan's article on Suzanne Osten's work in Sweden, "Staging the Impossible for Young Audiences: Preliminary Findings in a Research Project" *Youth Theatre Journal*. 23.1 (2009): 39 – 47 and *Dutch Theatre for Children: Three contemporary plays*. Trans and ed. Manon van de Water, Charlottesville: New Plays, Inc., 2008.

Their resulting productions have gained national and international attention. Four of their productions have been nominated for the Reumert award, the national Danish children's theatre prize, and they have won twice.² The Reumert jury described Gruppe 38 as

an exceptional children's theatre in Denmark, yes, perhaps in the whole world. In performance after performance they show a very special talent for telling fairytales and stories for children as well as adults. Poetic and straight forward, always subtle, never sentimental, and that every time we know ourselves, the fairytale, and the secrets and inner world of the theatre a little better. (Reumert)

Gruppe 38 is also consistently sought after to perform in international festivals around the world, including in Scotland, Ireland, Germany, Norway, Croatia, Japan, South Korea, Canada, and the United States.

I first saw Gruppe 38 in 2007 as part of the Danish Children's Theatre Festival at the New Victory Theatre in New York City. Gruppe 38 performed their Reumert-winning production *You Must Be an Angel, Hans Christian*, in which two waiters serve a birthday party for Hans Christian Andersen. Set around a long table in which characters from Andersen's fairytales are in attendance but invisible to the eye, the audience watched and followed the waiters from one place setting to another. A clever and compelling story about life, death, and storytelling unfolded--without a dominant narrative, central conflict, or protagonist.³ When the performance ended, I had a difficult time leaving. It had affected and engaged me more than most adult theatre I had experienced. In this and other shows in the festival, theatricality transformed the ordinary into the extraordinary,

² Gruppe 38 received the Reumert award for *The Little Matchgirl* and *You Must Be an Angel, Hans Christian*.

³ A promotional film of the performance, listed in the references, is available at <<http://www.eggertproduction.dk/EggertProduction.dk/Teaterfilm/Sider/HCA.html>>.

dramatic conflict rarely seemed to be the central thrust of the piece, and the dramaturgy followed something other than a cause-and-effect logic. As a theatre artist, I wanted to understand why and how this occurred in the development process, so I applied for a Fulbright grant to study the dramaturgy and theatricality of Danish children's theatre. Receiving the award allowed me to observe multiple companies and artists in the developmental stages of their productions,⁴ interview several theatre artists, and watch more than ninety Danish children's theatre productions, including Gruppe 38's productions of *Upside Down Town*, *The Trouser Button*, *The Little Matchgirl*, *A Sonatina*, *Hansel and Gretel*, and a restaging of *The Holy Night*. I was also able to observe the entire development process of their 2010 premiere, *I've Got Everything*.⁵

The premise of the production *I've Got Everything* is straightforward: two travelling technicians/performers—Alling and company member, actor, and composer Søren Søndberg—set up their *biografteater* and show films to the audience. *Biografteater* is a melding of the Danish words for film or cinema and theatre. Historically, it evokes the early days of cinema⁶ and is best translated into the context of the picture palace theatre. Their *biografteater* is a four-sided cart on wheels, shaped like an old, sloped movie projector, and is roughly three feet wide, five feet long, and five feet high (see appendix B, Figure 1). On one side of the cart there is a large screen. The rest of

⁴ In addition to Gruppe 38, I visited with companies including Corona la Balance, Teater Refleksion, Carte Blanche, Graense-Loes, and director Catherine Poher.

⁵ I was credited as a “consultant” in the production. I was primarily an observer, but I also contributed dramaturgical feedback.

⁶ Audiences today in Denmark go to the *biograf*, not the *biografteater*. Initially Søndberg was concerned that the term *biografteater* would establish rigid expectations and create limits on how they told their stories, or where a film could be projected. However, because it is not used frequently and is less clearly defined in contemporary usage, the word had a degree of flexibility of interpretation.

the cart is packed with objects that relate to both film and the performers, as if their lives were also stuffed into the cart: old films, lights, and projectors are next to a teddy bear, teacups, and a birdhouse (see Figures 2-3). The films played from the biografeater correspond to nine of the fifteen poems Alling recites, in which she describes what she owns: a robin that is not kept in a cage; her father who is an inventor; her hen who gets grumpy when laying eggs; her long-haired goat; her old dog; her old Aunt Viola; her goose, who is afraid of being eaten; candy; her tall Uncle Zimmerman who is growing so high he will soon get to heaven; her mother; her cat; and her seven singing stars. Each poem is, essentially, a discrete scene in which the poem is surrounded by a larger story which connects to but is not directly referenced in the poem. For example, in the father's poem, he is described as "an inventor specialist" at the end of a longer story in which Alling has already described many of his "inventions," including a television in which it is snowing year-round. The poem ends with her father, who is hard of hearing, putting on his hat and leaving. At this point, Alling shows the audience her father's invention—a television screen playing static "snow." Through the static, spectators can begin to hear and to see skis on this "snow." Alling's narration does not mention these images. There are two films which relate to other poems: a wool spinnery connects to the story of the goat, and two chicks watch a film while the grumpy hen is away. Some films are projected on the central screen, start with leader film, are accompanied by the sound of film running through a projector, and clearly have occurred in the past. Others, however, are presented on ad-hoc screens on different sides of the cart, and are presented as occurring in real time. There are additional films which are solely landscapes that are projected in a window and do not directly relate to the action or text of the play.

Søndberg is the film projectionist; he sets up and runs all of the films. Alling is the presenter. The two frequently tease and trick each other, but clearly they are friends. Søndberg is never referred to in the verses, but by the end of the performance it is Alling's friendship with Søndberg that she most values. Their stories, action, and dialogue hold together the diverse scenes, since transitions are typically instigated by a sound or a smell Alling or Søndberg discover which directly moves the play into the next scene. The transitions frequently require turning the cart or redirecting attention to a different object within the cart.

Although there is playful tension between Alling and Søndberg, the drama and conflict within the piece revolve around the film of Alling's cat. Early on and then mid-way into the production, Alling says that the film with her cat is their best and they are saving it for last. When they come to the end, however, conflict builds as Søndberg, reluctant to play the film, reveals that the cat died years ago and that Alling cries when she watches the film. Alling persists; she still likes to watch it. The greatest moment of tension and the *peripeteia* or reversal comes when the tin is opened and Alling finds the film has been destroyed—mice, running inside the biografteater, have chewed it to pieces. She says

I've got everything and though I know
that all I have can suddenly go
it's still very hard to realize that
that also goes for my beloved cat

The conclusion of the piece follows not long after. Alling recites her final poem:

I've got everything I can think about
and more – I'd rather do without
Because with more, there is no doubt
I'd have too much to think about (Alling, *Everything* TS 32)

Then the film, which has been playing the Big Dipper on a screen raised above the heads of the performers, shows the words “*La Fin*” (The End). The lights go down on the performers, the screen becomes blank, and the audience is left with the sound of a movie projector turning off and slowly winding down.

Although many of the ideas for the show were present in the first days of research and experimentation in March 2009, the show underwent significant changes up until its premiere in February 2010—and afterward. In tracking these changes, the decisions being made, and the language and principles behind them, it became clear that the company shares more than an aesthetic; they draw upon theatrical principles that introduce a gap, a disjunction, a tension between what is and what is not represented, what is real and what is fiction. This enables them to create productions which, like Alling’s grandfather’s photograph, engage audiences in seeing beyond what they literally see, and push both artists and audiences to “imagine things which we didn’t imagine we could imagine” (Gruppe 38, “Manifesto”; see appendix A). In setting forward these principles of theatricality, I will first contextualize Gruppe 38’s work within contemporary Danish theatre for young audiences. I will then introduce Josette Feral’s 2002 definition of theatricality and principles of theatricality Gruppe 38 employs. I will then conclude by looking at how these principles shaped the production *I’ve Got Everything*.

