

Theatre Talks - How to Accommodate Hygge in Theatre Experience

DARIA SKJOLDAGER-NIELSEN

ABSTRACT

Almost each year, the pop-cultural world is buzzing with a “new” Nordic word that can bring a piece of Nordic life to every home. Lagom, fika, fredagsmys or hygge - they all refer to slowness, break, taking a moment to feel good and happy, being considerate. Those concepts are believed to be a Nordic approach to life - and a very desirable one.

When I think of theatre in this context, one Nordic invention comes to my mind: theatre talks, which emerged as an audience reception research method in Sweden. They proved to be an effective audience development practice (even for non-theatre-goers) in Australia (Scollen), Denmark (Hansen; Lindelof), and Poland (Rapior) because (among other things) they bring the element of pleasure, community building, and feeling safe into the theatre experience especially for non-attenders.

In this article I will focus on looking at theatre as a possible “oasis of deceleration” in the constantly accelerating world, using Hartmut Rosa’s theory of social acceleration. By going through the development of theatre talks, I will demonstrate what theatres can gain from using this method - both in attendance and image. I will deliberate on how theatre can become a metaphorically “hyggelig” place for anybody during times when everybody ought to live faster and faster.

KEYWORDS

social acceleration, theatre talks, audience development, audience research, oasis of deceleration

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What can a newcomer learn during the “Welcome to Sweden” lecture? First and foremost, many practical things, e.g., how to get a personal number or how to register to the Swedish Social Insurance Agency and the Swedish Tax Agency. But not less importantly, they will get an introduction to the culture. They will learn about lagom (just the right amount), a phrase which refers to a good balance (not too much and not too little of something); they will also hear about fika (a coffee break) which is a midday break at work or an excuse to meet friends during any weekday; they will also discover the idea of fredagsmys (cozy Friday) which will encourage them to sit on a sofa, comfort themselves with some treats, and spend a cosy time with their family or friends. When digging into the culture, without a doubt they will also hear about hygge (coziness) – a Danish and Norwegian word and concept that recently became world famous and encouraged people all over the world to fill their rooms with warm woollen blankets, beige linen curtains, and many candles to create safe and casual atmosphere for loved ones.¹

Of course, when I bring those concepts forward, I am aware that I present them in a stereotypical way as they appear in global pop-culture, even though they often carry more complex, local meaning. I do it deliberately trying to grasp what can be understood as Scandinavian, or more broadly – Nordic, in the mind of an average cosmopolitan (or at least an average European). I think that my presumption will be correct if I list here associations like: safety, security, community, comfort, togetherness, equality. In the context of theatre, these connotations bring to my mind a Scandinavian audience reception method that turned into an audience development practice – theatre talks. These talks bring spectators together and assist community building; they add value to every experience, regardless of the social or cultural status of the spectator; they evoke feelings of pleasure. I believe they bring forth the aspect of hygge in the theatre experience: they make theatre a cosier and more familiar place, where everybody is welcomed to experience performances; it is no longer a place

¹ For example, see: Wiking 2017.

associated with elitism or the upper-class. In this article, I will deliberate on why those qualities of theatre emphasised by theatre talks can be valuable in modern society. By going through the development of theatre talks I will demonstrate what theatres can gain from using this method – both in attendance, image, and, possibly, evoking social change. Hartmut Rosa’s theory of social acceleration will serve as my *spiritus movens*. I will try to present theatre as a possible “oasis of deceleration” in a constantly accelerating world. In this context, I understand the concept of *hygge* metaphorically, as a pop cultural cozy slowdown, and as such this concept follows the nature of Rosa’s “oasis of deceleration”.

