

THE HUMAN ON STAGE FOR THE HUMAN IN CHAINS

**Theatre as a Medium in Human Rights Activism:
The Case of the *Item No 316* Performance**

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<p>This master's thesis combines two realms that have received only minor attention: Anti-trafficking theatre activism and the research of theatre audience experiences. The study is a data-driven qualitative content analysis of theatre audience's reception experiences considering the activist theatre performance, Item No 316, on the topic of human trafficking. The performance was staged seventeen times in the spring of 2013, in eight cities in Finland. The aim of this study is to clarify the function of activist theatre in relation to its audiences. This is done through the case of Item No 316.</p> <p>The data was gathered firstly through semi-structured group interviews with voluntary audience members right after the performances, and secondly by an e-mail questionnaire five months later. Altogether 30 spectators were interviewed in Turku, Tampere, Jyväskylä and Joensuu, and 24 of them later responded to the questionnaire. The data was analysed using qualitative content analysis and supporting quantitative content specification. The central theoretical background corresponding to the findings consists of media scholar Roger Silverstone's theory of 'proper distance', theatre scholar Lib Taylor's concept of 'emotional enlistment' and theatre scholar Peter Eversmann's analysis of the theatrical experience.</p> <p>The main results have to do with conceptions of the theatre medium, its most efficient means, the shared and individual aspects of its audience experiences, the change of thinking and action provoked by it and – most importantly – the influentality of theatrical emotions and the experienced increase in proximity of the performance and its topic. Theatre was conceived as a medium that enhances the experience of proximity with the distant suffering Others more than other media, and its capability to affect emotionally through theatricality and living body media was seen as a highly efficient provoker of change.</p> <p>The findings of this study defend the activist theatre medium's capability to engage its audiences on various levels: Firstly, into focusing on the delivered mediation of factual information and stories; secondly, into relating, identifying and empathising with the victims of social injustice as distant Others; and thirdly, into an ongoing mental process about the relevance and influence of the mediated social injustice for themselves and their everyday lives. Therefore, according to this study's audience experiences, the potential that theatre has to offer to activist causes might be considerable.</p>			
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<p>Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma yhdistää kaksi vähälle huomiolle jäänyttä aihetta: ihmiskauppaa vastustavan aktivismin ja teatterin yleisökokemusten tutkimisen. Tutkielma käsittelee aktivistiteatterin yleisökokemuksia ihmiskauppa-aiheisen Item No 316 -esityksen tapauksessa. Kyseistä teosta esitettiin yhteensä 17 kertaa keväällä 2013, kahdeksassa Suomen kaupungissa. Tutkielma on aineistolähtöinen laadullinen sisällönanalyysi katsojille järjestetyistä ryhmähaastatteluilta sekä kyselystä, ja sen tavoitteena on selvittää, miten teatteriesityksen aktivistiset tavoitteet ja keinot vaikuttavat katsojien kokemuksiin.</p> <p>Aineisto koostuu heti esityskokemuksen jälkeen järjestetyistä puolistrukturoiduista ryhmähaastatteluilta, sekä viisi kuukautta myöhemmin kerätyn sähköpostikyselyn vastauksista. Yhteensä 30:tä vapaaehtoista katsojaa haastateltiin Turussa, Tampereella, Jyväskylässä ja Joensuussa. Sähköpostikyselyn vastaukset saatiin 24:ltä heistä. Aineisto analysoitiin laadullisen sisällönanalyysin sekä tukea antavan määrällisen sisällönerittelyn keinoin. Aineiston perusteella keskeisimmiksi analyysin työvälineiksi valittiin mediatutkija Roger Silverstonen teoria sopivan vastaanottoetäisyyden luomisesta, teatteritieteilijä Lib Taylorin kehittämä käsite tunteellisesta sitoutumisesta, sekä teatteritieteilijä Peter Eversmannin aiemman yleisökokemustutkimuksen anti.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen keskeiset tulokset koskevat teatterin tehokkuuden osa-alueita, osallistujien käsityksiä teatterista mediana, yleisökokemusten jaettuina ja yksilöllisinä piirteinä, esityksen katsojissa aiheuttamia muutoksia, sekä tärkeimpinä tuloksina tunnekokemusten vaikuttavuutta ja kokemuksia läheisyyden voimistumisesta. Tutkimustulosten mukaan teatteri nähdään mediana, joka lisää läheisyyden kokemista vieraiden ja etäisten kärsivien toisten kanssa muuta mediaa enemmän. Teatterilla nähdään myös olevan kyky vaikuttaa tunteisiin näyttelijän kehollisen median sekä teatterillisten keinojen kautta niin, että kokemuksesta seuraa muutosta.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset puoltavat sitä, että aktivistiteatteri kykenee mediana sitouttamaan yleisönsä monilla tasoilla: Ensinnäkin, yleisö sitoutuu keskittymään välitettyihin faktatietoihin ja tarinoin. Toiseksi, yleisö sitoutuu luomalla suhteen, samaistumalla ja kokemalla empatiaa epäoikeudenmukaisuutta kärsiviä toisia kohtaan. Kolmanneksi, yleisö sitoutuu suostumalla ajatusprosessiin, joka käsittelee kyseisen epäoikeudenmukaisuuden merkitystä ja vaikutusta heihin itseensä ja heidän arkielämäänsä. Teatterin kyky toimia tehokkaasti aktivistimediana on siis tämän tutkimuksen yleisökokemusaineiston valossa vähintäänkin kiinnostava.</p>			
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1 INTRODUCTION

At the heart of any inquiry into the ethics of everyday life must be a concern with our relationships to each other. – Silverstone 2007, 117

This master's thesis studies the experience of receiving an activist theatre performance on a human trafficking. "The ethics of everyday life" and the relations with Others are the starting points here, for treating audience reception. This is because, every day, media invite us to incorporate some otherness, normally beyond reach, in our lives in order to widen our realm of experience. All media can transform the distance between counterparties, and through media individuals creatively negotiate their relationships with the surrounding world. (Silverstone 2007.) The theatrical medium, as a form of ritual, ceremony, spectacle and entertainment, is omnipresent in today's society, and as such it offers a way of asserting and questioning cultures (Harvie & Rebellato as cited in Kelleher 2009, vii). Theatre could be accused of being a slow or obsolete medium, but many forms of theatre, including politically engaged theatre, are actually immediate and punctual media. The actions of showing and saying – central in politics and media – that make some people visible and grant them the right of speech, are central in theatre too. These realms can make visible some who normally have no business being seen, or count as speakers some who have never raised their voices. (Kelleher 2009, 54–55, 68.) This thesis proposes that just as trafficking victims have often been left voiceless, so have the average theatre-goers' experiences been unheard (cf. Freshwater 2009).

1.1 Research aim and scope of the study

This thesis essentially aims at finding answers to the questions of theatre's efficiency as a medium for human rights activism. However, it approaches the theme through studying the audience experiences instead of trying to depict quantifiable effects. The definition of 'activist theatre' is understood here as theatre that is engaged socially or politically, has its focus on social justice and aims openly at affecting the audience's views and actions on the society or the world. The question of theatre's efficiency is intriguing, since it depends on the quality of audience's experiences – which are varied and can never be dictated beforehand. As the academic past has proved, the reception and effect studies on media products are a difficult field to tackle (see O'Neill 2011; Alasuutari 1999). Thus, this study is by no means trying to explicitly define the degree to which the theatre medium is or is not an efficient medium. However, it aims at gaining insight about what

are the strengths and weaknesses of the activist theatre medium like and how its effectiveness is experienced and described by the audience.

My interest in the topic of human trafficking arose already years ago inspired by anti-trafficking activism, namely The A21 Campaign. As a consequence, I started to work on the topic in the role of my other profession; drama instructor. I led a theatrical activist project in spring 2013, writing and directing an anti-trafficking theatre performance *Item No 316* (referred to as *IN316* in this thesis). I also chose it as my case study for this master's thesis research. *IN316* was a semi-professional activist theatre project aimed at raising awareness about trafficking. It was a voluntary project created by many Christian artists and the profits were donated to several anti-trafficking NGOs. *IN316* was performed to more than 1800 spectators in April-May 2013. Total of seventeen performances were presented in church auditoriums in Helsinki, Turku, Pori, Tampere, Jyväskylä, Joensuu, Lappeenranta and Lahti, in Finland.

The piece was postdramatic theatre, characterised by documentary theatre, in-her-face theatre, contemporary fragmented dramaturgy and the use of multimedia. The theatrical components strongly involved in the play were acting, dancing, music, audience participation, lighting, sound, projections, props and costumes. The script consisted mainly of Finnish and English, but also French, Spanish, Russian, German and Italian were used, and translations provided. The trafficking stories and facts in the play were largely compiled from real-life testimonials and NGO or government-provided facts. The play consisted of twenty scenes, with a total duration of one hour fifteen minutes. Scenes treated trafficking themes from sex slavery to child labour and unethical production of goods. A comprehensive description of *IN316* can be found in the Appendix 1.

1.2 Need for the study

In Finland the period of early 2010's was a time when trafficking as a human rights issue broke into the awareness of the wider public. The state of Finland launched the Assistance System for Victims of Human Trafficking in 2006 and the first criminal conviction was given the same year. The system assisted only a few customers every year until 2011 when the number of customers surpassed 20 for the first time. In 2013, 56 new customers were accepted into the program, in 2016 the number was 130 and in 2019 already 229, which shows that the growth is continuous. The types of trafficking also vary: in 2013 sex trafficking caught up with labour-related trafficking (mainly in catering, cleaning or gardening businesses) and has been growing ever since. (Finnish

Immigration Service 2020.) The amount of mass media coverage also grew. For example, an article search on the most widely distributed newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*'s internet page, with the search word "human trafficking", gave as a result 47 articles in 2003 compared to 118 articles in 2013 (*Helsingin Sanomat* 2020). Right before submitting this thesis, the newspaper reported about government-initiated plans of establishing a special police unit of 20 officers focusing on human trafficking (*Helsingin Sanomat* 1.11.2020). Trafficking has entered the sphere of theatre art as well; some institutional theatre's, too, have produced plays about trafficking in 2013 and onwards. Thus, *IN316* and this thesis are timely contributors to the wider societal discussion on trafficking.

The main academic justification for this work is that publications that treat theatre audiences, let alone their experiences, are few and rare. This is surprising because the presence of a watcher is indispensable for theatre's very existence, and audience research is commonplace in other mediated fields, e.g. film studies. One reason for this scarceness could be that the fleeting phenomenon of audience response is hard to study. (Freshwater 2009, 11.) There are indeed various challenges in studying theatre audiences:

The complexity of the performing arts audience lies in the fact that their experience includes both cognitive and affective responses, varies through the course of a performance as well as from one spectator to the next, and begins before they enter the theatre and continues long after they leave.

– Johanson 2013, 170

Especially research on ordinary theatre audiences' experiences is very scarce. This is why this kind of "asking the audience about the audience" approach, that leaves theatre professionals aside and refuses to assume responses, is urgently needed in the research of theatre media. (Freshwater 2009, 4.) Consequently, this thesis takes on an ambitious task and one of its challenges is the scarceness of former research on activist theatre audience experiences. Wondering in the crossroads of media and theatre studies, this work aspires to contribute to building a bridge between these two disciplines, thus widening the understanding of audience experiences. However, it must be noted that the use of theatre for different aims is an old phenomenon, and especially theatre practitioners have been mapping the characteristics of different practices, that can be identified as 'theatre for change' (Landy & Montgomery 2012).

1.3 The research context

The context of academic research consists of the chosen research strategy, methodology and the pool of knowledge already available about the phenomenon. This thesis adopts

an inclusive definition of media and resorts for theory to both media and theatre studies, dissolving different aspects into its approach, as the task at hand requires multidisciplinary means. It is mixed-methods research since it combines qualitative content analysis and content specification through quantification. (See Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 24, 138.) The data consists of group interviews and questionnaire answers that are coded and analysed in a data-driven manner. The research question is: What kind of experiences and experienced changes does an activist theatre play, designed to prompt the audience into action against social injustice, evoke in its audience?

The analysis brings up such central issues as documentarity, emotionality and proximity. The results are examined through the lens of such theoretical tools as: ‘proper distance’ that helps to understand how we can morally respond to the mediation of otherness in our everyday lives, ‘emotional enlistment’ that describes the power of emotional engagement in experiencing theatre, and in addition other theoretical background, including a former analysis of the theatrical experience (Silverstone 2007; Taylor 2011; Eversmann 2004). A specialty of this research is my double role: On one hand as a master’s thesis student doing academic research and on the other hand as the playwright and director of *IN316*. This double role presents challenges and limitations to the study, but it also has its upsides, both of which are further discussed later (3.4 & 5.2). This research project opened a new window into my personal point of interest: How to understand the audience better in order to use theatre's communicative potential in human rights activism in my work in theatre and media fields? I will start by discussing the bases of activist theatre and audience research in the following literature review.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review consists of two parts that present the academic background of activist theatre (2.1) and the discipline of audience studies (2.2). As this study treats the audience experiences of social justice activism through the theatre medium, there are several areas to cover in this review. I will now first connect *IN316* to its roots and roughly explain why theatre medium can be of interest to activism. The social justice field has thrived through various victories like abolishing slavery, dismantling colonial empires and the rising of the NGOs, just to name a few. The intellectual advocacy for social justice in the West has its roots back in the 17th century, and religious groups and movements have had a central role in its development. In the US the abolition of slavery and even creation of colleges with social science focus were results of social activism rooted on Christian values. Thus, activism performed by the *IN316* crew represents a continuum for this century-long tradition of Christian social justice activism. In the globalisation process, especially since World War II, social justice issues have become more and more international struggles. (Jansen 2011, 4–6.) Such is also the case of the thoroughly global, fastest-growing criminal industry of human trafficking: The estimated 40 million victims are often moved abroad in order to abuse them economically, mostly through labour exploitation, sex trade or forced marriages (The A21 Campaign 2020; Finnish Immigration Service 2020).

How then can the theatre medium be useful? Media scholar Roger Silverstone (2007, 12) claims that the mediated public space is cacophonous, fractured, disputed, unjust, repressive, imperial and is a constant place of struggle for attention, and more and more dominated by a few multinational companies. Also Sue Jansen (2011, 7, 18), who has studied social justice, argues that today's mainstream and corporate media, such as big TV, newspaper, and online companies, ignore social inequality issues and marginalise, through ridicule or inattention, major stories that fall outside the narrow range of acceptable media discourse. This is a strong claim, but in the case of trafficking one could easily argue that, at least in the past, the suffering caused to millions of its victims has not been in proportion with its media coverage. Trafficking has increased exponentially, but media coverage has not followed as steeply, maybe due to other big stories of our time, e.g. climate change, economic crises or wars, claiming the mainstream media (cf. Finnish Immigration Service 2020). In this media context, activist theatre can become a counter-discourse since it most commonly works as a medium for cases that cover vulnerable groups that raise controversial public attention, and whose

voices tend to stay unheard in the media (Paget 2010, 177; Reinelt 2009, 17). As Hammond & Steward (2008, 10) put it, “this sort of theatre provides what journalism fails to provide, and at a time when it is sorely needed.”

2.1 Activism through theatre

Theatre descends from the ancient ritual and religious storytelling traditions. It was constituted in Greek amphitheatres and has been a mediator of e.g. information, spiritual wisdom, fact-based stories or political campaigning, before the modern media was even starting to form. (Landy & Montgomery 2012, xvii.) As this thesis adopts a wide definition of ‘media’, it also states that theatre art can be defined as a medium also in the sense of information mediation (see Silverstone 2007, 5). This study especially focuses on mediation for an activist cause, which is a very common phenomenon in the realm of art – especially performing arts (Kelleher 2009). In this sub-chapter I will go through three different viewpoints to activist theatre: First, I will clarify social justice mediation, the preconditions that today’s media set to its morality and the concept of ‘proper distance’ as a solution to the challenges of representing otherness (2.1.1). Secondly, I will briefly go through the backgrounds of activist theatre (2.1.2). Thirdly, I will discuss activist theatre’s strengths and weaknesses (2.1.3) and lastly, as a summary, I will touch the problematic question of activist theatre’s efficiency (2.1.4).

2.1.1 Social justice mediation and the media

When dealing with anti-trafficking activism, there is always some kind of an understanding of human rights and social justice as a basis. Jansen explains (2011, 11) that ‘social justice’ is a term that is hard to define since it means different things to different interest groups, and also the presumed ways to attain it vary. Most commonly social justice activists are grounding their demands and aims on the globally shared *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) that has individual and universal freedom at its core (United Nations 2020). Another way of understanding the basis of fighting for social justice, be it academic study or practical activism, is that there is always empathy as a common root (Jansen 2011, 2). Empathy works as an impetus for compassion which in turn is a longer-term state, apart from temporary feelings, that makes a moral demand on us to ease the suffering of Others (Arthurs 2012, 146). It implies a shared desire to identify and change social forces that systematically complicate the life of some, depriving them of their human dignity, while favouring others unfairly (Jansen 2011, 4–5). Another concept at the root of social justice activism is ‘solidarity’, that can be

defined as the imperative to act with goodness towards vulnerable Others without anticipation of reciprocation (Chouliaraki 2011, 164).

To understand the centrality of media in social justice movements, it must be understood that media are constitutive of today's civic, moral and social world systems and contemporary societies revolve around communication – similarly to the everyday lives of individuals (Jansen 2011, 6; Alasuutari 1999, 11, 17; Silverstone 2007, 5). It is in the everyday life, constrained by physical and social, where bodies live and humanity is constructed through identities, relationships, connections and communities and where the material and the symbolic struggles of existence are happening (Gibbs 2011, 264; Sandvoss 2011, 248; Silverstone 2007, 108–109). Its pervasiveness is due to social beings' dependency on the supply of public meanings for their own meaning making. The privileged mass media play a central role in the creation of socially constructed meanings; however, it has a counterforce in the receivers' creative engagement with their media products. (Silverstone 2007, 109.) The power that media has is grounded in the way it deals with appearance: On the one hand, it is the context, the space where the world appears to us and on the other hand, this appearance in media actually constitutes and constructs our world – and in turn contextualises the media (ibid., 6, 27). Theatre too, works in two ways as it is detached from the reality it represents while depending on that very reality for its meanings (Kelleher 2009, 6).

According to Silverstone (2007, 119), since Guy Debord's work *La société du spectacle* (1967), spectacle has been seen as an important part of the "media's totalitarian occupation of the spaces of the everyday". For Debord (as cited in Jürs-Munby et al. 2013, 18), spectacle crucially means that production and reception are separated, and it ultimately points to exteriority. Due to spectacularisation, the societies' self-understanding and self-reflection is done through dramaturgical structures and a new kind of unique aesthetic understanding of reality is born – this can mould opinions and create whole new epistemological frames (Reinelt 2010, 28–29). Radical performativity scholar Baz Kershaw (2003, 591–592) proposes, further emphasising spectacle's significance, that the element of spectacle is "an especially potent force for change" aimed at producing strong reactions, and thus central in activism. It is an ambivalent form of cultural performance because it can be either positively or negatively experienced and thus the same display of excess can provoke disgust or fascination. According to Kershaw, it is central for activism how the forces of spectacle and

performativity actually reconstruct the human subject and engage automatically with the most notable social power relations. (Ibid., 592–594.)

The problems of spectacle touch also the mediation of otherness. Media scholar Lilie Chouliaraki (2011, 369), who has studied humanitarian communication, argues that also solidarity communication is under drastic changes due to the instrumentalisation of humanitarian action in the system of global neoliberalist capitalism. The new branding, celebrity and social media communication cultures shift the understandings of solidarity, focusing on the western self-subjects instead of the suffering Others (ibid., 164, 368). Representations of victimhood have been accused of allowing audiences to feel pleasures of self-satisfaction and vicarious suffering when they do the right thing and can thus feel virtuous; these kinds of representations are especially ineffective in reaching for justice (Berlant 2004, 71). Thus, representations should be free from dominant western viewpoints and voyeuristic aesthetics as well as avoid seeing trafficking victims as objects of knowledge and humanitarian concern – instead conceiving them as a heterogeneous group that can have agency (Arthurs 2012, 142, 144).

Ultimately, globalisation has increased fragmentation of lived realities and made it more visible than ever that experiences of the world, mediated or direct, are culturally specific and highly plural (Silverstone 2007, 6, 15–16). Otherness and sameness are present as building blocks to create individual and collective global imaginaries: they create “a sense of there being an elsewhere; a sense of that elsewhere being in some way relevant to me; a sense of my being there.” Silverstone criticises global media’s representations of otherness as inadequate because they often provide no resources to understand the differences, which in turn produces “either worldly indifference or hostility, both strategies for denial”. (Ibid., 10, 28.) Global cultural products and circulations have created a sense of a global paradigm that encloses billions of people. A new kind of globalised performative society has been born, where performing arts are present most often through the media of theatre, film, television and the internet. Today anyone can perform dramatic action to a global audience, but these dramatic actions, when mediated, mean engagement through disengagement and thus ignore the social and political aspects of the theatrical. (Kershaw 2003, 604; Landy & Montgomery 2012, 122.) Thus, moral responsibility is always present in using the media, especially in representing mediated otherness, as the audience is always responsible for their responses. This raises new challenges for solidarity and empathy, the bases of social justice mediation. (Alasuutari 1999, 11; Silverstone 2007; Miller & Whalley 2017, 17.)

Fundamentally, Silverstone (2007, 3, 127) is concerned about media's capacity to engage its audiences in the suffering of the Others and in their complex worlds. According to him, our West-dominated mediational realm brings the Other to our attention and provides a framework, defining the participation and the relationship we can possibly have or refuse to have with the distant Other (ibid., 3–4, 110). However, this visibility is only a starting point after which we must adopt the responsibility to listen and to respond in order to understand, since merely seeing things does not automatically invoke moral response, understanding or knowledge of the truth. In other words, media request us to recognise difference and to ethically consider our responses as an audience and as (potential) citizens – not only concerning the people physically around us but distant Others too – acknowledging that there are no separate worlds and not intervening in the crises of the Other is no longer a possibility. (Ibid., 7, 17, 26.)

This brings us towards the questions of 'proximity' which is an emotional and strategic keyword in media practices. There are various kinds of proximities: at least the concepts of geographical, cultural, social, emotional, moral and virtual proximities have been used in media research. Proximity can also be understood as an act of interpretation work done by the audiences. In the study of proximity, one of the key questions has been how the media succeeds in the task of managing the relationship, of creating an appropriate level of proximity, between the audience and the distant Other. (Ahva & Pantti 2014, 322–325, 331.) This is because, while media connect people, they at the same time paradoxically disconnect them. Media allow us to widen our action beyond the face-to-face, but the mediated connection makes us lose the sense of responsibility towards each other as well as the potential for reciprocity that normal face-to-face connection contains. That is why Silverstone's concept of 'proper distance' is needed. The term entails the ability to widen one's perspective and be willing to identify the Other in his or her sameness and difference. (Silverstone 2007, 11, 119.) It is central in proper distance to include the voice of the Others and represent them as people who actively strive to manage their lives regardless of the unjust conditions, as Chouliaraki (2011, 374–375) aligns.