1. Aesthetics and Dramaturgy in Danish Theatre for Young Audiences

Modern Danish theatre for young audiences emerged in the 1960s and 1970s with artists and companies who broke from traditional forms of theatre. As was true in many

Western countries, Denmark's anti-authoritarian Alternative Theatre Movement challenged conservative political and aesthetic conceptions of theatre. Several artists and companies became interested in performing for society's largest politically disenfranchised population: youth. Previously, young audiences had been taken to large proscenium theatres to watch productions of stories and fairytales. These "new crusaders"—pedagogues or youth instructors, as well as trained and untrained artists—rejected this as a bourgeois exercise to cultivate future adult theatre-goers. They believed that theatre for young audiences could be "a real tool for understanding the conditions that determine the individual's life and generating dialogue on these matters" (Jensen, "Quality" 61). Companies addressed contemporary political, social, and sometimes sexual issues.⁷ They valued performing in locations "where [children] spent their day-to-day lives and felt secure" (Schwoon 5) such as school gymnasiums, classrooms, and libraries. They sought to create intimate performances, keeping actors in close proximity to the audience, and frequently staging performances in the round or among audience members. The distance between performers and audience members was also challenged by companies that invited audience participation, either during the show or in post-show discussions, "creating a people's-own-theatre and a tool for deeper understanding" (Reiche 11).⁸

⁷ See also Reiche, 11. Productions by the Copenhagen-based company *Banden*, which can translate to either "the gang" or "profanity," were controversial for their criticism of school governance (*Skolen/The School*) and the military industrial complex (*Cirkus Milli*).

⁸ To situate Denmark in the European context of work being done in theatre for young audiences productions, Netherlands offers a particularly useful comparison. See van de Water 1.

Companies performing theatre for young audiences frequently devised their own productions. Initially the entire company was involved in the development and decision-making of a new play. Without the need to pay royalties or commission a playwright, devising was less of a financial strain on shoestring budgets. Devising also allowed members of the company to pursue their interests with a greater range of experimentation than if they had they begun with a script or even fixed expectations about how theatre had to be created. This resulted in productions that clearly followed and furthered the company's vision and aesthetic. Productions were kept as part of a company's repertoire for several years. Over time, artists developed specializations, particularly in directing and playwriting. Even then, companies frequently used playwrights or directors primarily to shape and craft the ideas and improvisations generated by the company.

As the field gained recognition and government funding, the increasing number of companies and devised productions provoked artists and administrators to address the question of production quality. As opposed to the extremely selective adult theatre scene, theatre for young audiences was considered easier to break into, which resulted in varying levels of expertise across companies and productions. In the late 1970s, the children's theatre union, *BørneTeaterSammenSlutningen* (The Children's Theatre Federation or BTS) created an "obligatory seminar" during their annual children's theatre festival, ^{which} involves practically every Danish company performing for young audiences.⁹ Each company was grouped with two to three other companies, and the

⁹ Due to the incredible number of companies participating in the festival, these seminars are no longer considered feasible and have been discontinued. The solidarity that BTS established has also shifted, as the experience level and aesthetics of companies has become even wider over the years. Artists are more inclined to seek the honest feedback of particular colleagues who know their work, their motivations, and aesthetic.

seminar consisted of artists critiquing each other's production. As described in Cartsten Jensen's "The Struggle for Quality: On Aesthetics in Children's and Young People's Theatre," the seminar was geared to move artists beyond polite responses and into substantial criticism. They had to "thoroughly analyse [sic] each other's performances in all aspects: content, intentions, style of acting, set-design, staging, audience" (64). Although the goal was to improve productions, at times the criticism, which could be "quite vehement and serious," prompted theatres to discontinue a production (64). These seminars established a process of peer evaluation, critical rigor and candor in assessment, as well as a push to formalize "a common set of 'rules' for the analyses, some criteria to guide the discussions and to prevent bad feelings" (64). The result was the "Criteria for Quality Assessment," a list of aesthetic principles and questions designed to assess the quality of every production. The assessment contained seven categories: Artistic Objectives; The Text; Solutions in the Staging; The Actor's Work; Relationship with the Audience; Relation between the Intentions and the Abilities of the Company; and Ethics. Each category consisted of several questions that revolved around the structure and dramaturgy¹⁰ of the piece as a whole: "Is the text well composed in regard to structure—according to the dramaturgy it has set up? Is the text 'convincing' within its own universe?" Even "productions with little or no text" were encouraged to analyze their "dramatic development" (67). Subsequently, Danish theatre for young audiences developed into a culture with widespread interest in the study of aesthetics and dramaturgy. Artists can take workshops on dramaturgy, as Alling and Søndberg have

¹⁰ Unlike traditions such as the French, in which dramaturgy is translated as playwriting, in Danish, *dramaturgie* is dramaturgy. In definition, theory, and practice, it follows the German tradition that has similarly influenced its usage in the United States.

done, through several organizations, such as BTS and the Odsherred Theatre School, or with freelance dramaturgs such as Jane Rasch.

The emphasis on aesthetic and foundational elements such as dramaturgy is crucial to discussing Danish theatre for young audiences because of the wide range of new work. With over one hundred companies performing theatre for young audiences, there is not one dominant style or aesthetic, no singular form or function in Danish children's theatre.¹¹ Productions range from work for the very young (under three) to mature audiences fourteen and up.¹² Acting styles may be based in psychology, but several artists draw upon a broader, physical, more presentational style, due primarily to their work in clowning and dance. Some companies have continued to portray contemporary and controversial social issues, often referred to as debate-theatre.¹³ Since the 1990s many companies grew tired of creating "pedagogical" theatre and, despite the assumption that theatre should strive to tell the truth to children, began again to perform fairytales. Several companies have created productions in combination with other performing art forms, fusing theatre with live music, dance, puppetry, opera, multimedia, visual art, or installation art. Additionally, whether used on a per-show basis or as a defining element of a company, film and multimedia have particularly been considered

¹¹ The 2008-09 publication of *Den Rode Brochure*, the annual BTS publication, lists 128 companies as performing a piece designated as being theatre for young audiences productions (Copenhagen: Teatercentrum i Danmark, 2008). At the 2009 Children's Theatre Festival, I distributed a survey to international festival guests to learn more about their thoughts on Danish children's theatre. Several cited the diversity and range of work as their main reason for attending the festival.

¹² Danish theatre artists determine which age ranges are appropriate for each production dependent upon on audience members' cognitive and emotional maturity, rather than a rating system based on a certain amount and type of inappropriate material.

¹³ Debate-theatre does not follow a debate structure, but is a piece of theatre that addresses a serious social theme. It may include a conversation with the audience, often following the piece.

necessary in being able “to communicate meaning and significance to the media-accustomed children and young people of later modernity” (Junker 16-17).

Across the range of work being created, there are shared principles and practices, particularly those which support creating an intimate theatrical experience. By and large, Danish companies rarely perform for audiences over two hundred people, preferring the intimacy they can create in groups of sixty or fewer. No matter the age of audience, companies are expected to apply the “eye-level” or *øjne højt* principle in which they do not look down on children but look with them. Applying this principle should lead performers to respect the intelligence and sensibilities of the audience, as well as to engage with them. As opposed to techniques developed to directly incorporate young audiences within the performance, engagement in Danish theatre for young audiences frequently involves incorporating elements of epic theatre. As described by scholars Hans-Thies Lehmann and Patrice Pavis, epic theatre elements, particularly narration, have been employed in drama to break the illusion of an enclosed, fictional world.¹⁴ In doing so, these elements draw attention to the production’s construction, and can also establish a direct connection with the audience. Most productions break the fourth-wall, often well before the show begins. Performers frequently meet the audience at the door, help them to their seats, and welcome them. Performers frequently move from narration to dramatization and back again, and portray characters of differing ages and genders. In the course of *Hansel and Gretel*, Alling begins as an outside narrator, then dramatizes the mother, quickly returns as a narrator who can later morph from Hansel into the witch with changes only in physicality, vocal quality and simple lighting.

¹⁴ See Patrice Pavis 129 on “Epic Treatment of Drama” and Lehmann 29-31 on “epicization.”