Theatre talks: variations of the method

Theatre Talks emerged as an audience reception research method in Sweden. In 1983 in Stockholm Willmar Sauter, Curt Isaksson, and Lisbeth Jansson² were looking for insights into the theatre experiences of different audiences. In their research, the authors wanted to go beyond the socio-demographic factors that impacted the results of surveys and/or interviews, particularly the artificiality of the interview situation and the fact that the respondents would only talk about the topics included in the questionnaire. In Sauter’s assessment, surveys would not give access to the most important aspects of the theatrical experience: the spectators’ emotions and their original thoughts³. The aim was to design a method that could make the interview situation feel like a more casual conversation with fellow spectators, an ordinary practice often observed after performances. Sauter designed the conditions for theatre talks in favour of the atmosphere of comfort, freedom to speak, and security. He divided participants who went to the theatre together into groups of approximately seven people who met after the performance and had an exchange about their individual experiences with it. He invited participants who knew each other – in order to make the environment even more comfortable and natural. Each group was facilitated by a leader (a scholar or a student) who refrained from asking any questions and only made sure that the dynamics of the conversation flowed. It was the participants who decided on the topics to raise. This strategy proved to be productive: researchers gained access to the experiences that otherwise could have been missed (which later led Sauter to develop a theatre communication model⁴). But they discovered something more: spectators enjoyed being part of the theatre talks.

This last aspect was noticed by Rebecca Scollen, who applied it in the Northern Territory and Queensland in Australia in 2004–2006 and adjusted the method to become useful for both audience reception research and audience development. Scollen focused on non-theatre-goers. She wanted to profile them, recognise their reasons for not attending theatre, identify their cultural needs, and determine their reception of performances and Performing Art Centres that they visited during the research.⁵ In short, she wondered what

2 Sauter et al. 1986.

3 Sauter 2000, 175.

4 Sauter 2000, 175.

5 Scollen 2008a, 45–6.

might happen when people who had avoided the theatre in the past would not only come to it, but additionally would be given the opportunity to meet and talk about the performances afterwards. What she discovered was that it was the exposure to performances and art education⁶ that increased curiosity and confidence in theatregoing. When joining the theatre talks project, participants realised that they are no different from the other spectators in the theatre, but more importantly that they were able to enjoy, understand, and relate to any performance.⁷ Theatre talks made theatre more accessible and interesting for them. Despite the fact that in Scollen's project participants did not know each other, they were able to discuss performances, share their experiences, and feel comfortable during the talks. The fact that they were among strangers made them even more confident: they were able to agree with others about interpretations and observations⁸ regardless of the fact that they came from different backgrounds and had different (and unknown to one another) life stories. Possibly, this observation made it apparent that theatre can become a universal experience for the many and this fact could make it easier to feel like belonging there.

In Denmark⁹, Louise Ejgod Hansen, while working with audience development for non-attenders and regular theatregoers combined, noticed a new aspect of the method: theatre talks may increase the democratic potential of theatre. Referring to David Wiles, Hannah Arendt, Richard Sennett, and Jürgen Habermas, Hansen accentuated two democratic aspects of theatre: (1) the community-building potential and (2) the constitution of the public space for debating diverse public issues, which are inspired by the theatrical experience.¹⁰ Theatre talks create a space which especially aims at deliberation. Hansen also noticed that during conversations about performances, participants changed their minds about what they initially thought about the performance¹¹ – participating in dialogue actually brought about a change in their thinking.

In Scandinavia too Anja Mølle Lindelof in 2011 and 2012 used theatre talks in the larger project Teaterdialog Öresund (Theatre Dialogue, a collaboration between Swedish and Danish publicly subsidised theatres in the border region)¹². In her research she focused on how qualitative audience investigation, such as theatre talks, can bring theatres valuable knowledge about their audiences, especially in how spectators perceive performances. With this approach institutions can move away from seeing their audiences through marketing as (un)satisfied customers and bring back “a critical aspect

6 What is important to add is that it was not an institutional art education provided by the performance centres, but the knowledge that participants were sharing or discovering during their participation in theatre talks. *Op.cit.*, 53.