To create proper distance, one needs to have imagination but also context: the event's location somewhere far away, the receivers' impotence in making a difference, the history of the event in question, the political and societal situations or simply the screen itself in the living room can be considered contexts. There is no fixed point for proper distance which means that it has to be created each time something is represented or received. The challenges of proper distance start when the material is prepared for its

mediation by the mediator, they continue when the material is released in the channels of global media, but their point of resolving is in the receivers' thoughts and actions. Trust works as an instrument for distance management as it reduces experienced distance. What then hinders proper distance is the inability of the receiver to understand the context and intentions of the communicator. (Silverstone 2007, 121–123.)

As inhabitants of today's world, we have no choice but to trust the media despite their various and obvious faults (lack of context, overdependence on the immediate, oversimplification of situations, the shock factor etc.) since trusting media is compulsory for trusting the world and for social life to continue. But the solution to this problem is that our trust has to be media literate, informed, active, sceptical, conditional and responsibility driven. (Ibid., 120, 124, 127.) The *IN316* performances were striving to engage the audience into giving this kind of moral responses and this thesis strives to track whether such responses actually were experienced in the reception. Now, as we have seen, globalisation, spectacularity and need for moral responses are preconditions that shape media spheres and have to be considered when researching audience experiences of social justice mediation. In the next section I will move forward to examine the activist theatre medium specifically.

2.1.2 Background of activist theatre

Activist theatre is closely related to direct political action and all kinds of non-conventional theatre practices aiming at social change (Paget 2010, 176). Landy and Montgomery (2012, xviii, 130) explain, in their book *Theatre for Change*, that the disciplines of non-conventional theatre making have developed from the 19th century's drastic changes in understanding performance and are lacking coherence and consistent concepts. To avoid the mess of overlapping terminology, they offer as an overarching umbrella concept 'theatre for change', that includes all forms of applied theatre as well as more aesthetic-based postdramatic theatre performances that have political or social aims. These forms aim at consciously informing and transforming the people involved, be they actors or audience. (Ibid., xx–xxii, 165.)

'Postdramatic theatre', a concept by Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006, 17), reconfigures theatre's relationship to politics: A closer relation to reality is adopted, compared with more traditional dramatic theatre, and audience's role is seen as more active than simply "consuming an aesthetic reality". This theatre form inherently emphasises the interaction of performers and the audience as well as the audiences' active engaging in sensory and

communal experiences. However, only a small portion of postdramatic theatre is activist theatre. (Jürs-Munby et al. 2013, 5–6; Dietze 2013, 143.) On the other hand, the wide field of ‘applied theatre’, connected to philosophy and social sciences, offers various viewpoints to the use of theatre as a tool for social change, as it challenges the existing order and voices the marginal views – even if all of the approaches are not explicitly activist. Different subsections are e.g. theatre for development, theatre-in-education and theatre as a tool for social work. Some projects are openly political and protest the current state of things, but others contribute to raising awareness, teaching new skills, building communities and developing political consciousness through education. (Landy and Montgomery 2012, 130; Shalson 2017, 7.) Many of the practices of applied theatre are rooted in the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire and the consequent theatrical work of Augusto Boal, meanwhile another notable branch leans on Bertolt Brecht’s heritage (Landy & Montgomery 2012, xvii, xix, 131). Landy and Montgomery define ‘change’ as awareness and action, following the footsteps of Freire:

[T]he actor and viewer are provided the opportunity through an engagement with the aesthetic object of performance to develop their critical consciousness and to rehearse options toward action. – Landy & Montgomery 2012, xx

Pursuing change is naturally also political. Theatre speaks of our worlds and the worlds of Others, standing up for us like a political representative. It invites us to make judgements on the lives represented as well as on the quality of their representation, to reflect upon ourselves, our societal environment and our culture. (Kelleher 2009, 10–11; Eversmann 2004, 158.) As activist theatre scholar Joe Kelleher (2009, 6, 65) explains, theatre always makes claims about reality and chooses to show some things (in a premeditated way) and leave others in the dark, which means it is partial (as is all representation) – even more so in the case of activism.

Activist theatre often aims at being a non-conventional phenomenon, outside of the sphere of established institutionalized theatre. It is sometimes referred to with more or less synonymous terms like ‘political theatre’, ‘alternative theatre’, ‘contentious performance’ or ‘theatre for social justice’. To define activist theatre, this thesis borrows the definition Charles Tilly (2008, 5) proposes for contentious performance: It groups performances and public actions where “actors make claims bearing on someone else’s interests, in which governments appear either as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties”, criticizing the current state and demanding change. These performances address highly contested issues that often fracture the public into different opinion camps.

Sometimes theatre is inspired by protest (a form of performance in itself) and prolongs the immediate political action, sometimes it exposes political problems and sometimes it is in itself an instrument of direct non-violent action. (Shalson 2017, 5, 12–15.) However non-conventional and antagonistic activist theatre might be, artistic radicality and its activist dimension cannot be measured by its anti-institutionality, as sustainable social institutions are often a prerequisite for social justice (Jackson 2011, 14). Theatre scholar Derek Paget (2010, 188, 190) emphasises that activist theatre should be seen as an accretion to a wider field of activism since all its forms take as a starting point an adjacency to fact that is expected to promote ethical response and increase the possibilities of audience commitment. I will next shortly discuss the recent history and characteristics of social justice mediation through theatre.

The 20th and the 21st century have been fairly animated in the field of theatre activism, as theatre has been a notable contributor to social and political movements: The suffragette movement of the 1910's was training women for public speaking and staging plays. The Workers' Theatre Movements of the 20's and 30's performed all kinds of agitprop sketches. In the 60's, there was a great explosion in the amount of grassroots theatre companies supporting political movements. The American theatre companies, such as Free Southern Theatre, San Francisco Mime Troupe, El Teatro Campesino and the Bread and Puppet Theatre took part in activist movements of various sorts. In the 60's, also Marxist 'guerrilla theatre' created a framework for a non-hierarchical theatre collective that exists in a local community and addresses its needs and problems. (Shalson 2017, 11–13.) From the 60's onwards documentary theatre forms increased in popularity among the activists (Paget 2010, 174). In the 70's, a noteworthy branch of activist theatre was created in Brazil: Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, that aims at addressing the problems of each community, radically enhancing the agency of the oppressed (Boal 1979; Shalson 2017, 7). In the 80's Britain, there was a strong brutalist theatre movement called 'in-yer-face' which criticized the society with an appalling shock factor (Sierz 2001). In the 90's, a new strong wave of single cause documentary theatre arose with e.g. *The Vagina Monologues* declaring women's rights for sexual independence. In the 2000's *Lysistrata Project* protested the war and invasion of Iraq. In the 2010's Occupy Broadway events fought alongside the Occupy movement. (Shalson 2017, 11–12; Paget 2010, 173; Reinelt 2010, 27.) These are just a few examples of the vast variety of theatre activism.

Paget (2010, 173–174) explains that in the 60's and 70's atmosphere of changing the world, theatre events were a part of party-related political activism and offered people a chance to see themselves as agents of change. He says that simply attending an alternative theatre performance was considered an expression of political commitment, let alone participating in the production of it. Starting from the 80s, moving toward 90s, disappointment in former political theatre increased and the search for new modes of intervention was fervent (Dietze 2013, 129). The nature of activist theatre shifted from fierce generalised political commitment and influential political theories into specific single-issues activism. This has profoundly changed how the interventions in the public sphere ought to be done, as performative campaigning and “acting” in all its meanings has increased in societies of spectacle. Single-issues theatre is often dependent on pre-set agendas, initiatives and campaigns started by NGOs, charities or governments – and their funding. This new kind of a collaboration with organisations, and the multifunctional and multifaceted approach to theatre production, became a cornerstone in participating in the public sphere. Different functions of an activist theatre group can be e.g. performance production, educational workshops, outreach to the vulnerable group itself and voluntary actors creating a base of actor-activists that are ready to participate in activist theatre work. (Paget 2010, 175–177, 180; Kershaw 2003, 593; Actors for Human Rights 2020.) In the case of *IN316* funding was resolved by voluntary work, but a close cooperation was established with an anti-trafficking NGO VALO – Ei orjuudelle. I will now introduce documentary theatre, as it is similar to the form of *IN316*.

Documentary theatre, also called ‘fact-based theatre’, is an old branch of activist theatre with various traditions during the 20th century. It entails theatre that mainly bases its content on documents of reality, be it spoken or written ones. Documentary theatre is a heavily event and issue-centred as well as context-based art form, and therefore it blooms in the times of societal trouble. It most commonly targets social change, attacking single issues, while relying on verbatim speech. (Paget 2010, 173–174; Reinelt 2010, 37.) The ‘verbatim’ is a technical means, not an end in itself. The term means citing word-for-word on stage a text with real-life origins. (Hammond & Steward 2008, 9.) Documentary theatre has had a strong new coming during the last three decades, especially in Britain and the USA. It has gained mainstream position, emerging on Broadway and in the West End. (Ibid., 11; Paget 2010, 173; Reinelt 2010, 38.) This is thought to be due to audiences’ will to get in contact with the indexical traces of reality in a world full of unsolvable uncertainties (Reinelt 2009, 12–13). Susanna Kuparinen’s two documentary

theatre series called *Valtuusto* (2008–2010) and *Eduskunta* (2011–2012) proved that documentary theatre is a relevant form also in Finland (Junttila 2012, 235). It has thus become clear that truth-based theatre can be successful high-quality art (Reinelt 2010, 27; Shalson 2017, 9). Alongside the boom of documentary theatre, a new, provoking style of in-her-face theatre was developed in the 90's, notably in Britain. It was said to be offensive, degrading and excessive but still it succeeded in finding new viewpoints for political analysis and expressing the young generation's alienation from society. The new playwrights wanted to invite the audience very close through sensationality, to share extreme emotions created by the stage events, not to observe them and speculate about them. (Taylor 2011, 3, 6; Sierz 2001.)

Characteristically, documentary theatre engages the audience emotionally through detailed real-life stories while still addressing political issues. It can bring a specific event or a distant situation closer and make it publicly and personally relevant. It offers details and context in a concrete way and expresses the contradictions of the topic adequately, potentially deepening the audience engagement, which is central to activism and the very key to this thesis. A theatre play on social justice can look for the audience's empathy by creating a possibility for identification with the human problems through a three-dimensional character on stage. (Taylor 2011, 4, 7, 18; Paget 2010, 178, 188.) In verbatim theatre, the actors in a way resurrect the real-life speakers of the words and represent them on stage (Hammond & Steward 2008, 9). The emphasis on the actor's live presence and voice can give a special weight to the spoken text and enhance the contact with the original speaker. Alertness of an actor mirrors and reminds us of the engagement necessary to understand the experience of the Others. (Paget 2010, 182, 186–187.)

Documentary theatre and verbatim techniques can be highly varied and hybrid (Taylor 2011, 8; Hammond & Steward 2008, 12; Reinelt 2010, 27). Most applied theatre tends to be low-tech and interpersonal (Landy & Montgomery 2012, 122). Often activist theatre concepts are created around the utility: a play needs to be simple and easily portable in order to be performed in multiple locations with a reasonable amount of work.

Sometimes, not least for this utility perspective, documentary or other activist theatre risks being dismissed (even by its practitioners) as propaganda, pleading or preaching – or accused of not being “real art”. (Paget 2010, 180–181.) Leaving aside the portable, marginal and alternative nature of activist theatre, it often helps the cause if a well-known venue, an established NGO or prominent artists are co-operated with. After all, the goal of activist theatre is to reach a wide audience in order to promote the issue, expand the

group of supporters and apply leverage to agencies that can have some influence to advance the cause. (See *ibid.*, 178–179.)

2.1.3 Strengths and weaknesses of activist theatre

Let us first take a look at the strengths and weaknesses of theatre in relation to politics. Politics is here understood as determining relations of power, and this distribution of power happens through social relations in designated spaces, e.g. in mass media or in theatre (Collini 2004). According to Kelleher (2009), theatre contributes to the political by interrupting the things that are taken for granted in politics and making space for creating new. He states that “theatre’s job, politically speaking, is to oppose the current state of consensus by provoking disagreements of various sorts.” This is the case, because theatre is able to imagine other (even paradoxical) realities and depict them. It has a “political-ready quality” as well because it happens in the instant and gathers people around issues of common concern. (*Ibid.*, 10, 72–73.) Kelleher points out:

Whatever – – this or that theatre is capable of provoking, and however we are capable of responding as spectators and as participants, the politics is unavoidable, is bound to come around sooner or later. – Kelleher 2009, 16

Katsouraki (2017, 291–292) argues, on the other hand, that theatre is not political per se, but the experience of theatre is rendered political by the staging of ways of speaking and the underlying reasons. However, she too, admits that the act of gathering together has always been seen as a political and democratic act (*ibid.*, 294). Especially documentary theatre’s search for solutions makes space for the audience to be engaged in dialogue on public affairs, engaging the reason and sympathy of the audience instead of alienating them (Taylor 2011, 23–24). However, theatre’s potential for actively working in the realm of the political has been doubted too. There have even been suggestions that theatre as a pale image of reality actually threatens to paradoxically eclipse it and lessen the seriousness of the real issue at hand (see Shalson 2017, 6; Kelleher 2009, 8–9, 15). Sometimes also documentarism in a play does disservice for its political aim: Focusing fervently on the documentarity and the correctness of the claims, the audience can leave aside the true (political) meaning of the artwork (Kuparinen 2011, 203). One of the special techniques of emphasising the political is theatre’s trick of distancing and ‘estrangement’, originally known from Brecht’s work, that enhanced distance between actor and audience, passion and reason. This technique plays in different ways with the amount of immersiveness the performance evokes in order to reveal fresh viewpoints and promote audiences’ thinking – to re-activate them. (Landy & Montgomery 2012, 124;

Jürs-Munby et al. 2013, 13.) In a documentary play, for example, humour can provoke distancing: The play between patheticness and distancing can grotesquely carnivalize some aspects while being extremely serious about the content (Kuparinen 2011, 198).

Another aspect of theatre that can be seen as a strength or as a dangerous characteristic is the high emotionality experienced in theatre. Emotional engagement has even been considered a goal of theatre (Sierz 2001; Freshwater 2009, 27). It is not surprising in a world where “the emotional is cultivated as a primary means of marshalling and impelling action in the current political climate” (Taylor 2011, 23). In theatre, things are encountered through someone else’s description and they are indeed designed to awaken something particular in us (Kelleher 2009, 8). The simultaneous trend of in-yer-face and documentary theatre was an urgent search for emotional response using “poetics of immediacy” (Megson 2006, 529–532). There was a goal of cultivating an emotionally engaged audience through the means of confrontation and immediate style. A crucial question remains: is the emotional response in itself political and how? (Taylor 2011, 2, 7.) Paget (2010, 174) critically responds that emotional commitment can have non-political meanings too, which means a spectator can also commit to a play due to e.g. his or her favorite actor, coinciding life situation etc. The above-mentioned proximity is a key concept in experiencing media and the feeling of proximity is closely tied to emotions (Ahva & Pantti 2014, 328). Emotional proximity can be defined as the ability of media to invoke affective interpretations and closeness to the events. As a technique, it uses emotional appeal or personal identifications. (Qureshi 2007.) When representing a real event in a way that reveals its tragic consequences, emotional proximity can create a powerful moment-by-moment experience of spatial and temporal presence that manifest by physical sensations (Ahva & Pantti 2014, 329; Taylor 2011, 9–10).

Theatre studies professor Lib Taylor (2011) sees emotional engagement in theatre audience as something that can be intellectual and political too. The strategies of directness and immediacy function critically to promote intellectual understanding and increase ‘emotional enlistment’, that Taylor defines as activist theatre’s strategy that aligns audiences rationally and emotionally with specific political perspectives offered by the drama (not with specific characters of the drama), winning them over with persuasion. Enlistment can also exploit existing sympathy or transform passive sympathy to active participation. However, enlistment has its dangers: the audience is always free to enlist themselves for or against the suggested viewpoint. When spectators become enlisted, they join in a group that is willing to act together and share beliefs, which in

turn comes very naturally to any public or audience that gets emotionally engaged with a drama. (Ibid., 2, 9–12) In a way it is logical, because live performances are powerful moments where performance and the audience produce memorable experiences together, in other words, the audience becomes committed to the process and the production of their own experience (Hill 2011, 486).

This search for emotional response brings about questions of content. Facing most brutal or explicit media content, we should question to what end this material was mediated and what kind of a distance it created between the subject and its audience (Silverstone 2007, 121). Theatre medium's representations about violence and victimhood are additionally complicated by the live acting and the unpredictable audience responses (Kelleher 2009, 14). Activist theatre can be quite harsh, using provocation, shock, irritation, compelling or violence to affect its audience. This kind of harsh performances can forcibly activate people and steal audiences' sense of autonomy and security, due to losing the "safe distance". (Dietze 2013, 138–139, 142.) Brutal imagery can simultaneously be shocking for their tragedy, but also familiar for their common context of representation; these kinds of images are flashed through screens into our receiving systems very often. Meanwhile, this imagery can represent people we can identify with, despite their possible otherness – or just as possibly we can choose distancing and reject any identification with them. (Silverstone 2007, 121–122.) When something tragic is represented on a theatre stage, spectators might feel sympathy for the ones suffering or indignation caused by the events they cannot affect but, at the same time, they might have a sense of detachment because it is 'only theatre', even if the staged events would represent real events of the world. (Kelleher 2009, 8–9; Kuparinen 2011, 202.) However, Kelleher (2009, 9) still trusts the power of political theatre and states that this kind of detachment would not block the audience from taking in what's happening and reflecting upon it and its political bearings.

Theatre scholars Freshwater and Paget recognise the risks of images and stories of suffering. Paget (2010, 190) asks whether "bearing witness" of injustice solely serves exhibiting social conscience and Freshwater (2009, 52) sees watching representations of suffering as a possible way to "sate the undeniable public appetite for gore, [and] sensation" – especially when we have no possibility of making a difference. Voyeuristic aesthetic invites us, through graphic imagery, to emotionally embrace the spectacle of suffering and immerse ourselves in the immediacy of sensationalism (Chouliaraki 2006, 149). Another problem in receiving representations of suffering is that an overload of

negative emotional reactions, ‘compassion fatigue’ so to say, can hinder empathy and increase distance – or repel the spectator from the medium in question. Thus, media products can evoke a strong emotional proximity, even a sense of being there, but that does not necessarily bring about any moral proximity as audience can still look at the situation from their own perspective, not identifying with the Other. (Ahva & Pantti 2014, 329–331; Landy & Montgomery 2012, xxiv.) Consequently, when seeing tragic events in theatre, the audience’s political potential does not come to fulfil in the emotional sympathising but in the critical thinking: Only critical thinking can help people to identify the acts of injustice that cause the events and take a position where they can do something about them through political engagement (Davis & Postlewait 2003).

Now, let us take a look at possible dangers in the use of (documentary) theatre for activism. In a performance, a charismatic person on stage is often trying to convince the audience out of their scepticism and into producing the kind of beliefs that are desired (Hill 2011, 486). As theatre for change aims at influencing people, its potential can be dangerous in the use of authoritarian and ethically distorted instances, as history shows (Landy & Montgomery 2012, 124, 166). The claim for truth, that works by emphasising the use of real-life documentary material, is a unique characteristic of documentary forms. Documentary theatre can offer directness through claimed truthfulness in the nowadays world dominated by mediation, hyper-reality and imitation. (Paget 2010, 174; Taylor 2011, 19–20; Reinelt 2009, 9–10, 40.) Instead of repackaging experiences, information or observations within a fictional situation (a theatrical drama) and hiding the sources, a documentary play brings forward and underlines its roots in real-life.

Even if a real-life document is the starting point and is somehow embedded in the cultural product, the ontological questions and the status of the document are hard to define, as they evoke questions about truth, integrity, fiction, research and editing. When a theatre director makes a claim to veracity, theatre and journalism are overlapping, and it changes everything for the audience: In addition to seeing a play, the audience also sees an assumingly accurate source of information. (Hammond & Steward 2008, 10–13; Reinelt 2009, 7.) The stand that each documentary theatre piece takes is constructed through the material included in the drama, designed to come close to or stay distant from the audience (Taylor 2011, 8). Thus, the audience can be seen as a co-producer of the reality, since they choose to validate or criticize the truthfulness of the documents, choosing which facts to adopt and whether or not to strengthen the documentation through their pre-existing knowledge (Reinelt 2010, 10–11, 40).

Severe critique has been presented proposing the possibility of documentary theatre being just another form of propaganda for the sake of specific arguments, “inventing its own particular truth through elaborate aesthetic devices” (Martin 2006, 10). Bottoms (2006, 56–57) argues that there is a lack of self-referentiality and reflexivity when theatre plays claim to be “documents”; transparent reconstructions of the real offering unmediated access to *the reality*, not differentiating it from *realism* in theatre. According to him, theatre should acknowledge the ambiguous, selective and manipulative potential it has. Reinelt (2009, 8) also admits that there is a problematic tension between objective fragments of reality and subjective treatment of those fragments through creating representations. Some critics go as far as claiming verbatim theatre to be inherently exploitative and voyeuristic. This critique often continues into asking the same questions about theatre that have lately been associated with reality television. (Hammond & Steward 2008, 12.)

However, Paget (2010, 188) claims that the mediation of documentary material through theatre and the so enabled conversation between the original material, the artists and the audience is actually a profoundly ethical reflex. He says there is a mutual desire to hear about an ethical and social problem, and it can be thought of as a desire to hear better and politically and suggests that we ask the following question: Does documentary theatre bring us closer to or distance us further from current crises? Taylor (2011, 21), Reinelt (2010, 40) and Kuparinen (2011, 194) too defend documentary theatre’s capability to actually avoid the lack of reflexivity through self-conscious use of real material, using its authority to anchor itself to reality. Also, considering emotional enlistment, Taylor admits that the tendency to use emotional tactics can be sometimes considered manipulative, sentimental or idealistic. Despite the critique and the manipulative potential of activist theatre, she sees that audience enlistment is rather neutral in nature, as it does not have a specific political orientation in itself. The emotional engagement must, after its creation, be transformed into political action, and the ways of channelling this emotional energy can be either negative or positive. (Taylor 2011, 21–22.)

2.1.4 Summary: Efficiency remains a mystery

Going through the backgrounds and challenges of theatre for change, especially its more antagonistic and activist forms, it is revealed how complex the relationship between theatrical presentation and the social and political reality truly is. As the theatre medium counts as art, and only occasionally adheres to documentarity or factuality, it remains a

diverse field of different theatrical cases that are difficult to classify. The mediation and final results of such cases vary so much that the success and efficiency of activist theatre is far from self-evident. Waldahl (1998, 56) points out that there is often “a great difference between the cognitive processes which the media *may* stimulate, and those which are *actually* stimulated.” And indeed, way too little evidence of activist theatre’s influentiaity has been collected (Paget 2010, 176; Kennedy 2009, 3; Freshwater 2009, 4). Intuitively many say that theatre-provoked judgements can attain impressive effects and thus theatre should be used in order to change the world (Kelleher 2009, 10–11, 16). Thus, live performance can be sometimes over-optimistically seen as a uniquely powerful medium for impacting people (Freshwater 2009, 3–5, 9; Paget 2010, 180).