Over the years, Gruppe 38's work has become increasingly engaged in incorporating and exploring theatricality. When it began in 1972, and even when Alling joined in 1981, Gruppe 38 followed the dominant trend in Danish theatre for young audiences and focused on real issues and ideological forces controlling children. Productions were told from the perspective of the child which, and as Alling relates, were recognizable in order that another child could feel that "there is someone else ... [who is going] through this." Alling, however, became dissatisfied with making theatre in this way. She felt that if everything within a production could be recognized, the production lacked "something that was more than that, something that was also very different from that" (Alling, May). At that point Alling did not know what to do, but she found inspiration while touring to Sweden in 1983. There she saw *Myth in Blue* and read *How Long is Eternity*, both of which felt like "another kind of theatre," in which representation of character and themes was not immediately recognizable (Alling, October). In *How Long is Eternity*, which was based on a play by Staffan Westerberg, four characters meet each other different critical moments of their lives. One actor portrays a woman in the moments before her death; another actor portrays a child moments before it is born. Alling felt this was the type of theatre that she wanted to create and perform, even though she did not know how to do so with the company's limited production resources. When she returned she asked the company if they were willing to try. Some ended up leaving Gruppe 38 to create Teater 83.¹⁵ But the rest of the company remained. In the following years, Gruppe 38 created theatre for both children and adults that exists in the tension

¹⁵ Teater 83 continues to perform, now performing primarily for audiences between one and a half to four years old.

between the everyday and representation, between reality and fiction, between the instinctive and the symbolic—in other words, a theatre based in theatricality.

2. Theatricality

Theatricality is generally defined as the way in which artists and audiences create and experience an event as theatre, as opposed to other literary genres, entertainment and performance art forms. Theatre has been considered synonymous with drama and dramatic practice. Nineteenth-century French neoclassicists and Gustav Freytag in Germany clearly defined drama's aesthetics and practices by rigorously following the unities of time, action, and space to ensure the illusion of a self-contained world. However, in the twentieth century, dramatists increasingly challenged drama and “what had been a clearly defined theatrical aesthetic ... [and] normative practice” (Feral, “Theatricality” 94). According to scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann in *Postdramatic Theatre*, pure drama had its own “semantics,” particularly with its progressive action and “the representation of a conflict in ‘dramatic collision.’” Drama was also defined by three “unquestioned constituents” which included “the textual form of a dialogue charged with suspense and pregnant with decisions; the subject whose reality can essentially be expressed in interpersonal speech; [and] the action that unfolds primarily in an absolute present” (48-49). Both drama's semantics and unquestioned constituents were, however, questioned in a systematic reexamination of drama that began with Anton Chekhov and Henrik Ibsen, was fueled by Antoin Artaud and Bertold Brecht, and was furthered by theatre and performance artists experimenting with representation and theatricality in the 1960s and 1970s. The written text began to be considered distinctly different from the

performance text, and lost its primacy among the elements of performance as the inclusion of movement, sound, and the visual arts made work more “*textural* (as opposed to *textual*)” (Callery 188). Written text could no longer “guarantee the theatricality of the stage” (Feral, “Theatricality” 94); instead the “complex inter- and cross-disciplinary dramaturgies in the twentieth century led to an emphasis on the live performance and the performance text” (Turner and Behrndt 30). Practitioners have increasingly looked to fields outside of theatre for innovation compositional principles to apply to their work, drawing from “pictorial or architectural composition” (Pavis 73), music or film.¹⁶

At the same time, the concept of theatricality was increasingly brought into question as other performing arts were influenced by and incorporated “the specificity of the theatrical act itself,” (Feral, “Theatricality” 94). Performances, particularly performance art, further challenged the codes by which theatricality was defined, by “abandoning the discipline of the fictional frame and blurring boundaries of art and life” (Govan 27). Attempts to redefine theatricality, however, led to greater frustration with both it and the exercise in general, and theorists began to consider it “something mythical, overly general, even idealistic and ethnocentrist” (Pavis 395) if not “misleading, misunderstood, or even obsolete” (Feral, “Foreword” 3).

However, theorists have not given up on theatricality. Josette Feral in particular has continued her exploration of the term, which she views as essential in order to “gradually discern the very nature of theatrical representation” (“Foreword” 10). In

¹⁶ See Bruce Barton, 113, in “Navigating Turbulence: The Dramaturg in Physical Theatre.” *Theatre Topics* 15:1 (2005): 103-19. Print. Anne Bogart and Tina Landow write that “Compositional principles from other disciplines to the theatre push the envelope of theatrical possibility and challenge ourselves to create new forms” (13 in *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2005. Print.)

Feral's 2002 foreword to a collection of essays dealing with theatricality, she concludes that theatricality is "the result of an act of recognition on the part of the spectator" (10). This is not a recognition that continues our ordinary perception by reinforcing a "unity between signs and their meaning." Instead, the creative act of theatre occurs by "replac[ing] uniformity with duality" through "point[ing] out that signs and objects, displaced from their habitual context, signify differently." Feral proposes a "series of cleavages," three specific areas that represent both a gap and its duality: 1) everyday space and representational space 2) reality and fiction and 3) the instinctive and the symbolic within the actor (11).

The gap between the everyday and representational space establishes theatricality as it creates two key separations for the spectator. The first occurs as spectators view the event as inhabiting a space separate from the everyday. The second occurs as spectators separate themselves from the everyday. Because of this, the spectator becomes aware that "in this space, signs signify differently" and that he or she is observing a "second structure"—fiction (11). The spectator is aware that what is fiction is also always already "inscribed" in reality. Although their actions and events refer to a fiction, the performers' bodies are real, as are many of their actions. Aware of this double-nature, the spectator, rather than being submerged in the fiction, engages in a process of "disjunction-unification" a "back and-forth movement that simultaneously opposes and unites two mutually exclusive yet superimposed worlds" (11). Finally, the spectator perceives a separation within the actor: the actor is both a subject to himself, which is instinctive, and the "fiction that he incarnates (or the action he performs)," which is symbolic. In being

able to see the actor as both “master of himself and subject to the other within him,” Feral believes this cleavage gives the spectator the greatest pleasure” (12).

Although organized into three parts, the cleavages work in combination. In Gruppe 38 productions, spectators are welcomed into representational spaces set apart by the presence of performers, scenery, lighting, and sound. The set of *You Must Be an Angel, Hans Christian* is an ingenious arrangement of evocative objects and images on a long table. However, what transforms it from being an installation to a banquet hall is the fiction that the performers create as waiters interact with the imaginary guests and the objects on the set. In Gruppe 38 productions, the cleavage of fiction and reality is often most developed through the tension in the performers’ instinctual and symbolic role. In *The Little Matchgirl*, each performer is identified by the ‘real’ role they play in creating the performance—light technician Kirkegaard¹⁷ has a script with an eye; sound technician Søndberg has a script with an ear; narrator Alling has a script with a pair of lips. As the story reaches closer to its climax, Alling asks if the little girl should light all of her matches. Kirkegaard agrees; Søndberg does not. Alling goes ahead and rips paper, which sounds like matches being lit. At this point in the story, the matchgirl joins her dead grandmother and flies to heaven. Gruppe 38 does not communicate this through narration. Instead, Kirkegaard turns his script to reveal an image of the little girl and her grandmother high above a church tower. Each successive page he turns zooms into the image, and it becomes larger and less discernable to the point that all that is left of the original image are traces and specks. Meanwhile, on the screen behind Alling is the faintest projection of wings. Gruppe 38 emphasizes the tension between reality and

¹⁷ This part was initially developed and performed by Kim Kirkeby.

fiction by drawing attention to how the fiction is being constructed, particularly through the tearing of the matches and the zoom. The performers' roles are both symbolic, with the eye, ear, and lips, and instinctive as they break away from their role of telling the story. Standing in front of the screen, Alling's symbolic wings are in tension to her immediate presence as a performer. In this way, the cleavages combine to create a complex theatrical moment.

The theatricality brought about through the disjunction-unification process of the cleavages is arguably a "technique of the arts" as conceived of by Viktor Shklovsky which seeks to make "objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception" (qtd in Pavis 18). With these cleavages, Feral clearly sets forward theatricality not as a concept tied to past aesthetics and practices, nor something mythical, but as a concept that can respond more broadly and yet concretely to contemporary performance and practice. The cleavages can apply to a semiotic analysis of theatre and issues of representation and the use of sign systems, as well as to a phenomenological analysis, with the cleavages' emphasis on the role of the spectator's perception of the performance.