7 Scollen 2006, 23.

8 Scollen 2007, 53.

9 I would like to thank Kim Skjoldager-Nielsen and Magnus Tessing Schneider for helping me translate the Danish reports.

10 Hansen 2013, 11–12.

11 Hansen 2013, 15.

12 Lindelof, Hansen 2015, 235.

of the nature of the performing arts: the sensual and the playful.”¹³

In Poland, there was one another variation of theatre talks that resulted in some interesting findings. Waldemar Rapior applied the method for audience development workshops during the Malta festival in Poznań in 2011.¹⁴ Participants met a day after the performance to talk about their experiences, but in this case with support from a theatre scholar. This facilitator pointed out important aspects of the performance that otherwise could have been missed, and she also answered questions relating to biographies of the creators, different contexts of the performance, and her own interpretations. However, even though her presence had an educational aspect, participants did not shy away from disagreeing with her opinions. Dialogue, where everyone's impressions and judgements were equally important, was the main concern of the workshop. What Rapior found as the most important was that competences, education, and cultural capital were secondary to the theatre experience. He concluded that people could experience every type of art, regardless of their background, if the space for the encounter with works of art is approachable, safe, and open.¹⁵

Theatre talks: from audience research to audience development

Like many other audience development methods, theatre talks hold the potential for different benefits for theatres. Firstly, they might work hand in hand with cultural policy goals. Secondly, they could contribute to fulfilling different marketing objectives of the individual theatre. Thirdly, they may support building better relationships between creators and spectators. I will deliberate on those three aspects below.

Most of the theatre talks projects that I described above used this method for researching and encouraging non-theatre-goers to come to the theatre. The interest in this group of spectators may be seen as a result of emphasising the idea of “cultural democracy”, which is often a goal of cultural policies (particularly in Europe). This view, especially developed in Nordic countries¹⁶, focusses on disseminating art among all citizens, regardless of their status or background, increasing participation in culture, and involving socially excluded groups. Theatre talks aimed at non-attenders can help achieve the goal of the democratisation of the arts. The projects discussed above indicated that if given a chance to experience theatre in a safe environment, spectators see themselves as not different from regular attenders. Regardless of their education and knowledge, they can approach the performance, have a fruitful discussion about it, and enjoy time spent in the theatre. Here, the question remains whether their interest and involvement may stay the same if theatre talks are not a component of a theatrical event. In some cases, a small group of theatre talks' participants came back to the theatre even though the project was

13 Lindelof, Hansen 2015, 236.

14 Rapior 2019, 536-9.

15 Rapior 2019, 538.

16 Duelund 2008, 15.

over¹⁷, but most of them didn't. This allows me to think that a supplement for the performance in the form of a safe and open space for discussion is the element that gives spectators better access to the very important aspect of theatre: a space for an encounter with fellow humans. Theatre talks invite participants to stay, reflect on different aspects of the performance (including those that could have been missed if not given a chance for a conversation afterwards), and encourage active contribution to a conversation, which sometimes ends with changing the interlocutors' minds.

The marketing goals of audience development often vary. They may focus on generating new and keeping existing audiences, supporting a better engagement of spectators, increasing revenue, or improving the image of the institution. While marketing helps organisations increase profit, its core lies in understanding consumers: their "needs and wants, perceptions and attitudes, preferences and satisfaction."¹⁸ When applied suitably, marketing should benefit both parties: institutions and their audiences. Theatre talks hold potential for supporting marketing in the organisation. They create a good experience for the participants, even when the performance was not appreciated at first. Participating in theatre talks brings to light new aspects of the performance and makes the entire event more gratifying. Additionally, theatre talks successfully encourage new audiences that otherwise might not have been interested in theatre. What participants (particularly non-attenders) stress is the fact that joining a theatre talks' project changes what they think about the theatre. They see that they are no different from existing audiences and that the performing arts is not a "foreign" experience, but rather a new way of spending time that can very much be pleasurable and beneficial. In short, theatre talks have the potential to change a theatre's image into a more inviting and accessible place. However, just like in a cultural policy perspective, the question about a long-term effect of such projects remains.