However, theatre’s capacity to intervene in the social and to act politically had been doubted and criticised far before the millennium (Shalson 2017, 6; Kelleher 2009, 58). Playwright Peter Handke said (1985, 313) that theatre is a useless tool in changing any social institutions, since it is a social institution itself, and thus works in the same ways and is limited by the same rules as any other one. Many scholars and theatre practitioners have stated that for political theatre to succeed it has to be renewed: e.g. theatres’ disciplinary systems have to be rearranged, or politics, arts and everyday life have to be combined in non-separate ways, or the whole of reality has to be transformed into a space of theatrical play that could work as a rehearsal for revolutionary social change. (Ibid., 314; Kelleher 2009, 58; Boal 1979, 122; Kershaw 1999.) Consequently, theatre’s potential for change has been tested by bringing theatre out of the traditional establishments to the streets, shopping malls, and churches (which is exactly what *IN316* did), which also in part led to the development of applied theatre (Kelleher 2009, 58; Landy & Montgomery 2012, 159).

Theatre scholar Peter Eversmann (2004, 158) boldly states that performance has the power to challenge audiences’ norms and values and change perspectives on the world. He says people are not only touched by theatre but they “actively engage in an internal debate about the issues raised by the performance”. Landy and Montgomery (2012, xvii), too, state that “performance becomes a means for changing understanding, power dynamics, consciousness and behaviour”. They say that when action and observation are combined with critical reflection this practice can lead to world-changing action, regardless of whether it starts from the actor or the observer. Like them, countless theatre scholars and practitioners defend theatre’s potential to empower politically, to awaken

social responsibility, to educate, to enable critical and ethical engagement – but equally many criticize such faith (Freshwater 2009, 55, 58–59). But indeed, semiotically speaking, theatre is a special case due to its diverse polyphonic semiotic system and highly varied pools of signs (Barthes 1979, 261; Balme 2015, 123; Eversmann 2004, 143). But however semiotically unique theatre is, researching, measuring or demonstrating how it can act as a catalyst or a contributor for social change, or even understanding the fleeting phenomenon of audience response, is difficult and easily contaminated by bias (Paget 2010, 176; Kennedy 2009, 3; Freshwater 2009, 11).

According to Paget (2010, 188–189) the leverage of single-issues theatre activism simply depends on the degree of commitment and the amount of resources invested, similarly to old party-political activism. Taylor (2011, 12) and Reinelt (2009, 12) on the other hand, emphasise that it is precisely the emotional efficiency that can promote activism and public engagement, even if the outcome can never be guaranteed. Reinelt (2010, 38) concludes that theatre alone, even if actively making culture, seldom provokes social change but more often works as a contributor. In addition, the evaluation of the political effectiveness of documentary theatre depends on the nature of spectators' enlistment: it can be resistant as well as complicit, or even both at the same time. However, it is undeniable that theatre indeed has a close connection with public affairs, as politics and theatre are public spheres where one can debate and consequently join up with an offered point of view. (Taylor 2011, 12–13.) This is because a performance is dependent on a relational system, that it itself puts in motion. This inherent relational nature makes it an appropriate sphere for handling social issues and bringing into light dependences that have to do with expression and coexistence. (Jackson 2011, 30.) It is also why, intuitively, theatre making practices and human rights activism can be seen as close realms; the former stages human relationships and the latter reveals violations in them (Rae 2009, 1–4). Performance also has a different quality than the everyday life reality, and this quality can be thought central in delivering social and political critique: It builds a distance from reality, that controversially takes place in a context that somehow is still real (Jürs-Munby et al. 2013, 14; Lehmann 2006, 185). Katsouraki explains:

[T]heatre and performance become particularly good places for undoing an image or situation of the dominant discourse in society simply by - - presenting it - - in order to 'replace' it, which in itself is an antagonistic act – the act of 'negating' something in the present reality in order to expose it, subvert it and ultimately transform it. In this sense, then, all antagonisms - - might be seen as theatrical performances. They offer ways of negation that 'perform' resistance by which it becomes possible to discover not only new meanings in multiple, pre-

existing and operating discourses, but to also transform and transmute them from within, precisely by staging them and, therefore, exposing their existing differences, limits and contradictions. – Katsouraki 2017, 290

I have now gone through the topics of social justice mediation, activist theatre and the strengths and weaknesses of using theatre as an activist medium. I first established that the central points in social justice mediation are: empathy and solidarity as a root, adjusting the communication according to the quickly changing media scape, taking into consideration global media morality in relation to the Others and, finally, encouraging the recipients to widen their perspectives in order to give a moral response through proper distance. These aspects have to be present for a successful and ethical social justice mediation to come true. Next I presented the background of activist theatre in order to make more tangible the nature of the medium in question – emphasising documentarity which is closely related to the case of *IN316*. Thirdly, I discussed some aspects of activist theatre on a deeper level, stating that theatre has a political-ready quality, that it is a highly emotional medium that can enlist its audiences, that representing suffering can be problematic, and lastly that documentarity evokes tricky questions on truthfulness. To summarize, I stated that the efficiency of any endeavours trying to affect the audience through activist theatre is a highly contested subject. After handling these issues of theatre and activism, it is time to take a look at the audience.

2.2 Studying audience experiences

In this study, the interest focuses on audience reception, on the experience of receiving an activist theatre play on trafficking, to be exact. After all, as media scholar Cornel Sandvoss (2011, 230) formulates, “the inherent aim of critical media and communication studies is to explore how recipients of mediated texts create meaning.” Studying audiences is difficult since it requires a multidisciplinary approach and combines two realms: In order to study how meanings are created, one has to study the subject as well as the object. It means that fields that study the human social subject are important pools of information, as are the fields that study the (textual) object or the sign, since these realms interplay in the process of meaning creation. (Ibid., 230–231; Kennedy 2009, 3–4.) This is why, in the context of this study, knowledge about the original *IN316* performance is useful to the researcher as well as to the reader. Appendix 1 gives a full description of *IN316*. This thesis combines theories from media and theatre studies, but as we can see, the approach could be even much more multidisciplinary.

Understanding audiences as intrinsically democratic actors, groups constituted of citizens, is at the core of this thesis. Thus, the democratic task of an activist theatre audience is emphasised. Silverstone (2007, 22) points out the active role of audiences, saying that even though media can be criticised for not fulfilling their responsibilities to citizens or states, the very citizens have responsibility for their media as well since they no longer are dependent and unable to participate. The aspects of play and playfulness in contemporary media consumption significantly displace that responsibility (ibid., 126). Today's user interface, the screen, is something that "grants sensation without demanding responsibility, and it involves us in a spectacle without engaging us in the complexity of its reality" (Robins 1994, 313). Mediation does not conclude where there is a world on a screen or a stage, but the scale of activity we can choose from goes from someone impotent receiving continuous stream of messages, possibly choosing a channel or clicking a mouse, to someone skilfully managing their own reception process and media space, choosing to be interactive, possibly including political engagement or production of media contents (Silverstone 2007, 27, 107–108; Kennedy 2009, 5). This sub-chapter searches solutions for the problems in studying reception and audience experiences, notably in the context of the theatre medium. In order to set the background, I will discuss audience research generally and briefly (2.2.1–2.2.2) and then move on to take a look at media studies' viewpoints (2.2.3). To gather the rest of the concepts used in the analysis I will present theatre studies' approaches (2.2.4–2.2.5) and lastly, I will briefly summarise the central points (2.2.6).

2.2.1 The contested conceptions of audience

The term 'audience' comes from the Latin verb *audire* which means 'to hear'. In the early stages of theatre art, the audience thus was seen as primarily listening, not seeing. However, paradoxically the term 'theatre' originally meant a place of seeing. (Freshwater 2009, 5.) Another Latin-derived word 'spectator' describes the side of seeing, but most European languages lack a word that would include both seeing and hearing, and thus better serve the purposes of theatre (Kennedy 2009, 5). Following the choice of theatre scholar Dennis Kennedy (2009, 5) this thesis chooses to speak about "audience" as a group and "spectators" as individuals. Audience theory has developed as audiences have changed over time, as communication scholar Dennis McQuail (2010, 10–13) explains. The original audiences of live performance and spectacle shifted into mass media audiences during the 20th century and into diffused digital media audiences in the new millennium. During the history of theatre, audiences have shifted from highly engaged

audiences of ancient Greek religious festivals to the 1890's politely restrained darkened auditoriums of naturalist theatre (Bennett 1990, 2–4). There were also times of indifferent audiences that ignored the play and rather gathered for social reasons as well as rioting audiences that evoke nostalgic images of theatre as a place for public debate and free speech for social change (Kennedy 2009, 12; Freshwater 2009, 26). Different interest parties have seen audiences in different lights, defined through institutional views or through the lens of the social world, e.g. as targets of political influence, as markets for goods and services, as critical publics that search for truth or as groups with dispersed, contradictory and dynamic media practices (McQuail 2010, 9; Ang 1991, 13).

The word we choose when referring to audiences is an important choice, since words are filled with value judgements and prejudice. Different names – audience, spectators, users, viewers, accomplishees, citizens, witnesses, participants, crowd, mass, mob, producers, critiques, connoisseurs, consumers etc. – emphasise different roles. It is significant whether we talk about an individual who receives, alters, produces, comments, resists or ignores mediated messages. An individual in a global media sphere potentially is and does all of these things, sometimes simultaneously, and thus audience carries several different identities within them (Freshwater 2009, 2–3; Silverstone 2007, 107; Höijer 1999, 179). Contesting this, media scholar Richard Butsch (2008, 3) claims that being an audience is not an identity that people carry but a situated role that can be temporarily performed and as people perform the role of audience, they produce representations of audiences. He explains that, in reaction to media institutions' and governments' discursive representations and subject positioning, audiences themselves have constructed conscious representations and counter-discourses. These understandings of the audience also affect how we define theatre and what theatre should be like in our opinion (Freshwater 2009, 3).

The understanding of what an audience is has varied in terms of the characterization of the group, the potential for action, the dangerousness of a public gathering, the inclusion and exclusion of individuals, the required assets of each spectator etc. (Butsch 2008). Audiences have been defined as good or bad: as a crowd threatening social order, a mass of individuals vulnerable to manipulation or, as a willingly informed public recognised as citizens. Authorities have been even more troubled by audiences since the mass home media evoked moral panics about the effects of media on audiences. (Butsch 2008, 1, 145.) In the early stages of research, audiences were seen as masses that had, due to their collectivity, a licence to stand in for the larger society (Miller & Whalley 2017, 19). It is

suggested that audiences and crowds have been giving space to ‘publics’ and ‘users’ that are more disembodied and participating (Gibbs 2011, 260–261; McQuail 2010, 9). The moral dimension of media production and consumption encloses questions about citizenship, appropriate media consumption and the relative moral value of factual and fictional media. According to the general ethos derived from Enlightenment and democratic values, citizens have a moral duty to inform themselves on important matters, and thus fact is seen of a superior value over fiction. (Morley 1999, 199, 201.) Behind this pressure lies the fear of audience passivity, which can be detected also in Silverstone’s theory of proper distance (ibid., 200; see Silverstone 2007). Parallel to this fear, entertainment audiences have been compared to arts audiences and blamed for not cultivating themselves with high culture products (Butsch 2008, 2). This naturally leads us to the problem of audience passivity.

2.2.2 The everlasting question of active or passive audience

In the tradition of both theatre and media studies, there is a tendency to be caught between the notions of active engagement and passive consumption, individual responsibility and collective response. The scholars seem to be always interested in the active, emancipated and productive spectator: Active is seen as better than passive due to the western cultural norms and ethics praising productivity. (Freshwater 2009, x, 25; Höijer 1999, 189–191; Bennett 1990, 1.) The words ‘active’ and ‘passive’ easily build unfruitful juxtaposition and a gap – even a hierarchy – between different performance practices: The danger is seeing contemporary performance as somehow better, as it is less familiar in its structure leaving space for spectator’s completion (Miller & Whalley 2017, x). The active-passive dimension is nevertheless central, since it has to do with the audiences’ own understanding of themselves as possible agents of change – and also with others’ understandings and political discourses about democracy, citizenship, consumer rights and media ideologies (Höijer 1999, 190–191; Hill 2011, 482). Audiences also judge morally their own media use by different cultural reference points. Consequently, depending on the media culture, audiences have different levels of willingness to engage in mental effort while receiving media products (Höijer 1999, 180–185.) In theatre studies, other media’s passive model of audience reception is sometimes frowned upon:

If we remain spectators/viewers, if we stay where we are – in front of the television – the catastrophe will always stay outside, we will always be objects for a subject – this is the implicit promise of the medium. – Lehmann 2006, 184

Thus, problematically, watching is often associated with passivity, mediation with simulacrum and externality with separation. Also, some binary oppositions further complicate the understanding of a potentially active audience: collective vs. individual, self-possession vs. alienation and image vs. living reality. Spectacle and visuality can be seen as forces that strengthen the idea of passive audience, completely replacing the original, authentic experience of theatre as a community-engaged practice and a collective assembly. (Rancière 2007, 272–274.) As a result, an unfruitful active-passive binary hinders developing conceptions about audience-performer dynamics further. These binaries should be questioned, since watching does certainly not require intellectual passivity and audiences actually do bring their own frames of reference into the situation of watching, and these frames can be of any kind – even distracting or antagonistic. (Ibid.; Freshwater 2009, 32; Miller & Whalley 2017, 3.) Another important point is that watching, the ‘gaze’, can also be conceptualised as an action that takes the agency away from the object of the gaze. Furthermore, witnessing something is often a fundamental and active part of an event e.g. a marriage or a trial, and so can it be in theatre, too. (Miller & Whalley 2017, 13–14.) In addition, there is a whole body of the spectator in the theatre auditorium, and it would be thoughtless to consider the sense of sight as the only perceiving tool (Freshwater 2009, 18). Rancière describes spectatorship:

Spectatorship is not a passivity that must be turned into activity. It is our normal situation. We learn and teach, we act and know, as spectators who link what they see with what they have seen and told, done and dreamed. – Rancière 2007, 277

Today’s media scape would not exist without the constant participation of individuals engaging with the media. As activity in relation to media implies agency, with it automatically comes responsibility; at least we need to take responsibility for our participation in the very media culture we live in. (Silverstone 2007, 108.) Contradictorily, even the words ‘audience’ and ‘spectator’ refer to reception rather than contribution or creation, and thus these words used to describe audience action themselves evoke the conception of loss of agency (Miller & Whalley 2017, 12). In contemporary art’s current wave of participation promotion, audience participation is a central point of interest for academics. Governments too have started to see theatre more and more as something with a potential for participation, political agency, education and democracy. (Freshwater 2009, 4–5, 55.) The general ethos then seems to be that when the audience embraces the identity of participants, they experience meaningful engagement through reason and passion, which in turn increases motivation for further consequences (see Dahlgren 2009, 1).

Media scholar Annette Hill (2011, 472–473) describes how audience participation is all about spectators producing beliefs that serve and foster the (live) performance, which, in many media formats, makes audiences' input an important part of the performance itself. According to her, audience has become such an important and active part of mediation that oftentimes audiences become cocreators and sometimes even are the core of a show. (Ibid., 482–486.) Some scholars go even much further in embracing audiences' activity saying that the construction of meaning is something that happens “*in spite of* rather than *through* the text”. If this is true, the most palatable cultural texts, that are easily negotiable and appropriable, can actually be the most ineffective ones. (Sandvoss 2011, 232.) In theatre studies, on the contrary, audience experiences have been largely ignored even if the audience most often is the largest contributing group, even a conscious cocreator, in a performance event (Miller & Whalley 2017, 9–10). Theatre audience scholar Susan Bennett (1990), nevertheless, makes a strong link between audience participation in theatre and political empowerment in the society. According to Jürs-Munby et al. (2013, 19) too, theatre can transform ignorance and exteriority into collective activity that cannot be pre-ordained. However, Freshwater points out, merely activating the spectator is not a democratic act but can actually raise social comfortability ahead of critical thinking: Letting the audience participate seemingly – choosing between two options or responding while the possibilities are scripted by social conventions – is hardly empowering. Thus, the results of participation depend on its quality. (Freshwater 2009, 61–65, 75.)

2.2.3 Media studies chasing the audience, reception and effects

It is a central task of media studies to track and understand the media uses, i.e. the practices of audiences. As explained above, understanding the concept of audience is a complicated matter undergoing a huge shift, causing trouble especially to media scholars. They say that the old notion of an identifiable group of particular people that constitute “an audience” is outdated in today's media scape. Even the whole concept of audience has lost its analytical utility because it no longer properly describes people using media, since audiences are more and more complex and found everywhere these days. (Sandvoss 2011, 230; McQuail 2010, 9, 15; Couldry 2011, 213–215; Kennedy 2009, 3–4, 7.)

In the contemporary times, a new kind of publicness has been created by multiplied possibilities of sharing different perspectives – and in this lies a huge potential (Silverstone 2007, 116). The massive ongoing digital and technological change has

shifted the nature of audiences for good: the convergence, fragmentation and dislocation of the media field has led to a situation where audiences are adopting a wide range of new undefined ways and purposes of using media and are consequently seen as more fluctuating and undefined groups than before. This development makes audience research more necessary, yet more challenging, as especially tracking audience behaviour has become much more complicated. (McQuail 2010, 9, 14–17; Couldry 2011, 223.) Audiences have become indistinguishable and invisible, as being part of an audience basically means simply existing as an individual in today's society (Sandvoss 2011, 230; Kennedy 2009, 7).

Today's audience is like an imaginary and constructed concept that helps make sense of the events of the world. This in turn questions the role of mediated audiences for democracy, since the classic idea of democratically functioning public had its very foundations in other societal constructions than media. Thus, even if there is evidence that user-audiences are more empowered than before, the struggle for control in the media scape continues and the ever-central issues of power, influence and solidarity still remain relevant to research. (McQuail 2010, 18–19; Couldry 2011, 215.) For the purposes of this thesis, it is noteworthy that even if the audience is seen as a tangled or imaginary construct in today's media, audience in a theatre performance can still be seen as a (live) audience in the traditional sense (see McQuail 2010, 18–19). However, it is hard to specify how a room full of individual spectators exactly differ from a mass audience (e.g. television) or a diffused audience (digital technologies) – if reception is indeed such a highly personal matter (Kennedy 2009, 9).

In order to understand media effects, some knowledge of audiences' mental processes is crucial (Waldahl 1998, 56). I will now present the theoretisation of Ragnar Waldahl (1998), who, in his article *A Cognitive Perspective on Media Effects*, evokes the functions of audience's mental schemas. He separates five constitutive phases of media reception and the creation of consequent effects. Firstly, he describes how selective exposure and attention direct media experiences through availability, habits and conscious choices. The audience chooses the type of media they use and, in addition, they vary their attention and omit parts of the message according to relevance for themselves. Secondly, the aspect of comprehension plays an important part: Higher individual knowledge and experience on the topic facilitates the adoption of facts and comprehension of the message. The obstacles to comprehension can be lack of previous knowledge, linguistic challenges, or inability to place the new message into a wider

context. (Ibid., 48–50.) Thirdly, an important factor is the individual encoding and interpretation, where people link the relation between the specific and the abstract, adding new information into their already existing thought patterns. In this the concepts that the person habitually uses play an important role, as well as the direct conceptual context of the new information. In general, conceptualisation is more thorough when the media use is purposeful and attentive, compared with routine or accidental use. People also choose concepts that are most relevant or advantageous to them and their collectives and can receive information with biased or open attitudes. Fourth dimension that affects the creation of media effects are the larger conceptualisations: linking, organising, simplifying, categorising and clustering information through relational bonds, i.e. organising the message within the existing mental schemas. The challenge of the media is to choose topics carefully and convey the issues in such a way that enables comprehensive and coherent attitudes. Fifth part of the creation of effects is the stage of retrieval, where the audience's mental processes choose the things that are memorised for future use. Here concepts are chosen and transformed from latent to manifest, according to the familiarity of the concept, the effortlessness of integrating it into previous mental schemas and the frequency of its use in the past. (Ibid., 50–55.)

Next a few words about media studies' approach to studying audiences. The whole branch of media studies actually grew out of the concerns considering media effects (Alasuutari 1999, 11). Reception studies cannot be traced down to one origin, but they encapsulate a wide range of diverse theoretical traditions, each with their strengths and weaknesses. The earliest paradigm of the 1920s and 1930s, behaviouristic reception studies, e.g. the response model, tends to emphasize the effects or their absence over anything else. (Ibid., 1, 4–7; Sandvoss 2011, 231–232.) The next phase of reception studies, 'uses and gratifications' approach, is based on assumption of audiences' activity, and assumes that audience choices are results of pre-existing needs, interests and tastes (McQuail 2010, 13). The media effects tradition has been the most dominant and longest-running of research traditions. It has been predominantly quantitative, measuring behavioural attitudes, and it has gone through different phases of believing in powerful or limited media effects. (O'Neill 2011, 320–329.) Next, media reception became a central topic in the cultural studies paradigm in the 70's, when the effects of media became a question of receivers' interpretations (Alasuutari 1999, 2–3).

There is a clear divide between the cultural studies understanding of studying the relationship of audience and medium (in ethnographic context) and on the other hand the

mass communication approaches informed by behaviourism and quantitative research. However, media effects naturally became the centre of attention as both these traditions embraced effects as a means to conceptualise reception. (Sandvoss 2011, 231–232.) In the 80's there was an ethnographic turn due to which qualitative audience reception studies started to take into account identity politics and the ethnographic paradigm took over studying audience reception through in-depth interviews (Alasuutari 1999, 4–5; McQuail 2010, 14). The discursive and constructionist turn shifted attention from audience psychology to sociology, added reflexivity and started to look at media culture as a whole; not only as mass communications (Alasuutari 1999, 8–9). In the turn of the millennium there was an awakening to look for new ways in research, replacing effects and individual reception instances. The new focus was “on the discourses through which our very sense of the (different) media, of ourselves as their audience, and of our involvements with them, are constituted”. (Morley 1999, 195.)

It is undeniable that the binary notions of audience activity, negotiation or appropriation still remain relevant in research to some degree (Sandvoss 2011, 232). Even if criticised in many ways, research on media effects can help understand the impact of media on society, and thus help in adapting media regulations (O’Neill 2011, 335). Nevertheless, research needs to move forward, into an empirical approach that embraces social reality and its complex power relations between media and audiences (and their contexts) as well as the interplay of reception, uses, effects, pleasure, identities, everyday practices and citizenship (*ibid.*; Alasuutari 1999, 16–17). New fresh ways of analysing the audience are for example the ‘practice theory’ that zooms into the audiences’ media practices, ‘affect theory’ that shifts the focus in the affective analysis of communication and ‘action theory’ that uses action frame of reference (Couldry 2011, 217; McQuail 2010, 19). This thesis, however, resorts to older methodology, since its topic has proven to be fairly untouched and its interviewed audience rather traditional. This study mixes theatre studies’ method, ‘theatre talks’, that resembles the old cultural studies’ ethnographic interviews, and a supportive quantification, in order to shift the focus to the personal experiences of a live audience (see Sauter 2002). Let us now take a look at the treatment of audience in theatre studies.