The cleavages can also be found in principles of contemporary practice, particularly in devised work. When a company, like Gruppe 38, creates devised work, decisions are constantly being made. There is an understanding and expectation that artists bring their best skills and ideas into the rehearsal room, and that the company as a whole will test and evaluate these ideas, even if they are working with a director, such as Hans Rønne or Catherine Poher, whose role is to make final decisions. Alling says that "you are never allowed to have an idea that has to be kept because you have to be willing

to take it to the next step and never be satisfied with the idea” (October). Even an idea that has been chosen will be examined to see if it could be improved in some way. For Gruppe 38, the devising process never entirely ends; even after a play premieres, Alling expects for it to change as performers continue to craft their relationship with each other and the audience, and refine the way in which scenes are executed. Although *The Little Matchgirl* premiered in 2003, in 2009 the way in which the image of the matchgirl’s face was revealed in the final moments of the show was changed.

Often decisions in the devising process, particularly in generating new material, are shaped by or draw directly on the logic of the narrative; however, many do not. Artists often refer to decisions as coming from their intuition and instinct, rather than a reason or concept. However, particularly among artists who frequently work together, groups tend to generate shared vocabularies and principles that allow them to identify and evaluate choices they are making in their work. Some of these principles may be formalized to the point of being defined; others may be generally accepted but not codified. This process is often based on what artists learn in rehearsals and performances, rather than a conscious application of theory. Key principles for Gruppe 38 include: non-illustration, non-acting, setting up and breaking conventions, deviations, alternate logic, and distillation. These principles may be found in various practices and aesthetics, but, fundamentally, they relate to theatricality.

Non-illustration

Non-illustration is a strategy to maintain a gap between the various signifiers on stage, rather than use them to create duplicate, literal, or illustrative representations.¹⁸ In maintaining this gap, the audience must draw inferences from these signifiers—objects, images, sounds actions, or spoken words—and apply their reasoning and imagination to create one or more connections between the signifiers. If an audience is faced with a single, unified representation which has its own, clear meaning, there is little for them to do. Instead, the purpose of the representation, is, as Viktor Shklovsky wrote of the image, to “create a special perception of the object—it creates a ‘vision’ of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it” (qtd in Pavis 18). For example, Alling spoke of a recent production at the Aarhus Theatre, a major theatre in Denmark, which featured a large, magical bird that carried the protagonist. When the bird first came on stage, the result was “spectacular. Soon, however, it became “dead” and ridiculous rather than magical because audiences could see how it was constructed. The bird lost any sense of liveness, and simply became another prop on stage. Alling suggested that

You don’t have to create a real bird onstage, but the idea of a bird. You must be creative in another way. How do you make a magic bird? No one has ever seen one, so you can feel free to invent – but you have to invent! And if you cannot, then you must [either] stick to sounds, or minimize the bird, so it does not destroy the picture in the audience’s heads, [but instead] makes new pictures. With the sound of bird and perhaps a feather and people realize it is a bird” (October; August).

Here the feather and sound suggest a bird; both signifiers remain representational rather than illustrative. Although the images, objects, actions, and lines spoken on stage are not

¹⁸ This is not to be confused with something being descriptive. When Anne Bogart and Tina Landau present their “Introduction to Composition,” they offer two options in staging a piece: descriptive (“essentially repeats the external physical and vocal reality of the event being described” or “exactly what happened literally”) or expressive (“what it felt like”) (146). Although “descriptive” theatre can be an illustration, it is tied, more or less, to realism. The principle of non-illustration, however, can be applied to other styles.

duplicates, Gruppe 38 still wants them to correspond, rather than be contradictory; i.e. the feather and sound are both elements that an audience can still associate with a bird.

In context of Feral's definition of theatricality, non-illustration is fundamental to all three cleavages, since, in order for the "disjunction-unification" process to occur, signifiers cannot already be unified. As Alling relates, non-illustration is "a way of thinking. It's how to surprise all the time, so the story always turns away from what you expect and becomes something very different." Non-illustration is key to Gruppe 38's devising process because in order to get "two or three steps further than the idea, and then you have the rest of it, or something that is not illustrative." To tell a piece that goes beyond the initial, illustrative idea, however, takes time and flexibility, as the group continually seeks to move each story "one step more" (May).

Non-acting

Although various acting styles stress naturalistic responses and believable psychology, through their non-acting Alling and Søndberg attempt to appear to be not acting at all, to be non-presentational and lack self-awareness, and to blur the line between what is symbolic and instinctive. Neither have had formal acting training. They learned their craft through years of performing and observation, and they came to dislike acting that draws attention to itself. Søndberg, who trained as a musician, is more interested in "just being myself. ... I have my limits of what I can do as an actor, so to find this place where you can kind of be yourself and at the same time be a figure, or, have a part of the show, that's a big thing, I think" (Søndberg).

This style and practice of acting engages in Feral's third cleavage. The two, who perform together in most of their productions, are clearly performers. From the moment they welcome the spectators into the theatre to the short bow at the end when they thank the audience for coming, they do not keep any pretense of a fourth wall. They rarely discuss their roles in terms of character, and usually perform as Bodil and Søren. Alling has been described as having "an aura and a scenic presence that, at the same time, is underplayed and completely fills the room, and [has] an authority and sweetness which completely takes one by surprise" (Lyding). With this authority and through the stories she tells and enacts, she leads the action and narration of the performance. Søndberg generally plays the straight man. Sometimes their relationship is oppositional, particularly as Søndberg frequently resists Alling in telling the story (*The Little Matchgirl*; *A Sonatina*). Sometimes it is supportive and almost familial; during *Hansel and Gretel*, as the wolves howl, Søndberg puts his head on Alling's leg and she reassures him that everything will be all right. As they tease, disagree, trick, or assure each other, audiences are aware that Alling and Søndberg are acting out parts. Audiences may be less sure, however, as to exactly how much of what they are doing is instinctive and how much is scripted. Alling likes to maintain this tension. When performing in schools, she is careful not to be seen by the audience after a performance. Although the children are old enough to know Alling is acting, she likes to maintain the possibility that the fiction could at least feel real.

Setting up and breaking conventions

As artists set up conventions and rules, they make agreements with the audience

that establish the representational meaning of objects and actions, how they will function and be read. However, just as important as establishing the convention is knowing if and when it can be broken, and why it should be broken. In order to begin the party in *You Must Be an Angel Hans Christian*, Eggert pours a drink for Cupid, and a bow bends and releases. An arrow is heard soaring in the air. Alling and Eggert pull apart a tray of glasses so the arrow can continued down the long table to Hans Christian Andersen's chair, where there is a bulls-eye located at height of his heart. With the sound of an arrow hitting its mark, the bulls-eye rocks back with the supposed impact. A sigh is heard, and then writing begins appears on Andersen's plate, and then the sound of people at a party is heard. While the audience may not understand all of the references to the Andersen stories that went into creating this opening, this clearly is the ritual that begins the meal. Later in the play, a farm woman projected on an egg that is held on a scale demands more animals, which a waiter puts on the other side of the scale. As she demands more and more, the scale tips, and when she falls the entire table erupts in commotion and then becomes completely silent. Everything stops. Alling asks Eggert if they can restart the party. He then pours the drink, the ritual repeats itself, and the party resumes. This break sets up that some stories end badly—which will happen shortly, particularly for the little mermaid and the little matchgirl. It also emphasizes that Andersen's writing puts everything into motion, and while the stories may have appeared to already have been written, breaking that rule clearly suggests that the stories occur as they are enacted or told.

Breaking conventions can also be meta-theatrical, drawing attention to the creation of the fiction the performers are creating. The performances of Alling,

Kierkegaard and Søndberg frame the telling of *The Little Matchgirl*. However, Søndberg refuses to continue telling the story. His resistance to telling story enables them to give greater seriousness to the father's abuse of the girl, and adds both comedy—interrupting the story with Jingle Bell Rock—and tension that builds towards the climax of the piece.