The third aspect of audience development concerns parties directly involved in the theatre experience: the meeting between creators and spectators during the Theatrical Event. According to Sauter, there are two facets influencing this encounter: the communication and the context.¹⁹ The first one describes the interaction between the performer and the spectator during the "here and now" of the performance. Sauter identifies three levels of theatrical communication: (1) the sensory that describes how performers and spectators perceive the presence of the other party, their mood or feelings they evoke; (2) the artistic, where the artistic means used by the performers can be appreciated by the spectators (or not); (3) the symbolic that allows for the reading of the meaning behind artistic expression and brings out the understanding of the staging.²⁰ Theatre talks may especially influence the second and the third level of the communication. They highlight different aspects of the staging – each of the theatre talks' participants introduces their own likings and readings of

17 Scollen 2008a, 51.

18 Scheff Bernstein 2007, 17.

19 Sauter 2000, 2.

20 Sauter 2000, 7.

the performance. In this way, other participants learn new perspectives that support their understanding during subsequent visits to the theatre. The second aspect of the theatrical encounter, the context, consists of the external circumstances of the communication. While theatre talks are not able to change the participants' social, political, economic, or educational backgrounds, they themselves constitute a context. While they cannot serve the encounter that already happened, they definitely equip recipients with tools that may be useful during their following visits.

Those three approaches show how both theatres and spectators may benefit from participating in theatre talks. They make performances more accessible and easier to understand. They add up to more pleasurable and comfortable theatre visits. Consequently, they make theatres more open to new audiences.

Furthermore, theatre talks stress those aspects of the theatrical event that distinguish them from other events in everyday life. They concurrently take time from participants and give them time to think, talk, and spend time together. And therefore, I wonder if theatre talks can do more than merely contribute to better theatre experiences.

Theatre as an oasis of deceleration

In his search for an understanding of what characterises modernity or contemporaneity, Hartmut Rosa systematises temporal structures of society and he finds a peculiar paradox of how “[w]e don’t have any time although we’ve gained far more than we’ve needed before.”²¹ What he means by that is the striking contrast between the ubiquitous increase of the tempo of life (bringing along stress, franticness, as well as a feeling of lack of time) and the immense gains in time coming from the constant technological advances. This paradox leads Rosa to analyse what he sees as the main condition of modernity: the acceleration of social processes.

Rosa systematises social acceleration by dividing it into three fundamental mechanisms: technical acceleration, the acceleration of social change, and the acceleration of the pace of life. Technical acceleration is driven from the perspective of economic gains and can be represented by Benjamin Franklin’s aphorism “time is money.”²² Even small technological advances that allow us to produce better, faster, or more than our competitors allow for a better profit. Subsequently, these advances are transferred to the everyday life of everyone. Rosa presents those processes using examples of transport, communication, and production. Innovations in those fields aim at saving time, which are welcomed with joy, because most people experience a scarcity of time in life. Technology seems to assist in finding solutions to time problems, e.g., instead of waiting for a letter for weeks we receive e-mails within seconds or, instead of traveling for a meeting abroad, we can meet on zoom the same day. However, new temporal solutions bring social changes with them, e.g., in the way we work, socialise, or spend leisure time, etc. Rosa defines them as the acceleration of social

21 Rosa 2015, XXXV.

22 Rosa 2015, XX.

change: new schedules and schemes compel individuals to focus on planning their lives around dominant temporal structures. Additionally, the acceleration of social change causes a “contraction of the present”²³, which means that definitions of social situations (e.g., how long a marriage lasts or how many times a person changes their career) remain binding for a shorter period of time. In short, social institutions and culture change more quickly and people have to accommodate those shifts. This constant need to adapt to an ever changing environment leads to the acceleration of the pace of life (i.e., “the compression of episodes of action and experience in the face of time pressure”²⁴). When life offers unlimited options for career paths, holiday destinations, hobbies, or self-development courses, then executing most of them before inevitable death seems like the best way of living life. However, when our lifespan does not get any longer, all those options have to be compressed into shorter periods or require multitasking. What could possibly help with that are... technological advances. This shows how all types of social acceleration are interconnected and result in mutual reinforcement – Rosa calls it “the circle of acceleration.”²⁵ All three elements drive each other and are additionally intensified by external mechanisms: the economic motor, the cultural motor, and the socio-structural motor.