2.2.4 Theatre studies focusing on expert opinions and semiotics

Theatre has an inherently social nature, since performances are dependent on interaction with the audience (Bennett 1990, 212; Miller & Whalley 2017, xii). During the 20th

century, the consensus was that the relationship between performer and spectator is constitutive of theatre and wherever this relationship of one watching and one being watched exists, theatre can exist (Freshwater 2009, 1–2; Reason 2010, 25). Kennedy (2009, 4–6, 9–14) emphasises reception processes, stating that “the medium is not the message: The message, if there is one, is in the spectator’s presence”. He underlines that the only universal aspect of theatre audiences is the powerful act of gathering and being voluntary witnesses of an event that is presented for the specific group in a certain time. The nature of audience’s and performers’ exchange is inherently uneven, and “being an audience” was for long considered a given. However, the mere speech of ‘an exchange’ between the audience and the performers articulates a conviction that this encounter consists of active intersubjective interaction. (Miller & Whalley 2017, 9–10, 18.)

The way we would like the audience to relate to theatre can reveal something about our expectations for other kinds of social interaction and this in turn has to do with our views on community, democracy and citizenship. When theatre professionals are dissatisfied with audience behaviour, it often leads to innovation and experiment in the theatre: Avant-garde desires to shock and provoke the audience. Behind these irritations there is the above-mentioned fear of masses, a demand for respect towards theatre and a strong belief that theatregoing should educate and improve the audience. (Freshwater 2009, 45–46, 55.) Many theatre practitioners, especially experimental ones (e.g. Bertolt Brecht, Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski and Antonin Artaud) got very interested in the audience’s role during the last century, and tried to reconfigure the relationship between audience and theatre – with varying success (ibid., 1–3; Landy & Montgomery 2012, 124). Most famous of them, Brecht, invented the technique of estrangement, that *IN316* used too, to create a critically engaged audience that would change their understanding of social conditions that were generally taken for granted (see Freshwater 2009, 46–47). Theatre’s ambivalent relationship with time facilitates this estrangement of consciousness – the looking as if seeing for the first time, and the distancing of the attachment that are closely related to politics of performance (Kelleher 2009, 65).

An interesting aspect of theatre audience is also the tension between the community it creates (at least temporarily on an emotional level) and the privacy of a personal experience (Freshwater 2009, 6–8). Eversmann (2004, 171) explains that in theatre communication happens between multiple parties; the artist and the audience as well as within the audience. Thus, spectators’ emotions can be “contaminated” or intensified by

neighbours. When talking about “an” audience as a single entity it must be remembered that the people gathered together include many possible types of audiences – there are plurality and variety of subjective response, individual context and personal environment which are crucial to a person’s interpretation of a performance (ibid., 139; Johanson 2013, 170; Kennedy 2009, 3; Freshwater 2009, 5, 9–10). There are contradictions also within people themselves: A person can respond to a performance in many different and even conflicting ways simultaneously or engage with the piece through alternative roles (mother, politician, resident of a suburb etc.) (Freshwater 2009, 6). This is why any statements about audience responses should be framed carefully, in theatre as well as media studies, in order to avoid over-generalising the different audience subjectivities as a singular abstract collective, making ideological exclusions, homogenising responses or exaggerating the medium’s potential (ibid., 9–10; Höijer 1999, 179; Miller & Whalley 2017, xiv). Consequently, as theatre is commonly enjoyed collectively, there is often a great desire to share what one has experienced in a performance and having a conversation about it is the only way of affirming one’s memories – feeding them with external stimuli, negotiating the nature of the experience. The conversation after the performance is an integral part of the performance experience for many people, and through it the performance enters into our social and cultural discourses. (Reason 2010, 26–27; Johanson 2013, 163; Eversmann 2004, 159, 161.)

A key problem causing bias in theatre audience studies’ methodology has traditionally been that scholars tend to focus on published reviews of performances, opinions of theatre professionals, well-educated constant theatregoers’ statements with vast cultural capital, or simply look at the interpretations made of the theatre piece. Theatre industry itself conducts surveys for economic profit only. (Freshwater 2009, 28–30, 33; Johanson 2013, 161–162; Bennett 1990; Butsch 2008, 3–4.) According to Eversmann (2004, 149–150) and Freshwater (2009, 28–29), theatre studies have failed to ask detailed questions from ordinary spectators (contrary to film and cultural studies), partly due to inadequate methods derived from old art theories, which are unable to grasp audience experiences – consequently research results have been insignificant. This is why it has also been a challenge to find previous research to support this thesis. Freshwater (ibid., 37–38) also suggests that there are residual cultural attitudes that hinder the interest and engagement with ordinary audience: Their intellectual and interpretive capacities are often undermined. This relates to the aforementioned wider historical distrust of the masses as

well as to the anxieties about the seductive power of theatre's make-believe, that date all the way back to Plato (Miller & Whalley 2017, 11; Jackson 2011, 20).

Differing from the older paradigms, studying audience demographics or meanings of theatre texts (through theories of film, literature and media studies), after the millennium there has been international academic interest in the actual experiences of audiences (Freshwater 2009, 14, 27; Johanson 2013, 161, 169). Bennett (1990, 20) explains how both, the old theoretisations and the new media technologies, leave aside the unique characteristics found in theatre: The audience response can influence the very delivery of the piece and the performers and the spectators are present in shared time and space. In order to let go of the imaginary ideal audience, she encourages colleagues to adopt the attitude of social sciences researching the ordinary people without prejudice, as well as to look beyond the actual receiving moment of the performance (*ibid.*, 212). Another issue is that, similarly to media studies' sender-receiver model, the analytical frame in theatre studies easily adopts a semiotic approach (that already defines possible subjectivities and the "right reception"), where there is a verbal transmitter on the stage and the silent receivers in the audience. This happens naturally in theatre because, ultimately, "spectators read signs". But what is then left aside is the potential for interactivity and resistance, as well as the semiotic challenge of indeterminate signifiers. (Kennedy 2009, 9, 11–12.) In the next section (2.2.5), central aspects of theatre experience, used in the analysis, are elaborated more specifically in order to ground the analysis.

2.2.5 Studying theatre audience experiences

In this thesis, one of the main concepts, 'experience', can be defined as something temporary that happens over a certain duration of time in a particular place, and is characterised by being personally engaging and memorable (Pine & Gilmore 1999). Another way of differentiating an experience from indifferent or banal happenings of everyday life, according to theatre scholar Matthew Reason (2010, 23–24), is to emphasise that re-constructing something as an experience is our own choice and is essentially realised by remembering, interpreting, analysing and communicating the experienced event. Thus, an experience is dependent on us, the subjects, for making it meaningful. There are also different views on whether an experience is something that ends in a satisfactory completeness at a certain moment, or something that potentially continues, through memory and thinking, for a long time – even until our death. In any case, the conscious reflection is the only way human beings can make sense and invest

meaning to their experiences and thus it is also what can be studied through qualitative research. After the event of a performance the *trace* of the performance can be assessed through retrospective reflection “as a *connected but different* experience in its own right”. Experience could also be seen as a form of *doing*: In theatre it can be imaginative doing through which audiences suspend disbelief, or emotional doing where they direct their sympathy towards the characters of performance, or even intersubjective doing that happens through kinaesthetic empathy towards the people in the same space. The doing while experiencing a performance means dual perception; actively perceiving and engaging with the art while being aware of oneself looking. (Ibid., 19–22, 26.)

The way the audience experience a live performance of course greatly depends on what is being watched, in which context and who the watcher is. In addition, a great variety of things affect the experience, e.g. the mood or general state of the spectator, the reason for spectating, the performance’s or artists’ familiarity etc. (Miller & Whalley 2017, xii–xiii.) Schoenmakers (1992) elaborates on two different tracks of simultaneous information processing: In the mode of aesthetic information processing the audience looks at the stage conscious of the artificiality, remaining distant from the fiction, but in the second mode, the audience processes the information as non-fiction, experiencing it as reality – sometimes even feeling present in the reality of the stage. These skilful shiftings between aesthetics or empathy, disbelief or belief, distance or engagement, reflection or emotion are directed by individual preferences, conventions and the theatrical stimuli (ibid.; Reason 2010, 20–21). Medium-specificity and medium-specific expectations mentally structure each spectator’s experiences – even when different characteristics are experienced in individual ways (Jackson 2011, 19). Jackson suggests:

Perception of stasis and durationality, passivity and activity, stillness and action, might well be in the eye (and body) of the beholder. – Jackson 2011, 4

Reason (2010, 24–25, 33) underlines that in the research of theatre audience responses, the post-performance experiences have been largely neglected. Correlating with media studies the research of theatre audience reception can be understood in two ways: studying reception *results* or reception *processes* (Schoenmakers as cited in Reason 2010, 18–19). However, studying results is problematic because it entails a conception of experience as something that is concluded at a certain point in time, and reaches a final resolution. The meanings the audience give to their experience, by processing it in a dialogue between themselves and their own experience, can be multiple, contradictory, can change according to whom they are recounted to or in what circumstances and when.

They are affected by processes of reflection and limited by structures of discourses. (Reason 2010, 25, 31–32.)

Now let us see, how the aesthetic experience can be studied. The key concern becomes what are we researching exactly when we aim at examining theatre audience experiences? To answer this, we must discover the nature of the aesthetic experience in theatre. The aesthetic encounter in the case of plastic arts has been studied in *The Art of Seeing* (1990) by Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson. They suggest that the aesthetic encounter, especially if it is a peak-experience, is a flow experience similar to ‘autotelic activities’, that lead to loss of self-consciousness or sense of time, require a lot of investment in order to acquire the necessary skills, assume total concentration and their reward is in the activity itself, not in a desired result. In their model, the aesthetic experience includes four dimensions that work integrated in a complex whole: perceptual dimension (composition, form, harmony, etc.), emotional response (interpretations, evaluations, associations, etc.), cognitive approach (art theory, art history, etc.), and communicative dimension (interaction with the artist, culture of origin etc.). Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson state that the vast variety of different individual aesthetic experiences show that the contents evidently vary, but nevertheless the experience can be similar in structure whenever a person is moved by art: It “occurs when information coming from artwork fuses with information in the viewer’s memory – followed by the expansion of the viewer’s consciousness, and the attendant emotional consequences.” Each artform invites its audience to intuitively adapt their way of receiving. To further specify how theatre differs from other artforms Eversmann (2004, 140–141) names four special characteristics that often play important roles in theatre: the transitive nature of performance, the collectivity of production and reception, multimediality, and ostension (iconicity) as means of expression.

The characteristics that most separates theatre from other artforms are that it only exists during a limited time and the production and reception of the artwork are simultaneous and dependent on the presence of the artist and the audience, which drastically affects the reception strategies. Because in theatre the stimuli are constantly changing until the end of the performance, which can never be repeated as the same, the audience is required to be alert and ready to absorb new information all the time. (Ibid., 141, 159, 171–172.) The second important characteristic is collectivity, which means that hardly ever is theatre created or enjoyed alone. Thus, the communication between the receiving (audience) and producing (artists) parties can happen on multiple levels. The third feature has to do with

multimediality: The communication utilises several different sign systems and their codes and techniques – which, as mentioned above, can be redundant, supplementary or even opposed to each other. The fourth characteristic aspect is communicating mainly by ostension i.e. the events of the story are directly shown to the audience through action. Even when narration is used, it remains secondary to the material signs, which in theatre medium can be identical to the real-life referent, following iconicity. (Ibid., 141–143.)

To be able to analyse theatrical experiences, the separation of content of the aesthetic experience from its structure becomes essential (ibid., 140, 144). *The content* of the theatrical experience is highly ungeneralisable and is composed firstly by the spatial conditions e.g. the venue and the atmosphere, enhancing concentration, memory and communication, and secondly by the whole of the life experience, opinions, attitudes, previous thoughts and expectations of the spectator. Each performance also provokes specific expectations through the pre-performance image building and reviews. (Ibid., 165–168; Miller & Whalley 2017, xv.) *The structure* of the theatrical experience, on the other hand, can be generalised to some degree as it commonly includes such aspects as the initial attitude towards the performance, staying in the theatre auditorium due to social conventions, engaging with the performance on emotional and cognitive levels, as well as the interplay of challenges and skills. For many spectators, the initial hook, instantly or slowly created, is crucial in evaluating whether the performance can be rewarding. During the performance, the emotional engagement creates a total concentration and a gratifying flow experience while the cognitive engagement appeals to the intellect by posing challenges – often related to understanding the performance or dealing with negative feelings. A central structural tension in the experience is between the skills of the audience and the challenges presented by the performance. The skills develop when the experiences of theatregoing accumulate. (Eversmann 2004, 159–162.) The most characteristic challenges of theatre seem to be multimediality and ostension. This is visible in that audiences often report it important for them to be able to create a coherent whole of the performance; integrating the different sign systems in a way that creates synergy between the theatrical elements. (Ibid., 163.)

In conclusion, the four dimensions (perceptual, cognitive, emotional and communicative) of an aesthetic experience, following Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson's (1990) model, are at work in theatrical experience too: Firstly, the perceptual dimension reacts first to a performance, but as a sensory reaction it does not interpret or attach meaning, and it is thus hard to describe through reason and language. Commonly the audience finds

gratifying any cohesion between the sensory stimuli and theatre is said to be “good” when the theatrical elements work well together. This dimension also includes the kinetic responses, i.e. involuntarily mimicking the expressions or movements of an actor, and through them possibly understanding better what the character is going through. (Eversmann 2004, 151–152.) Secondly, the emotional responses are probably the most important dimension in a theatrical peak-experience and are often very engaged during the performance and immediately after it. Respondents tend to talk about experiencing two types of feelings; the ones provoked by the (fictional) content of the play and the ones that are connected to the very act of going to the theatre. It seems that emotions become more pronounced in theatre than in other arts or everyday life – especially in the level of physical reactions; e.g. being breathless or immobilised, shaking, sweating, laughing, crying or having stomach aches. Commonly the performance provokes ungeneralisable and content-based feelings similar to the ones the characters on stage are experiencing. The (individual) investing of emotions in the moment of reception makes it possible for the audience to retain the performance in memory for later (collective) analytic purposes. A performance is commonly highly evaluated when it provokes new insights and lingers in the memory, forcing the audience to think about it over and over again. (Ibid., 153, 156, 171.)

Thirdly, the cognitive dimension includes intellectually following and making sense of the story, receiving and storing information in memory, as well as a spectator’s knowledge of the world and possible expert knowledge of theatre. This dimension analytically processes the performance mostly afterwards, solving problems and searching for the vital closure; an interpretation of a performance as a whole, which is often referred to as “the meaning or intention of the performance”. Also, the experience of recognising oneself or one’s life’s situations in a performance seems to be essential in peak-experiences. (Ibid., 152–154, 170.) However, the audience's identification experience, often expected to be a conventional fact, can only be solicited by a media product – but acquiring it is not pre-determined but a dynamic personal choice of a spectator (Sobchack 1999, 252–253). Another interesting side note to the cognition of audiences, following Waldahl (1998, 54), is that extensive mental effort leads to emphasis on the content of the message, while low degree of mental processing results in simplistic evaluations emphasising the form of the message, the assessment of the sender and the context of receiving. Finally, the fourth and last dimension is communicative. Its task is to form communication with the performers, and it entails opening oneself up to

them, understanding what they are doing and indulging in playing along with them – in a way becoming part of the performance. This communication is a special attraction of theatre medium, as it involves the human factor – the live presence of an actor – and resembles (even if distantly) face-to-face communication. Communication also takes place inside the audience, where a feeling of communality, being in touch and sharing the moment with others can attain the nature of communication, when the audience reacts as a single unit. (Eversmann 2004, 157–158, 163–164.) These aspects of the theatrical experience will be further discussed in the analysis.

2.2.6 Summary: Audience experiences are hard to study

After this sub-chapter's review on understanding the audience and its experiences, the challenge of constituting what are the exact factors that create certain reception outcomes has become visible. This challenge is inspiring and should provoke development of research methods in audience studies. The difficulty of studying experiences of theatrical events lies in that the experience of art is largely an individual matter, even in a group context, and it is difficult to define fundamental characteristics of the theatrical event that would apply to all theatre. The specific comprehension of theatre that the spectator has, their education, profession, knowledge, expectations, norms and the reasons for going to theatre strongly affect the reception, and these effects cannot be thoroughly mapped. Thus, it is necessary to define the things that can be known. The first step is specifying the kind of theatre (in the case of *IN316*: activist theatre) and the kind of audience (*IN316*: a heterogeneous group with a connection to the event organiser) in question. (Eversmann 2004, 139, 165–168.) According to Kennedy (2009, 20, 25), who emphasises the importance of social conventions, audience responses are constructed in the interplay of the spectator's self, physical environment (*IN316*: church auditorium), performance text (*IN316*: partly documentary material on trafficking) and social conditions (*IN316*: a combination of theatre-going and sitting in a holy place, with familiar or unfamiliar coaudience).

Another challenge of studying audience experiences is the difficulty in accessing spectators' experiences through the mediation of social, psychological, aesthetic and linguistic prisms. The experience of a theatrical performance as well as the primary reactions and individual responses might be simply unavailable to the knowledge of others, or even to the audience itself. There are indicators that it might be the very interview, the encouragement to self-conscious reflection on the experience, that causes

inability to know the exact feelings that were experienced there and then, while watching the performance. People cannot and do not always say what they mean, or even know what they mean, or simply lack the language to explain it (Reason 2010, 17–18).

According to Wilson & Schooler's (1991, 183) research, forcefully trying to analyse and reflect about the reasons for one's feelings can disrupt the connection to the very feelings that were actually experienced. They suggest that people seldomly are aware of *why* they feel the way they do. However, the only way of qualitatively studying audience experiences is taking for granted that the responses are true and correspond with the actual opinion of the speaker (Sauter 2000, 177; Johanson 2013, 163; Reason 2010, 17).

In this sub-chapter I have presented the central challenges of researching audience experiences in media and theatre studies. As I have shown, already the starting point of studying audiences is unstable, because the whole concept of audience is challenged and sometimes deconstructed, due to the recent drastic changes of media and performance cultures. The presented history of academic understanding of audiences can help us trace back what has already been thought and done and give hints about the efforts yet to be made. Curiously, there has been a lack of interviewing “ordinary” audiences in theatre studies, which has to do with the same kind of patronising attitudes that can be recognised in media studies' fear of passive vulnerable audiences. This thesis adopts the understanding that there is a need for some kind of a democratically functioning citizen audience to exist in the future, too, and that is why the questions of morality and politics were elaborated in the chapter 2.1, and the democratic role of audience in this sub-chapter. The method used here for understanding aesthetic experiences in theatre is based on a clear division between the somewhat generalisable structure and the ungeneralisable content of the experience and utilises the separation of the different dimensions of the experience. These theoretical tools facilitate the analysis of the interview data. The next chapter moves on to examining the methodology of this thesis.

3 METHODOLOGY

The aim of this case study is to understand the audience experiences of an activist theatre play, the wider bearing of these experiences to the audience's thoughts and actions, and to find new information about the theatre medium. A solid basis for research is attained when all choices in the levels of problem posing, research philosophy, research strategy, and theoretical understanding are coherently compatible and in accordance with the purpose of the research (Hirsjärvi et al. 2005, 115, 123, 128). In order to provide information about ordinary spectators – experts of their own experience – the chosen method is asking the audience through interviews and a questionnaire, as Freshwater (2009) and Tuomi & Sarajärvi (2002, 87–88) suggest. In this chapter, the methodology is thoroughly explained because in empirical analyses the data gathering and analysis methods' importance is emphasised (cf. *ibid.*, 26).

The research question is: What kind of experiences and experienced changes does an activist theatre play, designed to prompt the audience into action against social injustice, evoke in its audience? It is followed by these sub-questions: What are the audience's conceptions of theatre like? How does the audience describe the performance's influence? How is the proximity of the topic or the characters experienced? What is the role of factual contents in the experience? How does the audience describe the emotional aspects of their experience? Which aspects of theatricality are experienced as particularly impressive?

The methodology of this thesis is based on a qualitative research design and thus it does not aim at statistical generalisations but aspires to describe, understand and interpret. When the interest point is personal experiences, opinion and change of each spectator, it is fruitful to use interviews and a flexible and creative research frame. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 75, 98.) This qualitative research, especially as a case study, is interested in describing the varied and holistic nature of reality through explaining and mapping a singular, fairly unknown phenomenon. This kind of research data is gathered preferably from people (an individual, a group or a community) in real-life processes, situations and contexts through holistic and varied methods, where the informants' viewpoints can be revealed. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2005, 125–130, 152, 155.) This research is an inductive data-driven qualitative content analysis (QCA). In it, all previously existing information and theory should be excluded in order to fully grasp the unexpected that arises from the data, and the emphasis has to be on the logic of reasoning used in the analysis – even keeping

in mind that it is impossible to produce an analysis that is purely grounded on the data, since all observations are theoretical in a way or another. (Ibid., 155; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 108–109.) QCA aims at organising the data in a clear format without losing the information, which helps make trustworthy observations and conclusions about the phenomenon. It represents an analytical current that is not directed strictly by theoretical and epistemological bases but can absorb many kinds of starting points. QCA is a suitable method for analysing verbal data systematically and relatively objectively, also allowing the exclusion of irrelevant data. In addition, content specification methods, i.e. differentiation or decomposition of data through quantitative methods, are used in order to quantify some aspects. (Schreier 2012, 3–7; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 103, 117–122.)

In qualitative research, the researcher cannot reach objectivity or resign from their default values because what can be known and the one who knows are seamlessly intertwined in existence. Thus, all information is subjective and affected by the ontological decisions and choices that the researcher makes about the research strategy – and these influence the observations. When the research object is human, the ontological understanding consists of the specific idea of man adopted by the researcher. This study follows the model and ontological understanding of US social studies' current and is based on a worldview where the researcher is trying to place themselves outside the reality in order to see better. According to this view, understanding the reality of the phenomenon in question means producing a full picture of how it relates to the whole of reality. Epistemology, on the other hand, defines what methodology is considered appropriate and directs the concrete research choices. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2005, 121–122, 152; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 25, 109, 118.) In the tradition of the US qualitative research there is an emphasis on the priority of epistemology and emphasising the methods that have been chosen is seen as a way to promote the trustworthiness of the study (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 122). In the next subsections, I will first describe the data gathering (3.1) and the analysing process (3.2). At the end of this chapter, I will discuss the ethics (3.3) as well as limitations and validity (3.4) of the study.