Deviations

Gruppe 38 productions incorporate both drama and deviations away from that drama. Drama is a particular way in composing a story, using characters involved in a conflict which builds through a progression of actions, reach a turning point or *peripeteia* and climax, and is resolved. Dramatic models have been suggested and defined by practitioners and theorists, from what is referred to as Gustav Freytag's pyramid, to what Danes refer to "Hollywood" dramaturgy. Most dramatic models favor linear progression in order to sustain the dramatic build towards a climax. The majority of the stories told in Gruppe 38 productions—*Hansel and Gretel*, *The Little Matchgirl*, *Little Red Riding Hood* (in *A Sonatina*)—follow dramatic models. Even less conventional performances like *You Must Be an Angel*, *Hans Christian* incorporate elements of drama.

At the same time, Gruppe 38 deviates from drama's linear progression. According to Gruppe 38, "if a story is short and if it is good, it is already compressed in its idea and can give us room for errands on the way, in order for our watermark to be evident in the delivery" ("Manifesto"; see appendix A). The idea of making deviations is not foreign per se, particularly if one considers stories to be "made up of peripeteias—turning points—which make it *deviate* from a straight course" because "without incidents and hindrances, a story is not reduced to its essential, but to a stunted dwarf, just a beginning

and an ending. It is no longer a story, but a headlong rush” (Barba 93). Deviations do more than prolong a story; they often set up repetitions and images that tie together various narratives and frames, give the ending a sense of inevitability, and more firmly establish a resolution. These deviations can occur within and around stories, and are held together by a narrative frame which revolves around telling the drama. This frame provides an immediate reason as to why the story, or fabula, is being told, and establishes a perspective from which to interpret and understand its significance. It emphasizes the cleavage between reality and fiction, as the spectator is now tracing the performance and the meta-story behind or about the performance.

Alternative Logics

Along with breaking conventions, Alling renders everyday logic unfamiliar through alternative logics. She draws comical inferences and assumptions, rather than following cause and effect reasoning. In what she refers to as illogical-logic, the reasoning is often reversed. In *You Must Be an Angel, Hans Christian*, two waiters spend the entire time serving characters from his written stories. The audience sees the characters’ presence through their absence, and through the objects that are part of their place settings. The audience is also “not allowed to sit, for the real guests are the ones from the fairytales” (*You Must be an Angel*). Logic that is ‘close to the ground’ combines seriousness, an elevated if not ceremonious tone, which is then immediately contrasted with more familiar if not base comedic elements. Alling describes it as “at one point you are very, very serious and you wouldn’t dare think of taking it down here at this point, but in a little while you can do it again” (May). Alling portrays the witch as being truly

cruel and terrifying; it is not sugar-coated but chilling. But on the third time children see her, Alling says that she can “loosen” the character and make the witch also a little ridiculous by having her say things that reveal her greed and stupidity. This allows the audience to see how Gretel can later trick the witch (Alling, May). Alternative logics can draw in spectators, inciting their curiosity, both through surprise and also through requiring their participation in puzzling out the reasoning at play.

Distillation

Distillation requires simplicity of expression which then allows for complexity in communicating the essence of a story or an idea. In their manifesto, Gruppe 38 writes that “we try to find complexity and sophistication in simplicity, and thus create unpredictable experiences with a few and simple means” (see appendix A). Simplicity often results in fewer signifiers that contain several levels of signification. In *Hansel and Gretel*, Gruppe 38 first created a wood that used shadows and several set pieces. However, when they felt it did not serve the piece, they threw that set away and started again. In the end, the set consisted solely of a piano, a stool, and Alling’s white, draped costume. Alling’s use of the costume related not only to the story—it served at times as a baby, at others, folds of sagging skin—but to the set as various images were projected upon it, including the gingerbread house, and the flames which engulf the witch. That this was projected upon the storyteller was not only effective and clever but a meaningful way to present the story without representing the woods.

In practice, Gruppe 38 does not refer to theories of theatricality, nor do they intentionally employ them in every moment of their work. However, Gruppe 38 consciously draws upon these principles. Some are referred to in their manifesto, while others, particularly non-illustration, are cited in rehearsals and interviews. They are key in thinking beyond patterns and into variations, and enable Gruppe 38 to create work which inspires audience members, like eight-year-old Martin, to feel that “First I just thought it was theatre—but that was only at the start” (qtd in Jensen, *For det største* 142).

3. Gruppe 38 and *I've Got Everything*

3.1. Gruppe 38's Devising Process

The majority of Gruppe 38 pieces begin with an idea or concept Alling has been exploring and developing. Several months before rehearsals begin, a group including Alling, Søndberg, a director or consultant, the company technical director, and other performers involved in the production, meet for a research period. During this time the company discusses not only potential images and stories, but major dramaturgical issues of the production—the structure, organizing themes or concepts, and what the group calls headlines. Headlines, either statements or questions, play a dramaturgical role as both catalyst and shared point of inquiry from which decisions about what to cut and what to change can be measured. The headline for *You Must Be an Angel, Hans Christian* was “it is necessary for a human being to be seen... as well as seen through and be ... loved in spite of everything” (Gruppe 38, *Hans Christian*). In *The Trouser Button*, the headlines included:

When a person is not seen, they do not exist. When is this good and when is it bad? What is the opposite of being invisible? Having everything.

What is everything, the important everything? It is the questions someone asks who really cares about you. What is lost? What is found? (Alling, October)

The company puts headlines on the wall and refers to them throughout the development process, comparing it to what they have generated. Engagement with these headlines is not cursory; frequently they repeat or develop a headline from one devised piece into another. The visibility important to *You Must Be an Angel*, Hans Christian was explored in *The Trouser Button*, and from *The Trouser Button* the question “What is everything, the important everything?” and the answer, that “all you need is love,” was at the heart of *I've Got Everything*.

The process of creating *I've Got Everything* officially began in March, 2009 when Alling met with Eggert, Søndberg, Søren la Cour, and Hans Rønne (directing/story consultant) for three days of discussion, research and experimentation. Afterward Alling continued to work with the ideas and started developing the script. Rønne was unable to work on the show after the research period; instead Folmer Christensen, an actor, was enlisted as a consultant during rehearsals, which occurred again between May 18 to June 25, 2009. The company met to experiment, improvise, write and revise the script, film, and create both the backdrop and the moveable cart. The cart took the idea of having everything to another level. Inspired by the compact found-object sculptures and installations of Swede Michael Johansson, artist Sille Heltoft designed the cart in such a way that dozens of everyday objects took on their own importance, as well as suggesting that the cart was literally packed with ‘everything.’¹⁹ The company met again from

¹⁹ Initially they discussed the possibility of ‘having all’ to include a battery from which they could run all of their sound and lights. They found that voltage would not

August 2, 2009 to September 4, 2009, and performed for a few test audiences and twice at the Horsens Festival in October.²⁰ In February they rehearsed for a week before having their official premiere.

Company members have specific functions within the devising process. Alling writes the majority of their text²¹ and, as the artistic leader, also makes the final production decisions. Eggert creates all of the films. Søndberg composes the music and designs the sound, and also performs. La Cour oversees the technical direction, set construction and lighting design. Christensen gave directing and performance ideas and feedback to the company. There is no official dramaturg working with Gruppe 38, but, as is the case in many companies who devise their work, dramaturgy becomes a shared process as each company member is engaged in identifying, analyzing, questioning and contributing to the production through production meetings, rehearsals, and run-throughs.

3.2. Principles of Theatricality in *I've Got Everything*

The majority of the devising process in *I've Got Everything* developed from principles related to theatricality.

Non-Illustration

Because incorporating film affected not only the content but the form of the production, *I've Got Everything* posed a particular challenge in applying the principle of

allow for that, but kept the idea that, as much as possible, the cart would appear to have 'everything.'

²⁰ Held annually on the Jutland peninsula in the town of Horsens, the Horsens Festival is a major festival for companies performing theatre for young audiences.