Rosa is not optimistic when he looks into the future of social acceleration: most probably because he sees its end in a radical revolution (political collapse and the eruption of violence) or a final catastrophe (nuclear or climatic).²⁶ Concurrently, however, he sees some phenomena that counter the process of acceleration: (1) geographical, biological, and anthropological speed limits; (2) “oases of deceleration”, i.e., areas susceptible to modernisation; (3) blockages and slowdown that unintentionally occur in the process of acceleration (e.g., traffic jams); (4) intentional deceleration (e.g., taking a sabbatical or the movement of a slower life), (5) a tendency toward rigidity, particularly when individuals experience uneventfulness or perceive reality as the return of the same phenomena.²⁷ Even though Rosa does not see them as a “cure” to acceleration, but rather a reaction to what is happening or a residue of the slower past, I look at them with hope because they have the ability to reveal an accelerating reality to the individual and can act as subverting powers.

In this article, I will focus on the second phenomena mentioned by Rosa: oases of deceleration. He defines them as places, groups (of people), or forms of practice which constitute “a social form that is resistant to such processes [processes of acceleration – DSN], one that becomes increasingly anachronistic in comparison with the surrounding temporally dynamic social systems. Sticking with the metaphor, the clocks run “as they did a hundred years ago”.”²⁸ Rosa points to a large and continuously growing temporal distance between those

23 Op.cit., 155.

24 Rosa 2015, 156.

25 Op.cit., 151-6.

26 Op.cit., 322.

27 Op.cit., 302-4.

28 Rosa 2015, 83.

oases and the rest of the world: when everything goes faster and faster, they keep standing still. On the one hand, belonging to such oasis may be costly – if one stays there for a long time (e.g., people living in Amish communities in the USA), joining a society which changes so quickly requires a lot of effort (and additionally, it is almost impossible to regain the things that were lost during the stay). On the other hand, oases of deceleration have nostalgic value – they show how the world was in the past, but (in my view more importantly) they pinpoint the growing pace of life and changes those individuals undergo in the present. In that way, I see the subversive potential in them (I will get back to that thought further in this text).

I see that theatre²⁹ has a potential to serve as an oasis of deceleration. Firstly, in some ways theatre is anachronistic. I would not say it does not belong to our times – on the contrary, theatre has a reality commenting power and, to a certain extent, may contribute to social change³⁰. Nonetheless, the way in which theatre is consumed does not change at its core. The performance starts at a specific time and if spectators are late, they may not be let in into the auditorium (so most spectators will arrive well in advance). If there is an intermission, many will spend it in a foreseeable way: drinking coffee or a glass of wine while conversing with a companion or strolling around the theatre foyer reading a programme, looking at the interiors (which often contain exhibitions of costumes or photographs), meeting friends sitting in a different part of the auditorium, or discussing the performance with a companion. Some, of course, will spend that time on their smartphones, but many will choose one of the ways mentioned above. Nowadays, it is a rather unusual way of spending time: it is not focused on productivity or multitasking but reserved for a specific purpose – experiencing a performance. Secondly, theatre is a temporal medium. The fictional time on stage can pass with any speed: faster, jumping through history, but also slower than that, making use of micro-moments. Whichever direction it takes, theatre congregates spectators to look at the world through the lens of creators. It is a place that takes time – in the world where the greatest value is to gain time. In that way, theatre, through its enduring presence, enables a slower experience of time – an intrinsic value of the oasis of deceleration.³¹ Thirdly, for many non-attenders, theatre may be seen as possibly anachronistic because in their minds it sustains class divisions and seems elitist³². Because of that, non-attenders believe that they do not belong there, and they do not see theatre as a possible choice for their leisure time.

The cost of entering such oasis of deceleration is not too high – after all, a spectator stays there for several hours at most. It can, however, serve acceleration processes if the individual goes there to “refuel”, to gain some rest

29 Rosa writes that deceleration may take forms of “aesthetic-artistic” slowdown and he points to the experience of the museum [Rosa 2015, 87].