3.1 Data gathering

The data gathering of this study consists of two parts conducted in 2013: Firstly, group interviews right after a rendition of the *IN3I6* performance, with a total of thirty participants, and secondly, an e-mail follow-up questionnaire circa five months later, acquiring twenty-four answers. All data gathering was done in Finnish, except for one

non-native Finnish speaker. I will now shortly give some background information about the participants and then move on to describing the interviews and the questionnaire.

Because the tour performances were organised in different cities' churches, the audience structure was not typical of theatre. Nevertheless, the whole of interviewees was rather heterogeneous. As preliminary information participants were asked their name, age, profession and e-mail address. They were mostly young adults, but the ages varied from eighteen to fifty-two. The average age of interviewees was 28,7 and the median age 26,5 years. Gender division was one over three: ten men and twenty women. The professional fields present among interviewees were medicine and health care, business, media, NGO work, social work, law, theology, education, entrepreneurship, information technology, music and voluntary work. The interviewees presented different levels of expertise in these fields, from students to high-level leaders.

The interviewees were asked to point out whether they had a novice, an average or an expert level of knowledge on trafficking. Seven interviewees told they had only heard a little or not at all about the topic beforehand, and thus were novices. Sixteen interviewees told they had an average knowledge, while seven had an expert knowledge level. The mentioned former sources for trafficking knowledge were mostly mainstream media, social media, NGO's and different Christian channels. Another interest was the frequency of theatre going among the interviewees. Fourteen of the interviewees said they had not been to the theatre at all during the past year. Seven had gone once, four had visited twice, two had seen three plays and three interviewees had seen five or more plays during the past year. Yet another speciality was that, as the performance was presented in churches, some aspects of Christian faith came up in the data. Some interviewees would consider the topic through a Christian lens with the hope of an almighty loving God. The calling for all Christians to help the weak and the suffering by concrete acts of compassion as well as by prayer was also present in the data.

Interviewing is a flexible way of data gathering, especially in its semi-structured form – a feature that turned out to be very useful as questions were often asked to be repeated or explained, and the order of questions could be altered following each interview's logic. Despite the notion that interviewing is time consuming and always only one construction of the lived reality, it was most fruitful in studying the experiences of a theatre audience. (See Tuomi & Sarajarvi 2002, 74–76.) The four group interviews took place in May 2013 during the *IN316* tour in church-owned auditoriums in Turku, Tampere, Jyväskylä and

Joensuu. Group interviews were designed to reveal the spectators' experiences while they were freshly in mind. As in most qualitative research, the informants were not chosen randomly but gathered according to the purpose of the study (see Hirsjärvi et al. 2005, 155). After each performance an expert provided the audience with a short presentation on trafficking facts and ways to get involved in the work of anti-trafficking NGOs. In the end, she announced that there would be held a group interview for a master's thesis research and interested spectators were asked to come to the front of the auditorium to meet the interviewer. Thus, participants were spontaneous volunteers willing to share their experience. Each session, taking place in a backstage room fifteen minutes after the performance, lasted approximately forty-five minutes and had six to nine participants.

The interview method was modelled after Willmar Sauter's (2002) 'Theatre Talks'. It followed the model in organising the group discussion straight after the performance, which inhibits effects of external influences, and in gathering a group that have something in common (in this case some kind of relation to the organising church), to facilitate the liveliness of the discussion. However, the interviews differed from Sauter's model in that the group moderator did not maintain minimal engagement but posed questions. (Cf. Sauter 2002, 124.) This was necessary in order to avoid too broad a range in discussion topics. There are risks in using qualitative talk-based techniques: The results are limited to what can be articulated by the participant's vocabulary, the significance of the experience is further increased or modified by the very interview that offers a special social forum of expression, and the meta-cognitive functions of participants can provoke them to deliberately please or displease the interviewer (Johanson 2013, 163; Reason 2010, 17).

IN316's mediation of trafficking and theatre's characteristics as a medium were discussed in the interviews. The most focal topics were the personal, emotional and intellectual experiences of watching the play and the anticipated effect that this experience might have on thinking or action. Interviews were half-structured thematic interviews with twelve predetermined questions, found in the Appendix 2. Thematic interview was chosen because of its suitability for researching people's interpretations, the meanings they give to phenomena, and the way those meanings are constructed in interaction (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2006, 48). By choosing a half-structured interview, unintegral comments could be limited during the interviews. To point out the strengths and weaknesses of the data, it is important to clarify that the choice of the method was limited by practical aspects. (Hyvärinen et al. 2010, 27.) This choice ensured sufficient

variation of viewpoints and availability of interviewees. Individual interviews would have limited the variation and were not possible during the hectic tour, and finding enough participants willing to meet later, possibly in another city, would have been complicated. The tour audience also provided the study with more heterogeneous participants who have no specific relations to the crew or the performance.

The e-mail questionnaire was chosen as the second data gathering method since, as explained above, the audience experience continues long after the performance, and thus it is beneficial to attain descriptions of the experience in the long term too (Johanson 2013, 164). The questionnaire was sent to the participants five months after the performance and twenty-four answers, varying considerably in length and content, were received. The questions, found in the Appendix 3, were formed to encourage open-structured descriptive answers. The key questions asked, what was retained from the experience, how the performance affected the experienced proximity or concreteness of trafficking crime and whether changes were experienced in thinking or action.

3.2 Coding of the data

In qualitative research the data does not offer straight answers to the research question, but the results are found through systematic analytical processing and a close dialogue between the research problem and the data (Hyvärinen et al. 2010, 13, 19). Research using interview data includes several phases. First, the research problem and questions are formulated. Then, a suitable data gathering method is chosen and data is gathered and transcribed. After that, the data is confined and coded in order to find the phenomena and form the interpretative rules. The data is then analysed through interpreting, comparing and compiling, and results are further tested through theoretical dialogue. The aim is to define new understandings of the topic and list practical effects and further research needs. Translation may be necessary for presenting the data, like in this thesis. An ongoing dialogue with the data enables the reader to become an interpreter according to their own terms, as interview data can never be exhausted in analysis. (Ibid., 10–11, 29.)

In this section 3.2, the disciplined and systematic analytic process is made transparent in order to show the reader how the operations, interpretative choices and thinking processes occurred (see *ibid.*, 16; Ruusuvaori 2010, 427–428). Any processing, reading or coding of the data are interpretative acts that follow the basic epistemological and ontological pre-understanding of the researcher about the nature of the phenomenon (Mason 2002, 148). Thus, transcribing is a preliminary interpretation of the data as not all

information available in the interview situation can be transcribed (Ruusu vuori 2010, 427–428). This study, focusing on *what* is said, required medium specificity of transcription. Thus, the interaction of the interviewees, non-verbal sounds, tones and other modes of expression were left out. All data was transcribed, coded and analysed in the same order as it was gathered to make the processing rounds as consistent and organised as possible. (Ibid., 424–426.)

The starting point to coding is to choose the analytical tools, including observation unit, depending on the research problem and the quality of the data (Hyvärinen et al. 2010, 11, 20; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 122, 124). Coding means the organized processing of the data in a specific way that is determined by the research problem, central concepts and the ontological and epistemological starting points (Hyvärinen et al. 2010, 18; Mason 2002). In this study, a suitable observation unit is a cluster of one to five phrases on a specific topic and the chosen coding method is categorisation. The researcher also has to define and make visible, through methodological choices, what parts of the data are most fruitful, and which should be excluded and why (Hyvärinen et al. 2010, 14–15). The data was confined keeping in mind that the richness of the content should not suffer, and the research problem should lead to a consistent and justified data (see *ibid.*, 15; Schreier 2012, 30–31). In this study, the quality of the performance, specific observations about its content, remarks considering Christian worldview and the role of the program leaflet were left out of the analysis after the initial coding (see Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 104).

Holistic qualitative research treats the data profoundly, utilizing the insight that the researcher has gained through thoroughly knowing the data (Hirsjärvi et al. 2005, 156). Thus, the coding was conducted in three different ways: an initial wider colour coding (three rounds), a lingual reducing coding (two rounds) and a partial more specific selective coding (one round on the aspects of emotionality and proximity). Firstly, the three systematic coding rounds were done by sorting things under colour labels, using constant comparison. New labels were created when necessary, ensuring they were proportionate and in a proper relation to each other, until the organized form of data. (See Hyvärinen et al. 2010, 25; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 114.) Table 1 presents the initial categories revealing the most distinct aspects of the data:

Table 1. The initial coding categories.

First coding round	Second coding round	Third coding round
Attitude towards the performance	Thoughts during the performance	Expectations
Influentiality of <i>IN316</i>	Immersiveness	Awakening effect
Bodily sensations	Individuality of victims	Persistence in memory
Estrangement effect	Identification	Boringness or length
Concreteness	Information mediation	Audience participation
Directness of expression	Recollections from performance	Ability to express anything
Performance coming close	Increase in empathy	Multimediality
Actors' bodily media		Documentarity
Theatre as a medium		Emotional medium
Factual content		Comparison to other media
Message of the play		Purpose of theatre
Reception		Themes of the play
Change in the spectator		Inability to receive
Feelings		Play's aim for change
Guilt		Spectator's intention to change
Controversy evoked by the play		Change in thinking
Theatrical quality		Change in action
Impertinent content		Christian worldview

Secondly, all of the data was coded twice with a lingual reducing approach. As Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2002, 123–126) propose, the participants' expressions were reduced into condensed expressions, and listed in reducing tables. These were then quantified and colour-coded into initial categories. This second coding method served the need to understand the division of speech in different categories in order to find out about the exceptions and the intersections in the data and make any desired quantification possible. (Ibid., 135–137.) The whole e-mail questionnaire data was also reduced into a quantified table to identify the most recurrent thoughts. Thirdly, some parts of the data were coded with a more focused approach in order to drill deeper into the specific viewpoints of emotionality and proximity (see Mason 2002; Hyvärinen et al. 2010, 21).

In this study quantitative methods were used to support the QCA – as these two methods can be understood as complementary approaches. Simple quantification can assist qualitative research by widening and generalising the results, to assure systematic coding throughout the data. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2005, 126–128; Schreier 2012.) Quantification can also bring forth the relations, comparisons, similarities, differences and changes between coded categories. In this case, it meant counting the times a certain theme was presented in the data. The quantified data was visualised in tables in order to strengthen validity and transparency. (Hyvärinen et al. 2010, 20; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 136; see also Schreier 2012; Maxwell 2010.)

In the next stage, the data was clustered according to coding categories, regrouping subcategories under higher categories until main ones were reached (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 124). The different categories were compared, and their relations were examined in order to group the data into data compilations. This phase tested whether the categories were appropriate and systematic: Whether the observation units in a category were equal and whether any need for re-coding would appear. These data compilations were the bases for writing the analytical chapters. (Hyvärinen et al. 2010, 24.) In this study there was a need for translation from Finnish to English in order to present some of the data as examples in this report, and thus bring the data closer to the reader, making the reader's own interpretations possible. Even if the translation process can serve to find some new analytical insights through distancing, it nevertheless results in incomplete representations of the original interview. (See Nikander 2010, 433, 441–442.) However, to enhance reliability, the translations were made in co-operation with an English-language master's degree student, as faithfully to the original as possible.

3.3 Ethics

The researcher is always responsible for proper academic conduct and the honesty of the research. Ethics, which include responsibility of using proper procedures and defending science against offense and dishonesty, create the basis for the quality and credibility of research. Ethics consists of five aspects: the nature of “good research”, acceptability of thirst for knowledge, the choice of research subject, acceptable ambition considering results and the means that can be used during the research. Following the principles of honesty, carefulness and precision is focal, as well as choosing ethical methods for data gathering, researching and assessing. Acknowledging and respecting other researchers' work is a norm. The planning, conducting and reporting research must be precise and fulfil academic standards. However, different research traditions have different viewpoints to research ethics. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 148–152.)

In the US social sciences' tradition, the choice of qualitative research frame can be justified by purely scientific grounds, while in other traditions also ontological justifications are required. Following the US tradition, ethics is in this thesis seen as related to the research activity; in other words, its main concerns are informing the interviewees, choosing trustworthy methods for data gathering and analysis, ensuring anonymity and presenting results in a reliable way. (Ibid., 153.) This research aims at being ethically abiding already in its choice of theme: it examines how human rights activism can be promoted through the form of theatre. Ethical issues here have to do

mainly with the use and referencing of participants' comments. They were asked for their agreement for using their gender and age as an alias while referring to things they had said in group interviews and e-mail responses. (See *ibid.*, 75, 126.) Participants were told before the session that the discussion would be about their reception experience and the play's role as a mediator. They were also told that their participation and the use of their comments was voluntary and that they could stop their participation at any point.

3.4 Limitations and validity

Analytical transparency and linking the observations to the data are a basic ground to disciplined qualitative research and its validity (Nikander 2010, 433). The validity and reliability of qualitative research relies on the criteria of systematic analysis and reliable interpretation (instead of quantitative precise research instruments) and it is based on the evaluation of data and the interpretations of it. Validity can be strengthened through describing analytical criteria, creating data compilations and visualising them, clearly treating exceptions in the data as well as referring to former research. In order to transparently show all the choices considering the data, the used method and analytic criterion has been described in detail. (*Ibid.*; Hyvärinen et al. 2010, 27.) In qualitative research, there is also the possibility of internal generalisation, which means that the analytical results can be compared to the whole of the data, and this tool was also used during the analysis (Maxwell 2010).

Making generalisations and the representativeness of the data are not as explicit in qualitative as they are in quantitative research. The ways the interviewees describe their experiences are related to the norms of the culture – the expected ways of acting as a participant of the shared culture. However, as there is always something shared in the culture and in the way of speech, it can be assumed that nothing in the data is exclusively individual and ungeneralisable. (Hyvärinen et al. 2010, 28.) As mentioned above, the central problem is thus the relationship between the actual lived experience of a performance and the interviewees' ability to consciously and reflectively describe it (Reason 2010, 15). This problem is always present in an interview: Most often people are not straight away willing to express their private emotions to an unknown interviewer (Eversmann 2004, 151). It is an important notion that even if this study is interested in the personal experiences of spectators, it was conducted through group interviews, which might raise questions of controversy. It is known that in group situations, a common discourse and even some degree of consensus is often formed among the participants, which has probably influenced the data. This study takes the risk of interviewees

affecting each other, because it seems like the natural condition due to the communal nature of the theatre medium: Spectators affect each other already during the reception experience, which is why their interplay is still relevant in the interview phase. (Eversmann 2004; Freshwater 2009.)

Finally, it must be stated that this research is conducted in special circumstances: I, as the researcher, have an institutional role in two ways – as the theatrical director of *IN316* and as a master's degree student in the University of Helsinki (see Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 122). This arrangement calls for extra caution in order to avoid biased data or analysis. However, it is the case in all qualitative research that the observations are dependent on the researcher's individual perceptions about the phenomenon, the meanings connected to it and the tools used to study it (ibid., 19). There was of course a danger that some interviewees would restrain their critique and emphasize the positive due to the knowledge that the interviewer was also the director of the play. However, there is no other choice than to trust the truthfulness of each participant's articulation of their subjective experience (Freshwater 2009; Sauter 2002). To avoid biased answers, it was announced in the beginning of the interviews that the study is not interested in the level of theatrical success, but merely on the audience's reception experiences. It is noteworthy that the double role can be both useful and harmful: Knowing the play's content throughout already before the research starts and thus being able to easily grasp which parts of the play the participants refer to is positive. As a result of systematic qualitative coding and analysis, this study presents a fresh picture and related concepts to the understanding of activist theatre audiences, the functions of theatre as a medium and the research of audience experience. (See Hyvärinen et al. 2010, 24.) In the next chapter, the results of analysis are discussed.

4 RESULTS OF ANALYSIS

In this chapter I present the results of the analysis, including a system of themes that describe the data, and I will also initially combine it with theoretical concepts, as Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2002, 127) propose. The aim of this analysis is to study the self-accounted reception experiences of the audience, that can shed light into how activist theatre can or cannot work as a tool for change. The data shows that the participants were generally strongly affected by *IN316*, each in their own way. It also proves that there are many common factors and shared traits in the experienced effects. Such are for example the increase in willingness to help and predisposition to change thinking and action in order to act against trafficking crime. The most surprising aspect of the data is the strong positive emphasis on theatre medium's influentiality, in comparison to other media. In this, the double role of director-researcher and the choice of interviewees based on voluntary participation after the performance might have influenced the data to some extent, but even this considered, the descriptions of influentiality are notable. The exceptions in the data had to do with the Western white man's guilt, feelings of indignation caused by over-generalising, and different individual emphases on specific topics (e.g. porn attitudes for men and women's rights for women). I will connect this analysis to theoretical viewpoints using mainly Eversmann's (2004) study on theatrical peak-experiences, Silverstone's (2007) theory of proper distance and Taylor's (2011) concept of emotional enlistment. This analysis cites the transcribed original expressions, as a basis for observations, in order to grasp the authentic reception experiences.

After the initial coding more precise analysis can challenge the initial classifications (Hyvärinen et al. 2010, 18). This is why the analytical chapters first include an overall picture and then a deeper look into the interesting hubs of the data (see *ibid.*, 22–23). First a general analysis is presented in section 4.1, in order to ground and introduce the observations as well as present the sporadic exceptions. Even if the group discussion settings made the shared aspects of the experience quite visible, it also allowed individual exceptions to be brought up. Furthermore, it became very clear that certain categories had specifically central positions and they seemed to form hubs in the data. Such aspects were emotionality and proximity, which are further looked into in the section 4.2. When referring to the participants' comments, an alias of gender and age is used. Due to there being several participants of the same age, some participants' aliases have a letter (a, b or c) to avoid mixing the responses. After the alias, the letter (I) stands for interview and (E) for e-mail questionnaire, in order to specify the origin of the statement.

4.1 General analysis of the data

As Hyvärinen et al. (2010, 27) suggest, the parts of the data that generate the principal observations are presented in this general analysis under subtitles that are based on the coding results. Right from the initial coding stage I found a great deal of interesting comments on the impressive nature of the theatre medium and *IN316*, as well as on their purposes (4.1.1). *IN316*'s capacity to mediate its message in an efficient, concrete and digestible way was a source of astonishment, as participants had learned a lot about trafficking watching the play. The special and influential characteristics of theatricality were also discussed (4.1.2). Most of the spectators that chose to participate were highly affected and emphasised the potential of theatre for increasing the proximity of the topic (4.2.2). This suggests that the data mostly consists of theatrical peak-experiences.

Another richly commended issue was the individual reception processes (4.1.3) and their emotional aspects (4.2.1). Emotions were closely tied to the impressiveness of theatre medium and to the possibilities of causing change in the spectators. The anticipated change in audience's thinking and behaviour was discussed thoroughly in the interviews and the experienced change in the e-mail questionnaire answers (4.1.4). The question of theatrical quality as well as comments about the content of the play were left out of the analysis since this research does not aim at studying the personal preferences of the audience nor the play itself. To start with, Table 2 presents the entire data coded into categories, revealing the repartition of the observation units between categories. In the table the data is divided into nine main categories that in turn are divided into thirty-two parent subcategories. The parent subcategories each have several child subcategories presented according to their number in the third column. The fourth column expresses the number of observation units in each parent subcategory.

Table 2. The whole data organised categorically.

Main categories	Parent subcategories	Child subcateg.	Observ. units
Effectiveness of theatre	Theatre affects, touches, shakes and addresses	8	92
	Theatre more influential than other media	3	36
	Theatre challenges its audience	3	33
	Theatre easily retained in memory	4	32
Theatre art's purpose	Theatre entertaining	4	26
	Theatre explaining the world	7	43
Characteristics of theatre media	Theatre in relation to other media	6	24
	Directness, comprehensiveness and interaction	4	27
	Humanity, corporeality and liveness	3	34
	Theatre as gripping and effort-demanding	3	16
	Theatre art's effective means	8	80
Information mediation	Concreteness and directness	6	87
	Fact mediation succeeded in <i>IN316</i>	3	35
	Relationship between fact and emotion	3	12
	Fact mediation outside the theatrical	4	11
	Level of awareness and activism pre-performance	3	18
Emotionality	Heaviness of the experience	4	40
	Wide range of emotions	6	43
	Emotional experience and its effectiveness	3	76
Reception experience in <i>IN316</i>	Proximity and identification	3	64
	Immersiveness and length of performance	3	44
	Recollections of the reception moment	3	12
	Reception as an individual process	5	39
	Prejudice and expectations	3	20
Change inspired by <i>IN316</i>	Addition to compassion and disposition to help	6	44
	Change uncertain and cumbersome	3	37
	Change desired and expected	6	84
	<i>IN316</i> changed thinking or action	9	74
	<i>IN316</i> did not affect thinking or action	6	22
Recollections of <i>IN316</i>	Recollections of theatre scenes	9	44
	Recollections of the theme and theatricality	6	14
Christianity	Christian worldview	4	23

4.1.1 Conceptions about theatre and *IN316*

As mentioned above, the audience's life experiences and comprehensions of theatre strongly affect the reception (Eversmann 2004, 165–168). In the interview data, wide-ranging but relatively conventional conceptions of theatre arose. According to Eversmann (ibid., 139, 167–168), an impactful theatre experience is often described as beneficial to the spectator through various phenomena e.g. personal growth, information learning, pleasure, entertainment, stimulation or inspiration. Participants said theatre has many purposes, but the best performances provoke people to “reflect on life”. Among the listed purposes for theatre were also entertaining, offering experiences, helping to understand oneself and the world, informing, provoking thoughts and conversation on

different viewpoints, creating contrast, awakening people to notice certain topics and even therapeutic purposes. In general terms, theatre was seen to be very different from other media. Many had no problem in understanding theatre as a ‘medium’ but quite as many pondered on the definition and found reasons why theatre would not fit into their definition of media. Resulting ideas were that theatre is quite a slow and inflexible medium, yet simple, traditional and free from technical strains. The main challenge with theatre was seen to be getting the audience into the performance situation. A couple of interviewees also brought up that theatre can easily work as a counter medium: bringing up the topics that are left out by the conventional profit-seeking mainstream media (cf. Paget 2010, 177; Reinelt 2009, 17; Hammond & Steward 2008, 10). Some interviewees underlined that things can be more *easily* mediated through other (mass) media, but the *influence* of those media is milder than the influence of theatre.