²¹ *The Holy Night* and *The Trouser Button* were co-written with Claus Mandøe.

non-illustration. Prior to *I've Got Everything*, Gruppe 38 had, by and large, resisted using film in performances, with the exception of short films used in *You Must Be an Angel*, *Hans Christian* and *Upside Down Town*. Generally these films presented an image, and never offered a complete narrative: a woman smiled, a man bounced a ball, and a horse ran. They performed on alternate screens, such as an egg, a brick wall, pouring water, pouring sand, and bread in the process of being kneaded. While often important to the dramaturgy of the piece—the film of a swan completed both the story of the Ugly Duckling and the production of *You Must Be an Angel*, *Hans Christian*—film played a minimal role in productions. This was not the result of a lack of capability, but a dislike for film within theatre performances. Neither Alling nor Eggert had been satisfied with the productions they had seen use film. Alling felt that the film was usually unnecessary, and Eggert felt that the film was too illustrative. It showed everything: it supplied the entire experience and did not leave the audience anything to imagine.

However, with *I've Got Everything*, Alling and Eggert felt they had a way to use film theatrically. They wanted to use the content of film to question the form, to undermine its timelessness, linearity, and status as a copy, rather than a representation, of the past. They felt that film is treated as proof. Alling said that “you can tell stories and fairytales, but when you have a movie you can see it’s real. ‘It really happened, I was there’” (May). This proof appears to be complete and unchanging; no matter how many times you rewind it or run it, it always stays fixed in that moment of time and in that particular sequence. However, in a piece ostensibly about having everything, their use of film would forward the opposite statement: you cannot completely own anything. At least a few films would be shot with the outdated Super 8 film, and would be faded and grainy,

emphasizing that film could also disappear. Eggert would shoot film in a way that did not capture the complete event, and would create a sense that something was missing. In rewinding to a certain point of a film, instead capturing the same image, it would have changed. In these ways, film could be portrayed as a representation of a memory, not the substance, of the actual event. This non-illustrative use of film on the conceptual, macro-level was crucial in the conception and development of the overarching way in which the form of the piece would further its meaning.

Alling insisted, as does research professor Beth Junker, that when theatre practitioners incorporate film in theatre, they must be aware that “form and content are indivisible, and that they must experiment with the artistic forms of expression particular to the theatre” (17). Gruppe 38 discussed many potential ways to do this, which they were able to accomplish because the film and theatre were created in dialogue. Eggert created films as Alling developed her narrative. Alling was frequently present at the shooting of the films, and watched the footage that Eggert took before he edited it. Because they worked in close collaboration, the footage frequently inspired Alling to create particular stories that were in dialogue with the film, rather than representing it. Conversely, Eggert was able to see how she was interacting with the film, and could edit it to better respond to Alling’s performance.

Non-illustration pushes artists to challenge their ideas and find combinations of stories, images, objects, and sounds “which neither you nor the audience would have initially expected” (Gruppe 38, “Manifesto” see appendix A). Gruppe 38 saw this production as an experiment that would push them to look for ways to create non-illustrative film. They wanted to show something that would evoke, rather than represent,

what they were discussing. For instance, instead of showing a goose swimming, could they show a boy swimming in a way that would evoke a goose? Could they show a goose's shadow? Both ideas were discarded. It was a time-intensive portion of the play's development; it "took such a long time, to move the things from the idea... and then to [realizing] 'it's only the first step of the idea.' And then once again how do we move it one step more" (Alling, May). For example, in the book *I've Got Everything* there is a poem for a goat:

My goat has a coat, it's silky and thick
 Her favourite dish is a rhubarb stick
 She's crunching and munching like a garden shredder
 She guffaws and smells like a mouldy sweater
 But shame on him, who doesn't note
 She actually is a silky goat (Alling, *Everything* [4])

Alling began by brainstorming a list of what is unique to a goat. Goats eat things. Perhaps they could eat something silk of Søndberg's, or a sock? Goats are stubborn; consultant Hans Rønne told a story of a friend of his in the circus who has to do just about everything in order to get his goat to do any tricks. Eggert suggested that a goat was a very different pet from all of the other animals about which Alling had written. Alling began to develop a story of a goat with an identity crisis, who is trying to be these other animals. Later in the rehearsal process, she altered the story so that it was about the goat not wanting to get a haircut. This reminded her of a story about Søndberg and his Beatles' hair, a story she had used in their 1994-95 performance *Himmelsengen*. After the goat got its hair cut, the film would include seeing the wool get carded and spun, moving around spindles like film moves around the projector. That wool would go on to make hundreds of socks. Alling said that she wanted the goat to be an icon. La Cour argued that an icon has certain associations, and that he did not associate goats with hair;

he associates them with cheese. Alling countered that it is not as much a question of what associations a goat might have—which tend to be more literal—but what associations they, as the artists, create for the audience through their stories.

The most non-illustrative film did not show the subject of the film at all. In the film about the hen, Eggert did not use any footage of an actual hen. Instead, the film consisted entirely of leader of a film—what you see before the 3-2-1 countdown—with scratches and lines that corresponded to the clucks of the hen. The rest of the films showed the animal or the individual they are describing. In contrast to hen film, it could be argued that, to a degree, *I've Got Everything* was illustrative. However, none of the films completely illustrated the performance. Like the photograph taken from the bus, the films were the starting point to another story that was developed through the performance. Alling explains this in relation to the last image of the play, in which she speaks about seven stars. “It’s just a picture of the Big Dipper. You recognize it. They are even [on a screen] up in the sky. You read it very quick and it’s what it is, it’s flat, it’s just seven stars. And then when you have the story suddenly it changes because we’ve changed the story about it, so they are a bit special” (May).

Non-acting

Unlike acting styles which are presentational, non-acting focuses on doing the act, rather than communicating to the audience that the act will or did happen. Instead of deliberately indicating emotions, non-acting demands actors work to focus on going into an emotion, rather than showing the audience what the emotion would be. For various reasons, these presentational acting styles are frequently used in theatre for young

audiences. However, Gruppe 38 deliberately works against this style of acting, which was clear at points within the play's development. Folmer Christensen, an actor also trained in clowning, consulted much as a director during rehearsals. Christensen's attention to detail, his problem-solving, and his ideas and insights were important to the development of the piece. There were, however, times in which his style was blatantly more presentational and self-aware than Alling and Søndberg's. For example, when Alling first proclaims "I've got everything," Søndberg interjects "except money." In comedic fashion, this occurs twice before, on the third time, Alling anticipates his comment, overrides him, and continues the poem. In staging this section, Christensen gave them blocking in which Søndberg would pop out from a different location behind the cart for each interruption. Søndberg tried it, but neither Alling nor Søndberg liked the result. They ended up changing the movement so that it would appear he was simply working on the cart, rather than deliberately popping up behind it. They also reduced the number of locations and the space he would travel between his interjections.

Alling and Søndberg's interest in blurring the line of what is clearly symbolic and instinctual in the performer was most clearly evident in the development of their costumes. Designers Poul Fly Plejdrup and Birgitte Nisbeth initially created Alling's costume to be asymmetrical, with several layers of ruffles on one arm and side of the bodice. Alling was concerned that it would come across too clearly as a costume. It would set her apart as performer, and create a boundary between her and the audience. Her costume underwent several revisions, each coming closer to being every-day clothing.

This blurring also took place within the production. At the beginning of the performance, Alling and Søndberg move seamlessly from what appears to be functional if not instinctive actions to symbolic ones. Søndberg, after playing a trumpet fanfare, welcomes the audience inside. He interacts with the audience members by helping them find their seats. Alling, wearing a single roller skate, zooms around the set as a warped tape plays the Beatles' song "All You Need is Love." Sometimes Alling sings along to snippets of the song, only to stop, hold out a finger like a perch, listen and whistle, and then resumes roller-skating. When the audience seems to have settled, Alling looks up to the back corners of the theatre, puts up her finger again and whistles. She asks Søndberg to turn down the music and she whistles again. Then she explains that she had a robin and, seemingly offhand, recites a poem about it. At the end of the poem, the house lights dim, and Alling begins her next poem while Søndberg gets the film ready. By the time Alling welcomes the audience to the biografteater, the performance has already been going for several minutes. In moving quickly between roles, this opening catches some audience members by surprise; one reporter admitted that he did not know that the show had begun.