30 See, for example, Dolan 2005.

31 Rosa 2015, 87.

32 Many theatre talks projects stress that fact: non-attenders are surprised to see attenders to be similar to themselves in age, the way they dress or behave, e.g.: Scollen 2006, 23; Hansen 2013, 27; Rapior 2019, 538.

in order to be able to function better in a speeded up world.³³ There are many places that serve that purpose: while they allow deceleration, they actually aim to give body and mind a needed rest for the sake of becoming more productive (like a meditation course or yoga class). But theatre incorporates a very important feature that possibly could break that pattern of “refuelling” in oases of deceleration: a space for reflection and discussion. Theatre talks stress that potential and add to that value.

Can theatre talks subvert social acceleration?

When analysing her theatre talks project in Denmark, Louise Ejgod Hansen recognised their democratic potential. She referred to the concept of “deliberative democracy”, with its core lying in “the ability of citizens to participate in public debate and decisions on an informed basis.”³⁴ According to this theory three principles of a functioning democracy are equality, participation, and deliberation. Yet, in Western democracies it is deliberation that is often neglected. Hansen notices the same tendency in cultural policy: while the need for equal access to art and growth of participation are often stressed, there is little interest in why and how people participate in culture.³⁵ Theatre talks is a method which points to that neglected component. It allows participants to discuss different ideas and, in that way, become better informed about the issues raised. Additionally, the aim of theatre talks is not to come to any shared understandings or consensus, but only to share and listen to other people’s experiences. In all the projects that I have described above, this approach resulted in very positive outcomes: in the participants feeling appreciated and recognised³⁶. Thus, as I see it, the deliberative aspect of theatre talks is indisputable and beneficial, but there are other aspects that bring more value to the experience.

This additional value comes from how participants feel after theatre talks, how they reflect upon them (more broadly, after taking part in a theatrical event which includes theatre talks), and from how the event is organised. The circumstances of theatre talks enhance theatrical experience and bring the participants into a situation that is unusual.

Firstly, as I mentioned before, theatre takes time: spectators sit in the auditorium, share space with others, with only one focus – the stage. There is not much space for multitasking or being interrupted by the external world. When theatre talks are included, this experience does not end with the last applause. After the performance, the participants stay longer within the boundaries of the theatrical event, spend more time together to share thoughts, ideas, and listen to others. During the conversation, they are no longer in the auditorium, but the stage is still present in their conversations. Just like theatre itself, theatre talks take their time – the most precious commodity. Yet, instead of feeling stressed or under pressure, participants enjoy that “time steal” and appreciate sitting, talking, sharing, and experiencing together when the outside world becomes

33 Rosa 2015, 87.

34 Hansen 2013, 13.

35 Ibid.

36 E.g.: Scollen 2008b, 14; Scollen 2009, 8; Hansen 2013, 51; Rapior 2019, 539.

“suspended”. In her report, Hansen describes an example of this “suspension”:
“It has a value in itself to gain insight into the experiences of others. This quality also has something to do with the fact that as a participant you are offered a space where the normal social dynamics are partially suspended: It is liberating with regard to the participants’ daily roles and relationships to meet in a space where the focus is only on the theatrical experience.”³⁷ The time spent on talking about theatre is dedicated to that only. This focus allows for leaving the outside world outside, on hold with time slowing down due to the attention on the experience.

Secondly, the purpose of theatre talks is unusual for our present times. There is no goal for creating something together or coming to any consensus. The aim is to be and listen. With their utterances participants confirm that they indeed shared the experience and that other spectators belonged to the same community for the time being. The time spent together is uninterrupted and, one could say, unproductive. Focus stays on being present and open-minded towards other beings, but also to oneself. Participants share their thoughts and experiences. One of the young Danish participants of a theatre talks project noticed how beneficial the time spent on reflection was: “You get to process your thoughts about what you really think about the play, so you don’t just come out and think ‘well, this was good and this was bad’, and then that was that. It has been very good just to discuss the whole piece one more time.”³⁸ In order to experience that, participants need to meet themselves, have time and space for reflection, and then to share it with others. Theatre talks provide something otherwise rare in real life: time for reflection instead of time spent on doing (and catching up with plans).