In theatrical peak-experiences, spectators are deeply touched, which allows the performance to have a strong impact and become retained in the memory for a very long time (Eversmann 2004, 139). Compared to previous media experiences, watching the *IN316* performance was first and foremost said to be a more holistic, intensive, immersive and even overwhelming experience that would have a more profound effect or touch the audience more. This emphasis on the influentiality of theatre was surprisingly common among the participants. Evaluations of *IN316* affecting only a little or no at all were very rare. Also, it was generally expected that a message mediated through theatre would not be forgotten as fast as a message received from other media, due to the emotional intensity of the experience, which is exactly what Eversmann (ibid., 171), too, has found. Participants evaluated that they would retain more and better internalised information and remember learning about trafficking from this source longer. The reasons for this were seen to be the stories of "real people" that stayed in spectators' minds through visual footprints of the characters telling their story on stage. After five months, two women described:

When information is delivered through other media, it's easier to push it out of your mind and the sphere of your life; just to shrug and ignore the evil in the world. But this performance left a strong impact on me and thanks to that, it has stayed in my thoughts for a long time. – Woman 23 (E)

The performance overwhelmed me and I couldn't escape it. - - It was considerably more powerful as an experience, even a bit of an overdose to be taken in at once. It's hard to compare its impact on me with other media experiences, usually the experiences fade over time, but I think this left a more permanent trace. A trace that feels permanent, it's hard to describe with words, but I feel like it gave me a new awareness. – Woman 52 (E)

Like in this last comment, some interviewees expressed that the performance could not be escaped from. Generally, people actually tend to avoid media contents that are inconsistent with their worldview because they can evoke emotional unpleasantness (Waldahl 1998, 49). According to the comments, a spectator has less power over the use and course of theatrical performance compared to other everyday media that can be more easily controlled. Other media can be turned off or ignored in case of lack of time or interest, but the threshold for abandoning theatre auditorium can be quite high, which Eversmann (2004, 160) refers to by being “stuck contemplating the artwork”.

This theatre performance was more effective and powerful, invasive and personal. Of course, the information about trafficking from other media is shocking too but in this performance you have to think about it and you can't bypass it, like you can turn off a TV. In the theatre it was impossible to escape hearing about trafficking and you couldn't try to forget it. – Woman 26c (E)

One very common notion about theatre as a medium was that it is captivating both practically and emotionally – its supremacy in holding on to spectators' attention was very much emphasized. A female interviewee explained that in theatre the audience is present in a different way from other media and that is why the topic becomes more imminent. It was also said that theatre is no “background or throwaway entertainment” like other media can be and that it captivates its audience in a special way through theatrical means, storytelling, interaction and participation. It is in line with Eversmann (2004, 171) stating that theatre's constantly changing stimuli provokes high alertness.

The message, documentarity and fact mediation

It was very clear for the spectators that *IN316* consciously aimed at provoking change. Most described the aim of the play as trying to make spectators think and create opinions about the topic, many also mentioned the aim of provoking action. These understandings resemble “closure” or “interpretation of a performance as a whole” (ibid., 152). Participants seemed quite unanimous that the play had succeeded in attaining its goal – at least to some degree. However, it was hindered by general resistance towards change and struggles in making efforts for an activist cause. There were also allusions to negative feelings as hindrances. Interestingly, it was frequently expressed what a difficult subject trafficking is to treat and mediate, and how surprisingly well theatre succeeded at it.

Documentarity brings up another surprising aspect of the data: the degree to which the play was based on real-life documents was not discussed or questioned very much. This is surprising because as Kuparinen (2011, 196) evokes, authentic speech works strongly in a play, provoking terror in the audience, because there is no safety of fiction that could

be used as a hiding place. However, the approach of the participants was simpler: As one participant described in the questionnaire, “every story (true or not) brings the topic closer”. Documentarity, objectivity and truthfulness were deliberately left out of the questions, since *IN316* does not identify as an unambiguous case of documentary theatre and thus no claims of truthfulness were presented. However, the play did set apart the clearest factual contents by the use of text slides on the screen, and these were very naturally adopted as factual by the audience. Nevertheless, the degree to which the stories spoken by actors were truthful, was not discussed much nor did it seem a special interest to the participants. A certain woman assumed that there was no documentarity in the actual stories or lines, but still she claimed that the imaginary situations had a clear link to reality. Only one participant especially pondered on the theme of documentarity:

Somehow I felt that the play had a basis in reality. So, if you go see any play, it can be a completely fictional show. But if the performance includes actual facts, like numbers that are likely based on truths, it is raw and direct fact. – Man 26 (I)

And in the e-mail questionnaire five months later he continued:

On the other hand, it was shocking to hear the lines where the actors were speaking with the voice of a trafficking victim. Although I’m not sure if the lines were from real people, but they did feel real and believable. – Man 26 (E)

Thus interestingly, according to the participants, the documentary value of the lines did not matter that much as long as they felt real. The question remains, whether emphasising the documentary basis would have made the truthfulness of the text more important to the spectators or increased the efficiency of the activist theatre piece. The power of telling stories, factual or imaginative, was seen as a boost to the impressiveness of actors’ bodily representations, and the stories were told to override news, statistics or documentaries in efficiency. However, the capacity of easily absorbable fact-mediation was also of interest in the study. Experiencing the facts in the performance was closely related to the theatrical medium’s emotional strengths:

Numbers and statistics in general rarely provoke any feelings in people, no matter the seriousness of the matter. And considering this, the play served to make the numbers become people. And this play truly filled this purpose well. – Man 30a (I)

The attitudes towards facts were varied, especially since the pre-play awareness levels were so wide-ranging. Some saw that facts remain in memory better with emotional representations, others thought the emotional intensiveness left no space for learning of facts, as “the emotional power and effectiveness was really too overwhelming”. Some interesting comments revealed the paralysing effects of big numbers and statistics,

because “they are hard to process”. Other comments appreciated the use of facts and explained how they evoked a deep understanding of the seriousness of the topic. The advantage of the facts in the play was told to be that they were spontaneously associated with the emotional and visual experience and thus retained better. One interviewee underlined that it was easy to adopt facts from the play due to her natural visual learning habits, and she could “still bring back those slides”. Another one described the play “spoon-feeding the information”. According to the data, fact learning was also facilitated by the play presenting its topic thoroughly and from several viewpoints, thus offering a wide understanding of the topic during only one media experience. When asked which facts were retained from the play the interviewees responded in varied ways, which speaks for the individuality of reception and interpretation: Some listed the statistical numbers from the screen, but many also described their core insights learned from the play e.g. how heterogeneous the victims and situations are. When asked whether factual information was better captured from the play or the post-play presentation, the answers were divided equally between theatre and presentation, and many underlined that the best effect was achieved namely because both media were present.

4.1.2 The aspects of efficiency

The efficiency of theatre was closely tied to the notions of theatre making things concrete and bringing them closer to the spectator. Identification, directness, liveness, interaction, participation, multimedia, visuality and especially the living body medium were also regarded as highly effective theatrical means. Here *IN316*'s efficiency as an activist tool is looked into – but the key aspect of proximity will be further analysed later (4.2.2). To understand the core of the experience, interviewees were asked to describe *IN316* in one word. Table 3 presents the results, mainly expressing influence and reactions. Numbers in parentheses express if a word was mentioned by several participants:

Table 3. The one-word descriptions of the performance.

Interview	Influential (3), stopping (3), touching (2), shocking (2), deeply perpetrating (2), awakening, heavy, anxiety provoking but full of hope, an important voice, guilty and forced, honest, widening, cutting, provoking, going under the skin, varied, emotional, truthful, traumatic, a shout, shaking, convincing, addressing
Questionnaire	Stopping (5), awakening (3), touching (2), influential (2), eye-opening, earth-moving, intrusive, an intent to affect, attention-calling, dramatic, powerful, addressing, risk, distressing, unusual

Concreteness, directness and identification

Theatre was evaluated to be good at demonstrating the state of matters concretely.

According to the participants, trafficking became easier to grasp and the performance made each victim's individual lives, their stories, matter. It became more than just news and statistics, and its scope became more real. According to one man the "suffering came through" while watching a scene of a young girl as a sex slave – the effect had never been the same for him through a media screen. It was also said that the performance "gave faces" to the individual victims. Thus, *IN316* changed the categorisation of trafficking victims in the audience's mental schemas (cf. Waldahl 1998, 53). The ability of theatre to speak out the problem in all its creepiness was seen to be impressive. Many appreciated the straightforwardness of the play in bravely treating the ugly things as ugly. However, it was stated that they were not nice things to talk or hear about.

I thought that this performance's effectiveness lies most of all in that it was very direct, even obscene, in how things were portrayed. I thought it was excellent that everything was openly discussed, and nobody tiptoed around the subject. - - So, it felt right that for once, things were said directly. And if something is said concretely and directly to us, we ought to be able to handle it. – Man 33 (I)

Drama can provoke an understanding of what individual stories feel like when lived through, and it often does it through theatricality, even pathos, instead of analytical recreation (Taylor 2011, 16). In the interviews, the possibility to identify with trafficking victims through the actors was seen as a central asset of theatre. Contradictory to Eversmann (2004, 153–154) women and men would describe identifying a lot with characters of their own sex. Some interviewees evoked a feeling of almost being inside the stories themselves. Even identifying with the viewpoints of criminals was mentioned. An interviewee explained that putting herself into the victims' shoes actually provoked change in her. Another one emphasised the emotionality of identification:

When you have felt it yourself... Identified with something, the effectiveness is on another level. And watching this play truly allowed it. – Woman 22 (I)

Liveness, interaction and bodily presence

The liveness and interaction of theatre was brought up very much by the participants. They would describe the performance as "direct interaction" and as "strong live presence". The experience of being physically in the same space, "here and now", with real people and real action, i.e. the physical presence, was considered highly significant. The essence of theatre as something that only happens once and can never be recuperated was also at the core of participants' views of theatre (cf. *ibid.*, 141).

It's more clearly from a person to a person when people meet each other face-to-face, the audience and the actors. Of course, there are the roles so it's not real like that, but anyway they aim at delivering the message on the heart's level and it's not like just quickly reading or listening. – Woman 47 (I)

The participants remarked the same as Bennett (1990, 20) above: Liveness permits the audience to affect the delivery of the piece and actors can make instant improvised adjustments in case of unpredicted change. The aspects of participation and interaction between the actors and the audience were seen as a focal richness of theatre. Thus, as a participant described, the audience has the power to react giving feedback to the stage, but that same feedback would have no effect on the television news anchor, for example.

[The actors] came to the audience to give chocolate or touch our shoulders... Well, those kinds of things won't happen when you watch television. It's somehow so very individual experience. When someone looks you in the eye and claims something, - - it somehow forces you to take a position, make a choice or pick a side. – Woman 27 (I)

The exceptionality of the living bodies as media was also underlined by the participants. One interviewee said that for him the most important factor in theatre is knowing that the people on stage are real. Some described being extremely touched emotionally by the live movement and dance in the performance. The participants said theatre made the topic become physical; they used such expressions as it “becoming carnal”, “being a carnal presentation” or “becoming flesh”.

Multimedia and visuality

Multimedia and visuality were said to be an important part of the performance experience, and many described the special pervasive strength of theatre being “delivery on multiple channels”. Theatre was said to speak a universal language, because people can “pick up different things” that speak to them. One interviewee among many said that knowing, reading and hearing about trafficking did not affect him much, but the topic became much more shocking when it was brought in front of him in a visual way, him being “a visual person”. It was also predicted during the interview that the images would stay in the minds of spectators when returning home and would not be forgotten easily:

Normally, it's easy to forget any performance or such, no matter how impressive. And then you think of what you got out of it. But this was so impressive that I believe that it influenced me. Because it affected emotions and I saw those pictures in my mind and afterwards too, I can't imagine how it could stay without impact. - - It is different when it comes visually as pictures than if it would be just information, it remains better in my mind. – Woman 52 (I)

4.1.3 Performance experience

Matching the theoretical descriptions (2.2.5), the actual performance experience was described to consist of different mental stages: Anticipation and expectations, the collective and interactive presence in the auditorium, the individual processing and

recollections. The participants described these aspects in highly varied ways, which suggests that the generality of experience *structure* is an approximate. The central aspect of emotionality, that belongs under this headline, will be analysed later (4.2.1).

Expectations and recollections

While others came into the performance situation with eagerness, some comments revealed that for others there was nervousness and an anticipation of a heavy theatrical experience to come, as the topic was explicitly tough emotionally. Another state of anticipation was experiencing the challenge that theatre as a medium provokes: It forces people into making an effort to attain the media product, investing in it, which was said to increase the influentiality of the experience. According to Waldahl (1998, 56) if a message is hard to access, it must possess other features (relevance, interest, usefulness etc.) tempting enough to defy audience's mental barriers. This point of view shows, as an interviewee said, that theatre is "more clearly a choice than any other form of media".

I personally stepped outside of my comfort zone when I consciously got up and left my home sofa, drove here for 30 minutes and even stayed here after the play for another 30 minutes - - I feel that I am more greatly affected by things that happen outside my comfort zone. They are the ones that I remember best - - I have invested time, money and energy into it not just sitting on the home sofa watching and reading something to pass the time. – Woman 24 (I)

Even if the memories were varied, five months after the performance most participants remembered some parts of the performance especially well. Interestingly, around a half of the respondents tended to list recollections of concrete scenes, while the other half focused on describing their emotions, thoughts and atmosphere during the play. This, once again, makes visible the individuality of the reception and how it follows the personality and the preferred way of information processing of each person. Several respondents evaluated that the most emotion-provoking scenes were the most retained. A few mentioned remembering mainly facts, stories and the importance of the topic.

Individuality, immersiveness and estrangement

Theatre was frequently described as a highly individual media, as participants would constantly refer to their own personal way of experiencing it. The speech revolved around the varied inner reactions of the spectators. A certain participant described that from the very beginning, he was neurotically focusing on dissecting the message that the play tried to communicate, and almost forgot to enjoy the content that would have been there to effortlessly grasp. This clearly resembles the central challenge of theatre play according to Eversmann (2004, 163); creating a coherent whole of the performance.

Another interviewee walked in Reason's (2010) footsteps pondering on the individuality and collectivity of the experience:

First of all, nothing is more live broadcasting than theatre. Absolutely nothing. And then secondly, theatre's power lies in that we all experience things alone. Every one of us experienced this play differently but somehow we still experienced it together. So, this is like, there's a great humane duality, that I am alone, and I am together. And we all see the same thing and still it affects us differently. It is fascinating. – Man 30a (I)

Another participant had been weighing his options considering the way of reception:

I noticed that I was conflicted on whether I should take this as a personal issue: should I face this personally or should I look at this generally, collectively and societally. The performance affected me very much, it affected me on both levels. But still, I was torn between choosing one of those levels, in its effectiveness.
– Man 33 (I)

Even if performance experiences are individual, there are notable similarities in how significant moments, the peak-experiences, are experienced: Spectators report being fully concentrated and carried along by the performance or they report heightened consciousness and losing sense of time (see Eversmann 2004, 139). The participants' experiences of the performance were rather immersive, and their attention was kept active (see *ibid.*, 171). At least most interviewees (23) refused categorically having experienced any feelings of boredom. On the other hand, few people (7) evaluated that the play could have been slightly shorter or that there was unnecessary repetition. Towards the end some had wished that the performance would finish: The emotional burden due to the listening such hard stories became overwhelming or their capacity to absorb information was simply running low. What evoked most comments about the reception was the estrangement trick of two “angry spectators” that really were actors. I suggest that the *IN316* performance used here a technique of estrangement, which, according to the data, seemed to work in “giving space to audience's own reflection”. The desired effect of confusion was attained and the audience wrestled to understand whether the scene was part of the performance or not.

I thought that it was a very good tool for affecting the audience – to highlight the radicality and the shockingness of the topic. And to also give the audience a voice and to bring forth the same attitudes in ourselves, which we or our near ones might have. – Woman 26b (I)

The scene provoked two kinds of reactions in the audience, sometimes overlapping: Participants would describe getting angry at those two disruptors, but at the same time many could identify with their critique of showing things in a too provoking way.

4.1.4 The change in the audience

This research is far from a quantitative effect study that aspires to find out the truth about a media product's effects. Instead, it aims at understanding the nature of activist theatre audience experiences – especially the ways participants themselves describe something changing – leaning on their own accounts as honest descriptions (cf. Sauter 2000, 177). It must be remembered here, that adoption of messages that are inconsistent with the spectator's worldview demands more motivation and mental effort than that of familiar messages, and thus change requires different amounts of efforts from different people (Waldahl 1998, 54). Naturally the participants' viewpoint towards the question of change was different right after the play and five months later: Speech about the uncertainty, troublesomeness, and desirability of change was more relevant in the interviews than in the questionnaire. Then again, in the questionnaire the respondents could realistically list their experiences of actualised change. Here anticipated and experienced change is analysed separately, and quantification is used as a tool for presenting the results. A participant pondered the theatre play's potential for affecting the audience:

The premise of the play was that it's supposed to awaken a will in the audience to help the victims. That is why after the play we were told how to act in order to help. I wonder if this kind of play, that is clearly created to attack an issue, would be categorised to the same class with a play that presents the life of a trafficking victim, their ups and downs. I guess it depends on the play how clearly it tells the audience what to think. – Man 30b (E)

The anticipated change (interviews)

Right after the performance, the interviewees were very positive about this experience having an effect on their thinking and action. This belief was a mixture of certitude and desire. Describing the anticipated and desired change was observed 84 times in the data. Interviewees described they had thought they could do nothing unless they travelled abroad to help victims, but they understood from the performance that even small choices matter and everyone can do something to hinder trafficking. The post-play presentation's tips for getting involved in anti-trafficking work were seen profitable and desired. Two women described their reaction to the play five months later, stating that they could not go on in life without changing their action when the reality of the horrific crime had been acknowledged, which clearly resonates with proper distance (cf. Silverstone 2007, 7, 17):

I can't live my life ignoring this. Even though I can't save the world, I understood my responsibility in whether I recognize trafficking or not. – Woman 26b (E)

There was of course considerable variation in the responses. The more careful evaluations said that this experience would affect thinking, attitudes and compassion. The

most audacious evaluations predicted huge changes in consumer choices, NGO-participation and awareness raising, and these people seemed highly motivated and would subscribe to an e-mail list right after the performance. One participant described that already during the performance he “started to mentally work on how this performance was going to affect” his life. According to many interviewees, gaining awareness through the play increased their empathy and compassion towards the victims as well as their ability to willingly see themselves as potential helpers; this was observed 44 times. The understanding of the urgency to help trafficking victims provoked strong motivation, even determination to change, but also doubts about whether the desired change would actually happen. Many described that they had to admit their weakness in putting through the change they sometimes had aspired after an earlier emotionally intensive or thought-provoking experience. The uncertainty or troublesomeness of change was a significant aspect as it was observed 37 times in the data.

At this moment it's hard to say what it will change, the next weeks and months are going to show that. And there's two options, on one hand you might get numb as you do with everything else... We are told about society's and people's problems and it doesn't influence us at all. But then again, it could be that brought up this way it could have very great influence. – Man 33 (I)

The aspect of change that was most talked about in all interview groups was the aspect of consumer choices. This was surprising, as only one scene in the theatre play that talked about fair trade. However, consumer choices were probably the closest thing to the everyday life of the audience, and they seemed to think that if anything, they should change their consuming habits. Consumer choices were observed 22 times in the interviews as anticipated change and 21 times in the questionnaire as something actualised. Second aspect of change that was brought up quite a lot was the awareness-raising through social media and among the everyday acquaintances and loved ones. Many also described that their general alertness towards trafficking news was heightened. The interviewees would describe their wishes, desires and plans for change abundantly. They shared ideas for making a difference, that included thoughts about personal choices, and professional fields but also about the larger society.

The experienced change (e-mail questionnaire)

In order to make visible the inconsistencies of the answers, it must be stated that in the questionnaire the respondents did not give quantifiable generalizable accounts of the experienced change, but instead open qualitative evaluations that did not follow a standard response formula or classify the amount of the change. To provide an example,

one respondent told that there were no changes whatsoever in his thinking but curiously he still reported considerable changes in his action, e.g. more ethical consumption, taking a stronger stand in conversations and raising awareness more actively. It is also noteworthy that some of the interviewees were already beforehand quite committed to the anti-trafficking cause and did not feel a need for radical change.

The effects in thinking and action were of course varied. Many considered the most important change in thinking or attitude to be that trafficking seemed less distant and came to mind more often. Even if there was wide variation in the experienced change, the emphasis was still on the influentiality of *IN316* experience. One interviewee for example boldly stated that when considering its effects, *IN316* was “clearly the most influential media experience” that he had ever had. On the other hand, one respondent referred to changes as something that he had “tried” to do and it remained unclear whether his attempts had succeeded. There were also reports of the limited resources of an individual in impacting the world: Other more personally engaging causes and one’s own problems were said to steal the attention. However, many types of changes in concrete action were reported. The spectrum of answers ranged from no change to a considerable amount of multifaceted change. Many told that the performance was a significant part of their awareness process. Here is one especially fervent response:

I held a little presentation about the subject in my Finnish class. I’ve started to buy almost all my clothes at flea markets. Last summer I was supposed to participate in the Run for Freedom half marathon that supports the A21 organisation, but I couldn’t because of a strain. I thought that I would participate in it next year if it will be organised. – Woman 18 (E)

It was very common to refer to experienced heightened interest, information seeking and awareness-raising in everyday life, which had been anticipated in the interviews.

Typically, the respondent would describe that they take a stronger stand in conversations and try to raise the awareness of people around them. One respondent describes an initial excitement of spreading awareness in Facebook but admits that later the enthusiasm withered away. These kinds of comments about the short-livedness of change were usually accompanied by regret. Another very much shared aspect of change was the input in ethical consumer choices, which was also strongly anticipated. Many woke up to the reality that “cheap products are cheap for a reason”:

I’ve started to be thankful for every person through whom the food has ended up on my plate. My own shopping cart has changed in the way that I have given up cheap products and I pay more attention to the country of origin. I am prepared to pay more for my food if it guarantees the quality of the production chain, and I

favour Finnish products. I think about the origin also in my clothing purchases, where it's made and what we know about different brands. – Woman 26b (E)

As an additional tool, quantification of the questionnaire results gives some indication as to how notable the experienced change was. In the questionnaire there were two direct questions about experienced change. Out of 24 questionnaire respondents, only three responded that nothing changed in their thinking and two reported only small changes in thinking. Three of those five also reported no changes in concrete action. All together six participants answered that their concrete action had not changed at all.

In conclusion, 13 out of 24 respondents told they had changed their action in spreading trafficking awareness more actively than before and 11 confirmed that they had made changes in their consumer choices. Five started to participate in the work of an anti-trafficking NGO and four started to give more donations to anti-trafficking work. When considering the whole questionnaire data, experienced change (69 mentions) was much more spoken about than the unrealised change (22 mentions). This change-positive repartition of accounts can of course be explained by many reasons, not solely by the effectiveness of *IN316*. However, all the aforementioned aspects of theatre seemed to interactively work for the creation of emotional and proximity-based impressiveness. This is why emotionality and proximity are next discussed more profoundly.

4.2 Intersections and hubs in the data

During the analysis, two categories above all emerged as conceptual hubs, linked in a way or another to most other categories. Firstly, emotionality was at the core of participants' experiences. The power of emotions was brought up in all stages of interviews and questionnaire: It was a key in understanding theatre as a medium. The emotional intensity was seen as an overall result of all the effective theatrical properties of the play together, which indicates to Eversmann's (2004, 160, 162) notions of integrating sign systems for creating synergy between theatrical elements as well as to emotions' power in creating a gratifying flow experience. Emotionality was also seen as the most efficient factor in provoking change in thinking and action. Secondly, the question of proximity surfaced from the data constantly. It was treated on different levels: As closeness between the play (the theatre medium) and the audience, including the relation of the actors as living body media and the audience as live observers. It was also a question of proximity between the topic of the play (the reality of trafficking), the

original protagonists of the stories (trafficking victims), and the audience as receivers. These two aspects create the heart of the data and are now treated in detail.