Although clearly a style, non-acting was influential in the development of material and how it was crafted. It was key in establishing a role between the performers, and between the performers and the audience, particularly when the performers sought to heighten the disjunction-unification process between fiction and reality within the performance.

Setting up and breaking conventions

In *I've Got Everything*, the cart allowed Gruppe 38 to both establish and then break conventions through its use of everyday and representational space. In everyday life, film does not change. It is a record of past events, the time when the event was filmed. When the first film, the hen, is played on the central screen of the biografteater, however, it establishes that film is connected to the present. The grumpy hen squawks loudly her annoyance when Søndberg looks into her roost. Also played on the central screen, the goat in the second film appears to be dialogue with Alling.

In addition to the central screen, Alling and Eggert liked the idea that films could also play on screens that the audience did not anticipate. They broke the convention associated with the biografteater's central screen, using 'found' screens, such as an alternate panel in the cart that played a film of a mouse scurrying past, or a flag that telescopes high in the air to capture a film of the extremely tall Uncle Zimmerman waving to them below. These screens created fictional space within the cart. Eggert filmed the chicks in such a way that it appears as if they live deep inside the cart. The film of the dog, playing underneath the legs of a checkered-cloth table, creates the illusion that the dog is lying inside the cart (see Figure 1). Filmed and played at a proportion that is similar to that of real animals, characters like the dog and goose appear to be life-like. Through the presence of film, everyday spaces, like the area underneath a table, become representational, and in combination with theatre, the reality of a film takes on fictional qualities.

The limits of reality are further pushed through the use of one particular screen: a window. Eggert created three films of different fields that are projected onto a window. This creates an "out" or outlet to another world. While initially they had discussed

creating a film for the window in which a postman would talk to them, or from which they would show a young girl running past, the window is only used with films that play silently, and change frequently, without comment.

During the course of the performance, the conventions of the space are further complicated when objects are used in both the film and the performance. These objects occupy both past and present, reality and fiction, and become a symbol for the story and create a sense of access to that world. For example, the clock that sits on the cart plays a major role in the film for Aunt Viola (see Figures 2-3). The poem about Aunt Viola emphasizes her age—she is “older than Methuselem”—and Alling felt that there should be a quality and sense about this section that suggests Viola could disappear at any time. Eggert, who had been exploring what else, besides the television, or window, could function as a screen, suggested they project film on the clock. Alling liked the connection of a clock to Aunt Viola’s story, particularly when she realized the sound of the clock, in the stillness of Aunt Viola’s room, would give her the sound and a rhythm that she needed. The clock became a transition into the scene, as we hear it striking, incorrectly, twelve. Alling turns the cart to look at the literal clock, which she explains is always awry. Because of this, her aunt never knows how much time is left, a point which Alling emphasizes a few moments later, saying “Yes, yes, she says./ You never know how much time is left, anyway” (Alling, *Everything* TS). The clock is then the first image on the film to play, which then zooms out into Aunt Viola’s room. The entire scene is accompanied by the sound of the ticking clock. In this way the clock, an everyday object, both represents time and life, and acts as a bridge between conventional reality and the fictional world created by the film.

Deviations

Establishing the dramatic elements they would use in the show enabled the company to spend more of their time in developing the deviations that surrounded it. During the first research meetings, Alling proposed that the drama in the production revolved around the loss of her cat. As it was first conceived, the cat would appear in a film early in the performance in which it walks near the side of the road. Conflict would build in the discovery of the cat's death, which leads Alling to rewind the film. This would lead to the turn of events, peripeteia, as Alling, in attempting to see the cat through film—which never dies—instead finds only a cross. The climax comes about in realizing her loss is permanent, and the drama resolves in Alling saying farewell to the cat. Having this drama in place, the company had a greater idea of the themes that could connect scenes together and create an emotionally resonant ending. However, the majority of the performance and the devising process was not spent on the drama of the cat, but on the individual stories. These deviations from the central narrative did not follow a progression, but as the scenes developed, they established repeating themes and images of temporality, loss, and death. Alling arranged scenes that were particularly associated with these themes and images to occur before and build towards the scene of the cat. For example, as the scene about Uncle Zimmerman became more closely associated with death, it was moved towards the ending of the piece.

During the development process, the drama changed significantly. Although Alling identified the story of the cat as the central drama, even on the first days of research she was concerned that, introduced at such a late point, it might be wrong for the

dramaturgy of the piece. Alling's misgivings came to center on the implications of rewinding the cat film. As opposed to the rest of the piece's theatricality in which the construction of fiction was evident, the film would be unexplainable.²² If the film rewound to a cross, and not a cat, the audience might think that someone—God?—or something—a machine?—had changed the film. Alling felt this made film mystical, rather than theatrical, and she decided to cut it due to the philosophical and ideological implications.

Both the drama and deviations from it were possible because of the framework of the biografteater. The concept gave them flexibility in terms of structure, particularly in being able to move between scenes. It also drew attention to the role of the performers in presenting these films and stories, allowing Alling and Søndberg to move from one story to the next, from narration to enactment and back again.

Alternative Logic

Illogical-logic makes unfamiliar that which is everyday and known, often through reversals or misapplied inferences. For instance, when Alling was told that newly-hatched chicks must be kept under a light, she sought to find a way that the light could be incorporated into the film and the set. At first she reasoned that the light could be on to indicate when the chickens were there. When it was pointed out that a light is only used when a hen is not there, Alling applied illogical-logic. The chicken, she claims, is the

²² The creative team, particularly Eggert, did not feel there were the same implications, and disagreed on changing this key, generative concept. Alling, however, was certain that this ideology was not the right choice for the show and decided that there would be no visual representation of the cat in any film or at any point in the performance.

opposite of humans. What do humans do when they leave the house? Turn off the light. But chickens? They turn it on. This illogical-logic becomes part of the script. Some reversals of logic are ironic. For instance, cats typically eat mice; however, Alling and Søndberg find that mice have eaten the cat by way of eating the film. Misapplied inferences result in alternative logics, particularly as Alling lists her father's inventions, such as the television in which it is snowing year-round—static “snow.” The film her father creates arrives in the mail; his “car with four wheels ... has: ‘Made in Hong Kong’ written on the bottom” (Alling, *Everything* TS). From seeing her father working with these items, Alling's character has inferred that he invented them. Through these alternative logics, Alling destabilizes the familiar and creates humor, curiosity, and a tension between fiction and reality that the audience deciphers through tracing where the reasoning was reversed or misapplied.

Distillation

Distillation occurs most frequently when material has been generated and is then assessed for its clarity in communicating the essence of the scene. Is it encumbered by explanations, rendering it less clear or too illustrative? Distilling can involve not only cutting away anything that could be extraneous or confusing, but ideas will also be reshaped to find greater focus and clarity within the scene.

It is common in the devising process that a great amount of material is generated in order to find the key moments that are most effective. In the scene with the dog, Alling developed a second story: because of all of the skin, the dog accumulated gas and could fart for long periods of time. Søndberg does not believe her, so she asks the dog to begin.

When he does, she and Søndberg play a game to see who can keep from laughing, in which neither wins. During the first rehearsals, and even the first performances, the scene took several minutes. With more rehearsal, the story developed and altered. Alling was unable to stop laughing long enough to even start the game, but Søndberg, who kept his composure, pronounced himself the winner. It became an instance of tricking each other, and the scene became tighter and shorter. Later on, when Alling introduced another comic element into the scene, it again went through a process in which she spent a considerable amount of time exploring how the comedy could play out, after which she was able to shorten the playing time.

If an idea relied too much upon explanations that could indicate that it should be reexamined and distilled. The initial idea with the goose story had the goose dressed up in a Santa costume to avoid being eaten at Christmas dinner. Alling enjoyed the idea of the goose dressing up, and asked that other costumes could be created for the goose, which would then be placed in a wardrobe that displayed the several costumes. In creating the wardrobe and locating where the costumes would hang, Alling felt that it began to require too many explanations. The costumes would not be immediately recognizable; they would require not only an explanation but a story. The initial idea and major story about the Santa costume would not be surprising if they added an additional story about dressing up. In the end, the goose was housed, quite simply, in a suitcase, without a wardrobe (see Figure 3). Alling developed the goose's *dødsangst*, fear of death, which was at the heart of the story about why the goose dressed up. The film was able to reinforce this fear because part of the background where it was filmed resembled a cross. Distilling the story of the goose led to greater clarity and meaning in the scene.