Thus, when theatre talks take place, participants spend a significant amount of time in a theatrical event realm. This time is rather uninterrupted and without any measurable goal, i.e., unproductive. They spend this time with themselves and others. It is a time for reflection, sharing, being, listening, which are rare features of an accelerating world. Furthermore, this change can bring discomfort – not only is it an unusual way of spending one’s time, but it is also an entirely new situation for non-attenders to be in. After participating in theatre talks, they often feel that they do belong in theatre and are no different than other spectators; they feel appreciated and see that their opinion and experiences have value in themselves; they enjoy talking to other participants and take pleasure from the entire event (even if the performance was not to their liking); they feel moved as if something in them has changed³⁹. Those results allow me to think that theatre performances, especially when supplemented with theatre talks, have a potential of serving as oases of deceleration.

37 Hansen 2013, 51. (My translation: Det har en værdi i sig selv at få indblik i andres oplevelser. Denne kvalitet har også noget at gøre med, at man som deltager får tilbudt et rum, hvor de normale sociale dynamikker er delvis suspenderet: Det er frisættende i forhold til deltagerens daglige roller og relationer at mødes i et rum, hvor fokus kun er på teateroplevelsen.)

38 Hansen 2013, 17 (my translation: “Man får ligesom bearbejdet ens tanker om det, man egentlig synes om stykket, så du ikke bare lige kommer ud og tænker ‘nå det var godt og det var skidt’, og så var det ligesom det. Det har været meget godt lige at få vendt hele stykket en gang til.”).

39 Cf. Scollen 2008b, 13-15.

Conclusion

Theatre talks emphasise those features of theatre that allowed me to look at it as an oasis of deceleration. They bring to life bygone days, when there was time to sit down and talk to one another, to listen, and enjoy each other's company without looking at a clock. By this means, they emphasise the transformation that occurred in a society, where planning, synchronisation and being ready for a (unavoidable) change⁴⁰ are the most important skills expected from an individual, where productivity became a goal of all activities⁴¹. Theatre talks highlight the contrast between the everyday and non-everyday (here, specifically theatre). In this context, they can be seen as subversive. When a participant experiences a different way of using time and feels how good it makes them feel, there is a potential that they will want to bring changes into their life and possibly question the productive life as their aim. Like utopian performatives described by Jill Dolan, the possibility for change comes from a feeling: from how utopia could feel.⁴² Dolan looks at the performance and notices how community emerges out of the audience: when spectators feel a part of the whole or, in her words, when they experience themselves as part of a congenial audience who "experience a processual, momentary feeling of affinity."⁴³ She sees those moments of feeling together as inspiration for political change.

Theatre talks, I think, stress this utopian potential of theatre. Participants feel appreciated, united, important, moved, comfortable, or joyful. Those feelings come from an experience which is very different from what is expected in the everyday: from being with others, finding time to look at oneself, and reflect on one's thoughts, from spending time without any productive goal. Theatre talks provide a moment of living a different life – just like the famous concept of *hygge* (that I use here playfully in order to catch the core of what deceleration could feel like), which is supposed to bring cosiness, slowness, trust in being together in the world, sharing life, happiness, and having a break from an otherwise accelerating life.

40 Rosa 2015, 126.

41 see: Freeman 2010, 39.

42 Dolan 2005, 39.

43 Ibid.

AUTHOR

Daria Skjoldager-Nielsen, Stockholm University

Also publishes as Daria S. Nielsen. Holder of two MA degrees from the University of Lodz in marketing and theatre studies. PhD candidate in theatre studies, Stockholm University. Lecturer at the University of Lodz. Member of the IFTR working group The Theatrical Event. Vice chairwoman of Rococo Foundation researching cultural institutions' management and performance. Research interests: the theatrical event; new approaches to audience development, marketing and theatre; audience research. Recent publications: "Theatre Talks – Audience Development in Three Perspectives: Marketing, Cultural Policy and Theatrical Communication", in *Zarządzanie w kulturze* 2019, Tom 20, Numer 3; "The (Ir)replaceable Master Director – Considering the Case of the Odin Teatret" with Kim Skjoldager-Nielsen, in *Zarządzanie w kulturze* 2020, Tom 21, Numer 2.

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