4.2.1 Emotionality

Without exception, when talking about the impressiveness or effectiveness of the play, the participants would mention the power of emotions or describe their strong emotional responses. Theatre was named “an emotional medium”. Participants would describe the performance as something intentionally emotion-provoking and touching, which was also recurrently mentioned as one of the most important purposes for theatre in general. This emotionality helped the audience to get in touch with their own feelings and process them. The emotional strengths of the play were brought up a lot also in relation to theatre’s capacity for mediation. It was often underlined, like in these two citations, that it is namely the emotional experiences that evoke strong memories or changes in behaviour, which is coherent with earlier findings (ibid, 171).

[The purpose is] to provoke change in people’s actions. It could be the emotional awakening that gets people to change their behaviour. There’s no change without emotions. – Woman 26a (I)

I think this kind of experience affects me more because it’s also an emotional experience and - - if I only know the facts it doesn’t affect me much. It can create the feeling that you should do something, but you don’t end up doing anything. – Woman 21 (I)

The way emotions were strongly in play in the reception, and even named as key factors in provoking change, speaks for the relatedness of Taylor’s (2011) emotional enlistment. Enlistment means joining a group that is willing to act together and share beliefs (ibid., 11). Enlistment strategies were thus visibly at play in *IN316*: Accounts about strong empathy leading to an urgent need to “do something about it” e.g. to join the anti-trafficking movement, as well as the play forcing audience into “choosing a side” or “deciding what to think about this” prove that indifference was hardly possible. Curiously, even sheer participation in the performance event was causing pride and adoption of the cause – in the same way as Paget (2010, 173–174) described that participating in the 60’s political theatre audience was given a chance to see themselves as agents of change. According to the data, different aspects of theatricality (4.1.1–4.1.3) were present in the process of emotional enlistment, and thus described in relation to the intense emotionality: immersiveness, identification, interaction and liveness to name a few. The process of identification was mentioned as an especially powerful cause of emotional turbulence, as well as a factor in increasing proximity. Slightly differing from

Eversmann's (2004) evaluation of ostension as well as simultaneity of production and reception being the key factors, Taylor (2011, 13) concludes that it is actually the emotional dimension that gives theatre a special sense of immediacy. The weight of emotionality was visible in the data e.g. in that respondents would constantly use the word "touching" to describe their experience:

It was touching. Extremely many scenes were touching. The first cold shivers and sensations came in the first dance scene. - - Overall, the scenes with movement were very touching. In addition, there was this theatricality that was touching. And even the story, the message, - - the burden and the guilt, they caused it to be twice as touching. It was very emotional in many moments. It awakened me, it awakened the spectators' emotions, strongly. – Woman 22 (I)

The range of emotions that the participants experienced during the play was extremely wide. Many gave descriptions of physical reactions due to strong emotional experiences. Crying and laughing during the play was a common experience but some described also other types of bodily reactions such as cold shivers, stomach-ache or a need to close one's eyes, which coincides with earlier findings (Eversmann 2004, 171). Some also expressed that they experienced emotions that felt inappropriate; e.g. an urge of laughter in a "wrong place" that felt shameful. It is indeed noteworthy that social conventions regulate especially these physical audience responses (Kennedy 2009, 16, 20). Five months later, in the questionnaire, many described that the performance left permanent emotional traces, which can be broadly divided into categories of four emotions, presented in Table 4:

Table 4. List of emotions provoked by the performance.

Suffering	Shock, sadness, pain, agony, despair, hopelessness, helplessness, incapability, powerlessness, anxiety, distress, alertness, feeling troubled, fear, shame, second-hand embarrassment, confusion
Aggression	Anger, irritation, disgust, qualm, frustration, feeling of contradiction, scepticism, caution
Joy	Hope, amusement, amazement, being entertained, relief, laughter, peace, humour
Compassion	Identification, pity, love, pride, desire for purity, will to work for good

Participants indeed underlined that the most emotional scenes and the anxiety created by them were the most memorable:

The primary thing I remember is the emotionality and the feelings it provoked in me. While following the play I felt feelings of pain, gut-wrenching disgust, laughter, tears and anger. – Woman 21 (E)

On a general level, the emotional intensity was seen as a positive trait; almost as the fuel of the whole experience. One participant summarised that "in all its agony it was a healthy and enlightening experience". Negative emotions, such as irritation or confusion, seem to work in many cases as necessary obstacles that intrigue or upset in an engaging

way, and this interplay of challenges and skills leads to more valuable experience. (Eversmann 2004, 156, 160.) In the data negative emotions were very present and that “it felt really bad” was experienced as controversial: On one hand, emotional distress sometimes became overwhelming, caused weariness and could risk shutting down the receiving system of the audience, which was referred to in the theory section as compassion fatigue and presented also in the earlier section 4.1.3 (see Ahva & Pantti 2014, 330–331). But on the other hand, it was seen as something powerful and engaging, as Taylor’s (2011) emotional enlistment, too, suggests:

I liked that there was a bit of repetition. The message must be conveyed that this really is so very shocking, and the feeling of distress is supposed to grow and start swirling about inside. – Man 48 (I)

There were many descriptions of how the play was strongly forthcoming and even intrusive. Interestingly, these kinds of evaluations were given even when the person was already beforehand well-informed about trafficking, and the sheer informative shock-factor was thus not the cause. The play was at times experienced as excessive or overwhelming by some, and participants had been pondering whether it all could have been presented in a less shocking way. Some interviewees even described strong emotional states of being beside themselves right after seeing the play:

I got some kind of reaction, like I’m paralysed at the moment. Like, oh my God, what could be done to help. I think this reaction will calm down in about a month’s time. - - I will need time to really process all this, like oh my goodness, how could this be... This really woke me up to this matter. - - When it’s out of sight and out of mind it isn’t talked about. But still, it touches us, it’s so near to us. – Woman 22 (I)

Nevertheless, the emotional heaviness would often be released in the next scene with feelings of hope or humour. This interplay was described to be present in the audience’s feelings throughout the play. Despite the dark topic some scenes of *IN316* were transformed into joyful or beautiful through the use of theatricality, dance and music (cf. Taylor 2011, 15; Kuparinen 2011, 198).

In the beginning it felt in a way heavy and distressed. But then when there started to be glimpses of hope in between, it made me cope better. Then it suddenly ended, and I felt surprised and wished it had still continued. In a way, the anxiety diminished because there was that light in it. – Woman 20 (I)

Many of the notable exceptions in the data had to do with emotional reactions such as guilt or irritation. A young woman got very irritated and accused the play of oversimplifying and generalising. However, she explained that the irritation was partly positive since it forced her to think and consider her attitudes. Another exception was one

interviewee that experienced guilt in a notably strong way: He brought up several times that the play loaded a huge amount of guilt on the shoulders of the Western white male (especially related to sex trafficking), and he was personally puzzled how to react to that sensation of being accused. There were some vague allusions in the interviews of similar yet milder experiences of male guilt. In general, the issue of pouring guilt on the free Western people that cause or enable trafficking, was seen as moralistic and accusing on one hand, but truthful and action-inspiring on the other. The performance provoked personal guilt especially in relation to consuming habits, but even more it caused participants to resent other Western people that do not care even to know about trafficking. The Western unethical living and indifference was especially frowned upon in the e-mail questionnaire answers, as the participants had started to raise awareness among their friends and faced refusal or ignorance. The guilt did however have positive effects too: A certain woman had a remarkable revelation facing the fact of contributing to trafficking in a way and stated that “we are part of the problem if we do nothing”. Another woman described the effects of guilty conscience like this:

So, if I choose the cheapest option, likely knowing that there is something suspicious in the production chain, someone will pay the full price someday anyway, maybe with their life. So, it did make me consider whether I can really make those kinds of choices with a clean conscience. – Woman 24 (I)

As mentioned before (4.1.3), the scene of estrangement, where two “angry spectators” left their seats, was mentioned as a point of turbulent emotions from confusion and alertness to anger and shame. Some described that this interruption to the normal proceeding of the play left them uneasy and confused for quite a while and would accompany them for the rest of the play.

I noticed that I could identify with several things in the performance. I felt anger towards those who abuse other people, but I could also relate to some attitudes they presented. Also, the incident where two women stood up in the audience and started to criticise the performance got me emotional. I got angry and thought ‘why shouldn’t this topic be discussed?’ I felt second-hand shame on the women’s behalf and irritated at my own self-defensive attitudes. – Woman 26c (E)

Overall, the play was described to be entertaining and captivating, even laughter provoking – amusement and confusion went hand in hand. The contrast between heavy and light scenes, and the use of humour, was said to have made the receiving experience interesting, diverse and not too excruciating.

4.2.2 Proximity

The most interesting aspect of the data is the way participants described the feeling of proximity that the theatre medium created. As Ahva and Pantti (2014, 328) suggest, the feeling of proximity is closely tied to emotions. According to the data the theme of the play really came close and concrete to the audience and the theatre medium made the topic and the victims “come alive”. As one interviewee put it, the play reminded “how tangibly close this all is to us, whether you like it or not.” For Silverstone (2004b, 444) as well as Chouliaraki (2011, 164, 374) proper distance implies value-driven and Other-oriented listening and discussion through solidarity: There is a need to find enough understanding and knowledge of the Others and their cultures, in order to be able to take responsibility that transforms into action and becomes an enabling force for the Others.

Silverstone (2007, 118) presents four dimensions that help us understand the undertaking of creating proper distance in *IN316*: trust, complicity, responsibility and distance.

Firstly, considering trust, participants’ notions about trusting the theatrical representation’s faithfulness to truth were notably positive. As mentioned above, it was surprising how little the trustworthiness of the play was questioned. Secondly, the aspect of complicity was very present in the comments of various interviewees who had a sort of awakening about themselves passively taking part in trafficking crime, through unethical choices or simply closing their eyes from the problem. Communality of the audience seemed to create a sense of a common cause of trafficking. Thirdly, adopting responsibility for the distant suffering Others was a clearly visible tendency in the data. Silverstone talks about a responsibility to listen and to respond in order to understand. The idea that this responsibility is shared and touches all global citizens, especially the privileged with greater means to solve problems, seemed to be accepted, but of course inner struggles of responsibility adoption might have stayed undetected (cf. *ibid.*, 7, 17). Fourthly, the distance between the actors, the stories, the reality of trafficking and the audience on the other hand was a recurrent topic in the discussions. The increasing of proximity was a constant that none of the participants contested. The two different aspects of proximity – the closeness of the reality of the topic and the closeness of the theatre medium – can be depicted in these two citations:

My first thought was that ‘oh no, this is really coming close to me’. I’ve maybe been trying to keep this subject away from me, like it’s real but not a part of my life in any way. Now I had to accept it and the fact that this is happening to people. So truly, it really went deep and touched me. – Woman 33 (I)

The experience was different from my other media experiences in that it all happened so close by and in such a physical way. It affected me in the way that the issue and the emotions felt different, much closer to me and so did the pain and injustice. – Woman 21(E)

The theatre medium was often and explicitly said to come “much closer” and be “more concrete than other media”. As indicators of this intense closeness were such recurrent expressions as the play “going under my skin” or it happening “under my nose”. Many participants described the performance as an intimate experience. Interestingly, scholars claim that audience sometimes feels present in the reality of the stage, and when representing a real event in a way that reveals its tragic consequences, emotional proximity can create an experience of presence that manifest by physical sensations (Ahva & Pantti 2014, 329; Taylor 2011, 9–10; Schoenmakers 1992). I suggest this is visible in the data: An interviewee described feeling she was herself “inside human trafficking instead of looking at it from a distance”. The experience of intimate closeness was also tied to the memorability of the play: It was said that the play brought the topic close to one’s own life, which made it easier to remember than other media. Even five months later, an interviewee described the proximity of trafficking as something unavoidable – “not being able to stop thinking about it or to get rid of it”. The theatre conventions that force the audience to continue watching were brought up once again:

The topic was brought up more impressively in the form of performance, it became carnal in a way. - - so close that you couldn’t escape it. You sit and watch. For example, reading information on the internet keeps the topic further away because of the fact-heaviness. – Woman 31 (E)

The increase in closeness had also to do with the fact that the performance could, differing from more restricted media, deliver a wider picture of its topic at once, while making the reception easier:

I at least got the feeling that this was truly the kind of theatre that could be used to bring up serious things and this topic. - - it enabled it, that it could speak, tell all the things at once. And that already gave a holistic... or it gave already a wider perspective. And obviously it is easier to understand... - - in some parts it used theatrical means and humour and it could speak about everything... which wouldn’t have necessarily been possible through a lecture, for example. – Woman 22 (I)

The experienced proximity of trafficking or its victims was closely related to the specifically theatrical aspects of transitivity and liveness, visuality and multimedia, bodily presence and identification, holisticness and immersiveness, concreteness and directness of interaction that were discussed earlier (4.1.1–4.1.3). Ironically, despite the use of props, costumes, makeup and make-believe, theatre was considered to be an

undisguised medium that is imminent and cannot be edited as it is delivered live. Some, in their account of theatre coming closer than other media, went as far as accusing other media of representing trafficking as distant.

Well I think the impressiveness of theatre is significantly stronger than that of other electronic media or print or anything. Because here it is people that are doing something, the humanity is present, so the feelings and that whole sense of real-life and that presence, it all makes the impressiveness of theatre much stronger, as a communicator, than other media. – Man 33 (I)

Thus, the key aspect of increased closeness was the use of live body media of actors to represent the victims. This strength of humans representing other humans seemed focal to the changing of experienced proximity. A young woman explained the play made her see trafficking victims “as individuals with individual stories instead of as numbers in statistics” and thus the topic started to feel less distant. The personal identification of spectators with victims was said to be an important part of the proximity. A certain woman commented that it is hard to identify with victims when being “kind of outside this trafficking”, unable to really see it. According to her identification became possible through the live-enhanced proximity and hearing individual characters’ stories. However, the same powerful means of humans representing humans was mentioned to be in action also in video content, especially when treating real-life stories, which also points to the power of documentarity. Here is a participant’s account on the importance of seeing the victims as real human beings:

Item No 316 came so close to me that I had to just give in and face it. People were portrayed as humans, not as emotionless. Somehow it was also powerful to me when in a certain scene an actor said that even acting it wasn’t easy, because it felt so hurtful. So how would it feel to actually live it? There was deep humanity in the play which resonated with me and it impressed me a lot more than a performance by any other media. – Woman 33 (E)

The vast majority said trafficking had felt very distant before seeing the performance, and that this distance had diminished as a result of the experience. One young woman explained she had thought there could never be trafficking in the Finnish labour market, and that had been the understanding of quite a few participants. For some people, certain forms of trafficking felt closer than other forms. It was revealed to many that trafficking “exists right in the neighbourhood, it is just not visible”, as one interviewee put it. Many underlined that the crime still thrives more in third world countries, namely in Asia, which is correct since the majority of trafficking indeed happens in Africa or Asia (Arthurs 2012, 147). As a consequence of enhanced proximity, the e-mail questionnaire revealed that after the play the participants had been more alert and aware of the

possibility of coming across trafficking in their own life spheres. In addition, new understanding of the victims as a highly heterogeneous group was gained.

On the other hand, a couple of participants said that the performance did not change the experienced proximity of the topic much because it already had felt relevant and close. One man explained how he had a more multifaceted picture of the subject already beforehand than what the play had to offer. But even these well-informed participants told they gained from the performance an intensive experience and deeper understanding of what trafficking means to each individual victim. Not only did trafficking seem closer to most interviewees after the performance, but also more horrific and even too personal. But on the other hand, no matter how close the things are brought, the receiving process remains an active and critically engaged thinking process, in which the audience always makes the final choices (see Reason 2010, 23–24; Silverstone 2007, 107–108; Kennedy 2009, 5; Sobchack 1999, 252–253). The mediated things are not automatically accepted but participants have to solve contradictions and try to choose a side in the matter:

It somehow felt that it was made too personal, that it was brought too close. - - And it created a feeling that the performance maybe overgeneralised matters. But on the other hand, I was conflicted because I realised that it was also discussing exactly the real problem. - - So, I was left with conflicting feelings about whether the performance would affect me positively or negatively. - - I had to ask myself if I should feel guilty. Or what was the message for me? – Man 33 (I)

The performance was without a doubt the ‘informing situation’ that has approached me most directly and been most concrete. It came so close that it couldn’t leave you cold. You immediately had to take a stand and decide what you think about it yourself. It left a permanent trace. – Man 26 (E)

As we have witnessed, the descriptions of the play bringing the topic closer to the participants were clear and abundant. This makes activist theatre an especially interesting focus of study when considering Silverstone’s proper distance. Overall, most surprising about the data is how eagerly indeed the interviewees compliment the performance and the theatre medium on its potential to mediate a cause and affect its audience. In the light of these results, it is no wonder that optimistic expectations of theatre’s potential for political empowerment are so common, or that practitioners and scholars throughout time have been obsessed about what is it that theatre actually does to its audience. Without concluding that theatre performance is an activist super-medium, it is at least fair to say it is a medium that should be paid more attention to in the realms of activism and mediation of a cause – not to mention academic audience research. Next, I will discuss these results further in relation to theoretical aspects and earlier research.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

I started this research from curiosity about the ways in which the theatre medium can work as a communicator in human rights activism. This thesis handles the issue through studying the audience experiences of activist theatre performance *IN316* and asks what kind of experiences and experienced changes it evoked in its audience. Using data from group interviews and an e-mail questionnaire, interesting results were found through qualitative content analysis: They reinforce the understanding that the theatre medium can function in considerable ways promoting an activist cause among its audience. Here the key results of the analysis are shortly listed, while further treated in the section 5.1: The pre-experience knowledge level seemed to affect whether the play primarily evoked deepening in understanding of the topic or shock about the topic's atrocity. Eversmann's (2004) division of structure and content applied to some degree in the data, while his special characteristics of theatre were all found. Documentarity provoked an important question about audience's media literacy and the aspect of change underlined the consumerist identities of Western subjects. Post-performance experiences, especially trafficking expert's presentations and the possibility to discuss, were extremely important to the participants. And finally, the emotionality was most central and worked together with the enhanced proximity: They guaranteed memorability of the experience and brought the topic of trafficking closer, enabling the creation of proper distance. In this chapter the results of the analysis are linked with theoretical aspects in order to provide new understanding on the topic (5.1). The relevance and limitations (5.2), as well as further research needs (5.3) are also identified, and the conclusions (5.4) made.

5.1 Discussion of key findings

IN316 was not seen as a counter-medium, but rather as a medium that amplifies the potential for ethical responses and commitment, enhancing the effects that earlier trafficking mediation had had on the participants, as Paget (2010, 177, 188, 190) and Reinelt (2009, 17) suggest. *IN316*, as a performance, clearly corresponds to the description Paget (2010) gives of single-issues activism, as well as Taylor's (2011) description of emotionally pervasive political stories of documentary theatre, that can bring distant events closer, offer context and details, and make them personally relevant. The data contained virtually only positive remarks about the capability of *IN316* to mediate well, which can point to various reasons: Maybe theatre had habitually not been seen as an effective medium and thus its capacity for mediating was seen as surprising.

The other options are that the double role of the researcher hindered critical opinions, or simply that participants deliberately and sincerely brought forth the mediational superiority of this activist theatre play, often in comparison with other media.

Questioning or critical comments about the mediation were scarce in the interviews, and only slightly more recurrent in the questionnaire. Even a critical onlook could not ignore what this thesis' data strongly supports: That the theatre medium's characteristic aspects indeed make it a special case among media experiences. The participants considered the experience of activist theatre as especially influential, even shockingly awakening.

Furthermore, they reported experiencing active engagement in emotional enlistment and being empowered to consider change in thinking and action. Of course, in addition to the characteristics of the medium, the urgency of the chosen topic makes a difference. Also, following Waldahl (1998, 51), one factor of the experienced influentiality could be the fact that, for many participants, theatre as a medium was not very habitual.

Some other examples of successful anti-trafficking campaigning through media products exist (e.g. movies *Lilya 4-ever* 2002; *Sex Traffic* 2004), where audiences have been moved from private emotion to concrete action in order to help the suffering Others. Thus, campaigns can be efficient even if forms of traditional storytelling are often criticised for ignoring the complexity and heterogeneity of the victims' situations. (Arthurs 2012, 145, 155; Chouliaraki 2011.) Whether the representations of *IN316* encouraged voyeuristic attitudes or enhanced audience's self-satisfaction and vicarious suffering, as suggested above, cannot be solved – however, the data suggests that empathy and emotional enlistment most often overran such attitudes (cf. Berlant 2004, 71; Arthurs 2012, 142, 144; Kelleher 2009, 6). Surely, the shock-factor being deliberately strong, there could have been more data on voyeurism and sensation. However, the comments about excessive brutality on stage suggest that the audience themselves recognised the dangers of gore and sensation and mostly counted them as profitable for the cause (see Freshwater 2009, 52). Next, in this sub-chapter the key results are treated separately according to their themes:

Pre-experience knowledge and competences

The different symbol systems of media presuppose different mental processing and skills (Waldahl 1998, 56). In *IN316* interviews there was a tendency of the ones who had high level of knowledge on trafficking or theatre-going to speak a lot, probably due to their mental schemas (of watching theatre on social justice) being more developed. Some

participants with vast experience described the effect of the play and its information as only moderately significant. Thus, I would conclude that competence probably led to higher level of understanding on the topic and combining the new information more efficiently but lessened the significance of the experience – while novelty led to stronger shock-factor and thus potentially to more considerable change. The ones unfamiliar with theatre and trafficking had the advantage of being genuinely shaken by both. (Cf. *ibid.*)

Structure, content and the special characteristics of theatre

Even if the content of the theatrical experience is ungeneralisable due to individuality and changes in contexts, the descriptions of *IN316* experience contents were broadly speaking surprisingly shared (cf. Eversmann 2004, 159–162, 171). This can be partly due to group influence or risk factors of research design in the case of interviews, but I suggest yet another factor at play here: The message of the performance was so clear and loud, and so distinctly recognised by the participants, that it left a visible, surprisingly shared, mark even in the content of the experience. The fact that something must be done to stop trafficking and it involves us all, was the most prominent message that the audience shared. Following earlier results, this understanding of the intention of the performance as a whole was an important part of participants' experience and it worked as a starting point – as a headline – directing interpretations (*ibid.*, 152).

The content was of course affected by the contexts of church-owned auditoriums, and many audience members potentially share Christian values, but I wonder if those things can thoroughly explain why demographically and socially so different participants in four different cities used such similar expressions and descriptions of their experience – even when responding individually to the questionnaire. Therefore, I ask the following question: Could there be an anomaly in the degree of generalisability of experience content in the case of activist theatre that is openly created to enlist audiences? Could especially emotional, brutal and empathy-evoking theatre performances shift the content of the experience from ungeneralisable and highly individual towards more generalisable and collective? These questions remain open for further research.