Principles of Theatricality Applied to a Single Scene

While not all of the cleavages and principles that relate to theatricality may be used to develop every moment in a production, even in a single scene, such as the mother's, clearly several principles are functioning together. It begins with the playing of music, a recording in which a piano develops and elaborates upon the melody that had been played as a lullaby for the chicks. Alling picks up a piece of fabric. She smells it and says, "my mother." She then takes a rod from the cart and attaches it horizontally to the cart. Alling then begins to hang the fabric on the rod and as she does so, a black and white film appears on the fabric of a woman's hands hanging the identical piece of fabric Alling has just hung on a clothesline. The film then moves down the clothesline as the woman hangs more items. As she bends down to pick up clothes or lifts them up to pin them to the line, the woman is only seen briefly. Alling recites a poem about her mother, telling of her singing

a wistful evening song
saying "certainly time is endlessly long
but we're here for a moment, and then we're gone."

The poem concludes:

When she is gone, my mother, however
She'll still be my mother forever and ever...
and ever and ever

From where she stands, Alling looks down to watch the film play on the material. She and the audience see sheets move in the breeze. Then, offsetting the scene's lyricism nostalgia, the film shows a pair of underwear on the clothesline. Alling suggests that "somebody has wet the bed," to which she responds, "it doesn't matter" (Alling,

Everything TS 30). The final object the mother hangs up to dry is a teddy bear. This same teddy bear sits on the cart. As the song fades, Alling takes down the material, and the image disappears.

The film does not illustrate the poem. It does not enact nor portray the mother singing the song, or even speaking text. The audience is shown her only in glimpses. Through her absence, Gruppe 38 can suggest, rather than portray, the possibility of the mother's death.

The fabric becomes both screen and subject, which draws attention to the space and the medium. Similarly, the manner in which the film arrives suddenly and disappears just as easily draws focus to not only what but also how it is shown. This reinforces the tension between fiction and reality, which is furthered with the presence of elements like the material and teddy bear on the cart and in the film. This tension extends to Alling's instinctive and yet symbolic role, which is brought clearly into focus when her hands mirror the mothers'.

Alling's non-acting keeps this scene away from melodrama. Although her voice communicates tenderness, she lets the piano carry the emotion. The marked nostalgia of the scene is undercut with 'low to the ground' logic in using the familiar if not base image of underpants and wetting the bed. And while there are dramatic elements within the scene, it is not a drama. The only conflict—the embarrassment over wetting the bed—is easily diffused by Alling's acceptance of it.

The mother's scene plays a key role in the structure of the play, furthering and developing the theme of loss and death. Earlier scenes allude to or mentioned death. The goose fears death. Aunt Viola never knows how much time she has left. In the previous

scene, Uncle Zimmerman, projected onto a screen above the cart, has difficulty hearing Alling. As he disappears from the screen, Alling reasons that it does not matter that he cannot hear, because he is now “over the hills and far away,” where it is as “quiet as the grave” (Alling, *Everything TS*).²³ The mother’s scene is the first in which death and mortality is talked about openly and in a way that is both decided and hopeful. It prepares the way not only for the recognition of the loss of the cat, but the resolution and ability to say farewell to it.

Although simple in design, text, and execution, and while no longer than three minutes, the mother’s scene conveys considerable emotion as well as meaning. In that short period of time, through the use of multiple principles of theatricality, Gruppe 38 is able to create a scene that not only develops the piece as a whole, but is in itself evocative and significant in its own right.

4. Conclusion

In the years since I first saw Gruppe 38 perform, I have come to understand not only characteristics that describe their work, but fundamental principles that are used to generate, shape, and refine it. Theatre’s complex signification systems and processes are irreducible and not easily described, nor are these principles of theatricality unique to Gruppe 38. However, the theatrical principles they use provide greater clarity in both discussing their process and productions.

²³ In the Danish version of the text it is *død stil* or deadly still. While the connotations differ, both scenes draw upon death.

Feral's definition of theatricality is conceptual and broad, and more applicable to analysis rather than the creation of theatre. However, the cleavages and disjunction-unification process provide an approach to theatre that can be used to identify foundational and practical principles that function on both the macro and micro-level of work. On the macro-level of *I've Got Everything*, non-illustration was key in exploring how form would engage with content, how film would work within theatre. It was also used to develop content on the micro-level to generate, evaluate, and revise individual scenes and moments.

Although drama plays a vital part within that process, other principles are needed to account for or describe the decisions being made in a devised work. While drama suggest models and patterns that are often useful, the principles of theatricality Gruppe 38 employs and which were at work in *I've Got Everything* allow for a more complex aesthetic, and define a process that is can be used by other companies. Compared to rigid patterns or models of drama, these theatrical principles are more fundamental and have greater flexibility. Non-illustration, non-acting, setting up and breaking down conventions, alternative logics, and distillation can be applied singly or in combination. They are tools, rather than proscriptions; they invite variation and exploration.

As artists continue to identify principles within other art forms that aid them in devising new work, it is important to continually examine the principles of theatricality, and the challenge they offer theatre artists as they conceive and develop their work in whatever forms they choose to employ.

Gruppe 38's productions ask more from audiences than simple observation, and the result is rewarding for both artists and audiences because "when audiences have to

imagine and figure something out, they feel clever, pleased, and enjoy it” (Alling, October). Employing theatricality and the principles surrounding it in the devising process requires more from artists than the interpretation of a script or the application of dramatic principles to the creation of new work. Although these principles will not lessen the potential variables in the devising process, they provide a useful way to encounter and engage with them. And as companies such as Gruppe 38 show, the art that comes of from that engagement is worth the effort.

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Appendix A

“A Manifesto of Sorts”

It is our ambition that our range of performances can be recognized by their unique artistic profile.

We try to find complexity and sophistication in simplicity, and thus create unpredictable experiences with a few and simple means.

"The journeys" towards the performances, on the other hand, are never simple. Gruppe 38 consciously chooses not to use the language, the form or the solution, which seem most obvious in order to make it necessary to examine and re-examine possibilities, which we weren't able to reach beforehand. We trip ourselves up, so to speak, during the entire process. We choose collaborators, who work quite differently and have an entirely different approach to the theatre than we do, in order to reach an immediate peculiar expression, which seem, when delivered, quite obvious to the audience as well as to ourselves. All this to sharpen the ability to imagine, and the desire to change something apparently unchangeable.

The basis of an idea is often an ultra short tale or narrative, where life itself is at stake. If a story is short and if it is good, it is already compressed in its idea and can give us room for errands on the way, in order for our watermark to be evident in the delivery.

It is wonderful to become fascinated with a story and then force yourself to pass on the story as well as the fascination while realizing what the fascination consists of - where is the fragile point in us, where this particular story creeps in and insists on realization, change ...or just (e)motion?

At the same time it is crucial for us that life itself is at stake - in spite of the fact that our audience are mostly children - or perhaps exactly for that reason. We do not insert extenuating circumstances to spare the children. A story can be as cruel, as highly dangerous and infinitely sad as it lays claim to, in order to convey the strongest emotional experience. After all, reality is highly dangerous.

Artist's quotation by Bodil Alling:

"With an hour's compressed image of reality I want to give a moment of clarity in the chaos the audience walks out into when they leave the performance."

“At the moment I want to stimulate the ability to imagine. To get the audience and me to imagine things, which we didn't imagine we could imagine.

“In a little while, well, I'll probably be occupied with something else."

Appendix B: The *biografteater*
Created by Sille Heltoft and Poul Jepsen,
along with Søren La Cour, Joakim Eggert, and Jakob Kierkegaard.



Figure 1: Screens of the *biografteater*: the main screen (covered with black material on the end, far right); the clothesline; the television; the tablecloth covering the screen for the dog.



Figure 2: Objects packed in the cart.



Figure 3: Aunt Viola's clock above the goose's door.