This thesis supports Eversmann's (*ibid.*, 140–141, 159, 172) earlier findings in what comes to the special characteristics of theatre, transitivity, collectivity, multimediality and ostension, that were all present in the data. Ostension was mostly talked about in relation to the living actors' powerfulness as markers for trafficking victims, as well as the presence of physical violence or abduction. The above-mentioned structure of the

theatrical experience was also to be found, even if not very straightforwardly: Interviewees referred to its aspects less precisely and gave also contradictory descriptions, and for example the aspects of perceptual synergy and aesthetic coherence were barely mentioned. Social conventions of staying seated in the auditorium, not being able to escape from witnessing, were frequently elaborated on – especially as the conventions were challenged during the estrangement and participatory scenes. The interplay of challenges and skills was strongly present in descriptions of coping with negative feelings and handling the estrangement scene. Differing from Eversmann, multimodality was not counted among the challenges and the initial hook that he emphasises was only mentioned a few times. (Cf. *ibid.* 159–163.)

Documentarity and fact mediation

The vast majority of the interviewees seemed to take for granted the documentarity of the play: The belief that the stage events corresponded or at least reflected the reality of trafficking was adopted without further questioning and the assumption of the play's veracity seemed fundamental, even if underlying. This indicates there being a real issue in audiences' media literacy: One would expect plenty of questions about the factuality and documentarity of a performance that includes e.g. news materials but does not, at any state, reveal its level of factuality or sources. After all, the audience is believed to be an active coproducer of reality, choosing which facts to validate and which to abandon, and make their own interpretations as Taylor (2011, 8) and Reinelt (2010, 10, 40) describe. However only one participant thoroughly pondered on this. Most interviewees would not pay any attention to these questions but instead resort to their intuitive understandings of *IN316*'s stories' truthfulness. Even when the interview discussions considered fact mediation, the level of truthfulness often remained untouched as the sensationality of trafficking facts seemed to steal all attention. An important part of media literacy of theatre goers would be the recognition of different theatrical genres and their characteristics, particularly in the case of documentary or activist theatre. As the participants seemed to fail this task of questioning and recognition, the response from theatre practitioners (that *IN316* partly failed to deliver) should be transparently revealing their own agenda and the performances' ontological starting points – to avoid the above-mentioned risks of documentarity.

Change in thinking or action

It was clear in the analysis that many interviewees saw their consumer choices as the primary way of acting against trafficking. Even if this seems logical as many counted it

the easiest and most accessible way of helping, interestingly, this tendency could be criticised when considering the above-mentioned ironic solidarity paradigm. According to Chouliaraki (2011, 374), activism can end up being reduced into consumerist practices, as ironic solidarity makes sure that the private reasons for action are self-originated and do not come from a true empathetic understanding of suffering Others' humanity. Solidarity has been instrumentalised for the global humanitarian market by turning it into self-centred consumerism, which reinforces the imbalance of power relations between West and vulnerable Others. (Ibid., 164, 368–369.) This audience reaction supports the claim that, in the West, people's self-understanding is strongly coloured by consumership as a primary identity before citizenship or political agency. The questionnaire revealed that only a few participants had taken political action in the form of NGO-participation or donations. However, the power of socially sharing about the importance of the anti-trafficking work, face-to-face or in social media, which I call 'relational micro-activism', should not be undermined. After all, as social psychology has proven, people tend to follow the lead of opinion-leaders. However, in the case of trafficking, the most influential decisions are made by political and legal instances, and thus a more direct and efficient way of provoking change would be political action.

Post-performance and communality

Chouliaraki (2006) suggests that emotional experience of empathy is not enough but it has to be accompanied by a political understanding of the root causes of suffering and of how to eliminate them. This is why mediation of distant suffering should always include a presentation of the potential that the spectator has to make a difference. The post-play presentation on trafficking facts and the ways to get involved was of great importance to the participants. The presentation seemed to be the necessary link between the spectacle of the performance and the everyday life of the audience. It was clearly important to avoid leaving the audience with an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness, that facing negative factual information and reports of the world often evoke, as well as to tie the sensational crime to the realities of Finnish legal contexts (cf. *ibid.*; Morley 1999, 200).

The estrangement scene (see 4.1.3) was an interesting point in the middle of performance experience as it in a way awakened the audience from the immersive suction of proximity. It was one of the most shocking scenes as it was told to have revealed, through confusion, the hypocrite attitudes and the narrow conceptions of the spectators themselves. This scene made the audience aware of other spectators and made visible the tension between the audience community and the private individual experiences (cf.

Freshwater 2009, 6–8). When communality arises in the audience, sharing the moment and reacting together can create feelings of unity. This state especially allows audience emotions to be affected by neighbours, but interestingly, even if emotionality was so focal, comments on other spectators' emotions were almost completely absent in the data (cf. Eversmann 2004, 158, 171). On the other hand, the possibility to discuss the performance with others afterwards was experienced as positive communality and an important continuum to the experience, extending it and making space for post-performance processing. No wonder that post-performance talks are valued tools for activists. The need for releasing the tensions created by the play was often tangible in the beginning of the interviews. (Cf. *ibid.*, 161; Reason 2010, 27; Johanson 2013, 163.) The interviewees engaged in a mixture of going through emotions and establishing critical thinking. As Davis & Postlewait (2003) suggest, the latter was clearly the path to wider understanding of the social injustice and to increasing the potential for political action in everyday life: Specific intentions and aspirations were created, and action plans drafted.

Emotionality

According to the data, the emotional dimension was the most significant part of *IN316* performance experience. Emotional reactions and strain on audience was according to many interviewees the very reason why the performance was experienced to be so overwhelming and influential. Participants described experiencing kinetic responses and physical reactions. Most participants clearly described a theatrical peak-experience: The emotional and physical alteration caused by the performance's experienced impressiveness, and the interplay of multi-level narrative was in many cases extensively described – while cognitive and emotional engagement were a given. Consequently, gratifying flow experiences were common among the participants and the immersiveness of the performance was congratulated in comparison to other media experiences. Peak-experiences commonly cause strong feelings of joy, admiration and pleasure, but in *IN316* these positive feelings were stained by shock, anger and empathy. (Cf. Eversmann 2004, 152–160, 169.) However, humour in the performance lightened the audience experiences as Kuparinen (2011, 198) suggests, and the interplay between hopelessness and hope seemed to be key in restricting compassion fatigue.

I consider that the problems of Taylor's (2011) emotional enlistment emerge right when the relation of strong emotional motivation and actualised activist action are studied. In my opinion emotional enlistment reached only halfway, stating the obvious, i.e. that theatre's strength as a medium is above all its capacity to move emotionally through

visuality and living body media. According to Taylor, political effectiveness depends on whether the audience's enlistment is resistant or complicit. She herself admits that enlistment still has to be transformed into political action. (Ibid., 13, 21.) As a result, enlistment is an insufficient tool for analysing audience commitment's consequences. More precise analysis tools and more comprehensive data collection methods would be needed in order to grasp how exactly emotional enlistment gains ground and results in corresponding action. Also, a possibility to compare the equivalency of enlistment speech and resulting action would help. Another interesting question is, what kind of time span after the performance experience offers fertile ground for enlistment to take shape and flourish, and how quickly it withers if not transformed into activist action.

The media are a central resource for an individual in managing the normality of everyday life, but this life is constantly interrupted by personal and political crises. Disasters are contained by the conventional media narratives, but also quickly forgotten due to media's short attention span. (Silverstone 2007, 112–113). This became visible in the way interviewees described how all media experiences, including the profoundest ones, slowly fade away from memory. It was mentioned that the more urgent personal crises the recipient has, the less attention can be paid to a specific media experience. However, theatre was described as a mediator that made this forgetting slower. This kind of lingering often results in new insights and high evaluation of the play (Eversmann 2004, 153). The reasons for this were said to be the high emotional density (see 4.2.1) and visuality (see 4.1.2). Considering activist theatre, the question seems to be what is the right amount of emotional turbulence that makes the experience powerful enough to linger in memory and lead to enlistment and change in thinking and action.

Proximity

The next question to be asked would be whether the performance affected the experienced proximity or succeeded in offering possibilities for creating proper distance (see 4.2.2). It should be stated that the results of this thesis considered the creation of proper distance between the mediator and the audience and thus this work does not evaluate the preceding part of creating proper distance – between the subjects (original victims) and the mediator (performance) (cf. Silverstone 2007, 120). There were no traces of the above-mentioned threat – detachment from the topic's reality due to theatricality – in the data. However, distance management was clearly present. (See *ibid.*, 121–122; Kelleher 2009, 8–9; Kuparinen 2011, 202.) Theatre was described as an intrusive medium: It came too close and invaded personal space overwhelmingly, which

was varyingly experienced as positive or negative. Silverstone's (2007) proper distance is key to understanding the experienced closeness of trafficking. It widens one's perspective and makes one willing to identify the Other in their sameness and difference, which is clearly visible in the data. (See *ibid.*, 11, 119)

I suggest that when the audience processes the play as non-fiction, experiencing it as reality, and even somehow feels present in the stage events, this fuels empathy and creation of proper distance. Of course, proper distance engages also the reason of a spectator, but reflection happens during the less immersed reception mode, conscious of the performance's artificiality. According to the participants' descriptions, there are indeed shiftings between distance and engagement that function as Schoenmakers (1992) and Reason (2010) suggest. I think there is an alternating function at play: Emotions work as fuel, reflection is the motor and changed action is the potential movement, which can be backed up by the views of Reason as well as Davis and Postlewait (2003).

I also claim that theatre differs from other media significantly, through liveness: The powerfulness of a live encounter seems to be an enhancer to proper distance and ethical response. Scholars are unanimous that liveness is most central of the theatre medium. Eversmann (2004) suggests that the simultaneity of production and reception cause the audience to experience a heightened sense of immediacy. As Kelleher (2009, 75) and Kennedy (2009, 13–14) describe too, sharing time and space – the bodily presence of the actors and their presence with each other and the audience – gained more weight in the accounts of *IN316*'s influentiality than the use of text or language. The potential for two-way communication and interpersonal encountering was highlighted in the data, as it makes possible influencing the delivery of the performance and committing to the production of the very experience (see Bennett 1990, 212; Hill 2011, 486). Thus, adding to Silverstone, I suggest that it is not only trust that can work in enhancing proximity, but living body media can, too. It made the identification process more effortless and also created a bridge between the audience and the original speaker of the verbatim text (cf. Paget 2010, 178; Hammond & Steward 2008, 9). Since the live presence of the actors was experienced as such a powerful aspect of mediation, the question arises, how does theatre medium combine aspects of face-to-face communication to its mediation?

Due to the central role of compassion fatigue in the emotional realm of experiences, I deduce that adjusting the amount of brutality presented in the theatre piece could work as a regulator for managing the proximity, too. Compassion fatigue seemed to be the data's

most notable hindrance to creating proper distance, which proves that moral proximity is never a given (see Ahva & Pantti 2014, 330–331). The experiences of overwhelming negative feelings of course vary a great deal among the individuals. In the case of *IN316* the interviews proved that approximately one third suffered from feelings of negative overload and compassion fatigue. Whether or not it obstructed their enlistment remains unsolved, and is probably highly individual, as many interviewees also evoked the idea that showing trafficking in all its atrocity was a key factor in the influentiality of the play. The question then is: To what kind of spectators gore and sensation work supporting proximity and enlistment – and to which they become distancing factors? The data proves that creating and maintaining proper distance is indeed a choice of a spectator: The initial enthusiasm of perceiving trafficking as something close and relevant to one's life had been further emphasised for some and almost abandoned for others in the second phase of data gathering. The vastly differing levels of enlistment visible in the e-mail questionnaire indicate that some adhered to their created and experienced proper distance with more perseverance than others; to them, remembering proper distance and the consequent responsibility seemed to have become a habit, truly changing them. This kind of long-term enlistment and subsequent action is the exact objective of activism.

5.2 Significance and limitations of the study

The topic of this research has been hard to tackle due to multidisciplinary, scarcity of former research, risk factors in research design and the known challenges in studying media reception. This study stepped into relatively uncharted territory. (See Freshwater 2009; Miller & Whalley 2017.) Nevertheless, it succeeds in offering fresh viewpoints, challenging or validating scholars' views, and new openings in the following ways: It participates in filling the void of asking and listening to the opinions of non-professional theatre audiences (cf. Freshwater 2009, 28–29; Eversmann 2004, 149–150). As Reason (2010) encourages, it takes into account the importance of post-performance experiences in two ways: Offering its participants the opportunity to process the experience right after the performance, and also adopting a long-term view through asking about the continuity of reception processes during the following five months. Thus, this thesis offers new insights, however, it is only a limited contribution and most certainly presents the challenges of a multidisciplinary and complex research on a fleeting phenomenon.

Furthermore, research on audience experience is easily contaminated by bias, which makes the double role of director-researcher especially problematic – even if the position

of a researcher is always inherently and inevitably subjective (see Freshwater 2009, 11; Miller & Whalley 2017, xii). The audience might feel inclined to overestimate the powerfulness of the performance when the director is interviewing. Another stumbling block could be the potential temptation of the researcher to overestimate the positive accounts in the analysis. The best way to avoid compromising the validity and reliability of the research is to acknowledge these dangers and take measures to resist such bias. In this study, these measures were notifying the interviewees that the quality or merits of the performance are not of interest, but merely descriptions of personal opinions and experiences of the participants. Another measure was that the analysis was done particularly meticulously and keeping in mind that no personal bias should affect the analysis. It is unfortunate how the double role endangers the credibility of these results that are intrinsically and undeniably positive about theatre's potential as an activist medium. As a researcher doing the interviews, it was confusing to discover how much the influentiality was emphasised by the interviewees – especially after reading scholars' critiques about over-positive assumptions and conclusions about theatre's efficiency in empowering its audiences. Consequently, this study boldly questions these critiques.

Here are some specific considerations of how this kind of study could be bettered in the future: The choice of appropriate combination of research techniques could be considered more thoroughly – in order to acquire the participants already before they have seen the performance (which can be arduous) and to take into account the group's influence in the interview situation (see Johanson 2013, 164, 170). Also, an internet survey would work better than an e-mail questionnaire, since it provides anonymity and thus diminishes the problem of pleasing the researcher. According to Arthurs (2012, 150), the question whether a media product on trafficking moves the audience to action depends, in addition to the aesthetic aspects, on the kind of political and interpretive audience networks it is presented to and what actions naturally flow from these networks – and how easily. This is why a similar research in a different, preferably non-Christian context would help to understand to what degree the remarkably positive results of this study are related to the performance context of church-owned auditoriums and the underlying Christian values.

5.3 Implications for further research

According to Hyvärinen et al. (2010, 29), through a fruitful analysis of interviews, a phenomenon becomes highlighted in a new fresh way that encourages other researchers to advance the research and dialogue on the topic – which has been one of this thesis'

aims. The results contain so many interesting aspects that several studies could have been conducted on the gathered data. There are several questions raised for further research: How audiences' experience of a theatre play would change if its documentarity would be underlined? How is the estrangement effect experienced and how it affects the audience in the context of activist theatre? Using comparative study with a control group, also these questions could be asked: How do different media, e.g. theatre, film and news text, succeed in enhancing the creation of proper distance, when factual content remains the same? How does the post-performance discussion affect the accounts of experiences? Also, an interesting approach to audience experiences would be to examine whether spectator types could be found. In this study, there were notable differences between male and female interviewees when considering their focus points and ways of information processing and expression. The differences between age groups were less visible, but younger participants seemed more eager and energetic in their search for change, taking on activist attitudes. These differences would be interesting objects of study, but unfortunately, they remain outside the scope of this thesis.

I, too, suggest that new openings in the fields of audience studies have to be made in order to keep up with the developments of the recent drastic changes of media and performance cultures. Different analytical paths could be followed in researching activist theatre audience experiences: Audience's emotional and embodied responses to a performance could be focused on more. One way of extracting these private experiences, in addition to deep interviewing techniques, could be 'performative writing', where academic, social and artistic analysis appears hand in hand with the spectator's relationship to the artist(s) and artwork, his/her personal history as well as physical and emotional responses to the performance (see Freshwater 2009, 23–25). Another example of possible future approaches is affect theory, which makes audiences' emotions and beliefs become central objects of study, focusing on the in-between of the one affecting the one being affected. The way affect theory encloses also the physiological state of the bodies of the audience could avoid the active-passive binary and bring about a deeper level of understanding. (Miller & Whalley 2017, 16; Gibbs 2011, 255–257.) It could also be interesting to theoretically compare media reception approaches with the ways in which different forms of art are interpreted and evaluated (Sandvoss 2011, 232–233).

5.4 Conclusions

I propose that *IN316* brought, through theatrical and documentary means, the moral degradation of trafficking right in the faces of the audience, offering an intense experience. Similarly to in-*yer-face* theatre, it did not look at the societal establishments for change, but rather addressed the individuals, in its search for social justice. *IN316* brought the stage close enough and got the audience to share the strong stage emotions instead of distantly observing them and, according to the results, succeeded in enlisting the audience emotionally. (Cf. Taylor 2011, 2–3, 6, 23.) The reports of experienced change five months after seeing the performance seem encouraging considering the medium of activist theatre and the aspirations of such medium to have an effect on its audiences – and to the wider society. It could be said that the *IN316* audience accepted the performance’s invitation to make judgements on the topic and its representation, as well as on society, culture and themselves, and thus entered into a political encounter (cf. Kelleher 2009, 6, 10–11; Eversmann 2004, 158). What further encouraged the audience to engage their thinking and empathy in the questions of social justice, was the clear emphasis of the performance and post-play presentation on reaching for solutions together as citizens (cf. Taylor 2011, 23–24). Thus, the critique of theatre lessening the seriousness of the real-life political topic does not seem to apply in the case of *IN316* (cf. Shalson 2017, 6). Actually, *IN316* rather sharpened audience’s sensitivity to the real human rights issue, through its theatricality and dissimulation (cf. Rae 2009, 75). However, these are limited results and the questions of whether and how theatre truly works for social justice or political empowerment remain contradictory.

In summary, an invitation to emotional enlistment and enhanced proximity can profoundly affect theatre audiences’ experiences and have varying long-term effects: emotional efficiency of theatre can promote activism and public engagement (see Reinelt 2009, 12; Taylor 2011, 12–13). According to this study, theatre tends to facilitate the creation of proper distance through its special means, primarily emotionality and the living body media, that make theatre resemble face-to-face communication (cf. Eversmann 2004, 157). Are the challenges of proper distance then media specific? Silverstone (2007) does not examine the potentials different media have for proper distance to function, but rather focuses on the less practical side of willingness to responsibility. In this case study, the living body media facilitated proper distance in an essential way, as it gave the audience concrete objects of responsibility. This raises

questions about non-live media's repertory of means that could fill the void of liveness in their practices, to enhance proper distance.

The results are undeniably positive about the participants' emotional enlistment and proper distance, but the duration of its effects varied and proved the forgetful nature of the human mind: Even the most awakening media experiences can be forgotten and the memories of one's emotionally highly altered state fade away with time, eating away its bites of any cognitive or behavioural changes. As my interest on this topic arose from the eagerness to understand how activist theatre is experienced and whether it can be an efficient medium, I would advise theatre activists to pay more attention to the post-performance experiences: It seems that the emotional enlistment and proper distance created in the performance require maintenance during the following months, if permanent results are desired.

Today, as Finland finds itself in an increasing trend of international trafficking, that is more and more organised by domestic perpetrators, the results of this thesis are even more timely (Finnish Immigration Service 2020). According to Chouliaraki (2011, 377) and Silverstone (2004a, 4), solidarity at its best could be communicating human vulnerability as a political question of injustice and collectively reflecting, empathising, identifying and acting upon it. This description considerably resembles the whole of the *IN316* project, and the participants of this research can be said to have collectively reflected, empathised and identified – many even acted – in order to abolish human trafficking.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: Presentation of *Item No 316* theatre performance

Item No 316 (IN316) is in many ways an unusual piece of theatre: It is a semi-professional activist theatre project aimed to raise awareness about human trafficking. It is created by the voluntary work of Christian artists and performed in nine church auditoriums in eight cities. The play consists of mainly Finnish and English scripting. There is also one song in French and small samples of Spanish, Russian, German and Italian (and translation provided). The use of languages is designed to underline the global nature of trafficking and the difficulties of victims and authorities to understand each other (The A21 Campaign 2020). The trafficking stories and facts told in the play were mainly picked up and compiled from real-life testimonials and NGO or government-provided facts.

The theatre piece is a combination of the styles and techniques of documentary theatre, in-her-face theatre, fragmented contemporary dramaturgy, and the use of multimedia. The theatrical components strongly involved in the play are acting with text and with physical expression, dancing in a group and solo, music with and without lyrics (live or recorded), sections with audience participation, theatre lighting, sound effects (including live speech into microphone from outside the stage), props and costumes and, lastly, videos and photos projected on a big screen above the stage. During the play there are five videos, six photos and ten factual text slides projected on a screen; eight sound effects, six times speech into microphone from outside the stage and nine music pieces to be heard.

IN316 was performed ten times in Suhe Church in Kallio, Helsinki, in April 2013 to a total of more than 1000 spectators. The play was also performed on tour in Helsinki Pentacostal Church, Turku Evangelical Free Church, Pori Lutheran Church, Tampere Pentacostal Church, Jyväskylä Adventist Church, Joensuu City Church, Lappeenranta Lutheran Church and Lahti Evangelical Free Church. The tour gathered over 800 spectators.

The play consists of twenty scenes that are from one to ten minutes in duration. Scenes treat themes of trafficking from sex slavery to child labour and unethical production of goods. First scene is an imaginary slave auction, where western white, rich and successful people are to be sold. The second scene consists of a song that presents the deprivation of work labor through dance. As third scene the audience hears in darkness trafficking news about a Chinese restaurant using trafficked workforce. Fourth scene consists of different attributes collected from the Bible for giving a positive identity to a person, and it

discusses human worth. That is exactly what the fifth scene soils through: a violent dance of masked oppressors and a punk song that declares that the victims are rubbish. Before the next scene there is a fact slide on the screen telling that half of all trafficking victims are children and 80% of those children are girls. In the next scene, child labor is treated by showing a small girl that rambles across the stage in overwhelming panic, dragging by a rope an extremely heavy box where a big teddy bear is sitting.

The seventh scene consists of a monologue on pornography. During this scene there is a fact slide on the screen telling that there are 4.2 million commercial websites selling porn and each day 260 million dollars are used to buy their content. The actor insists on being a gentleman and respecting women, while he is actually controlling an actress on a dog leash. Next scene is a song with French lyrics (translated on the screen), telling a very tragic story of a young French girl that is sold to sex traffickers by her boyfriend, danced by an actress. Scene number nine is continuation for the story of the little girl, this time working in a factory, exhausted. Before the next scene there is a fact slide on the screen telling that slaves around the world are paying for our consumerism with their lives.

Scene number ten is a combination of consumer awareness and an interactive fortune wheel game. First, an actor alternately accuses and understands the audience for buying slave products, but is interrupted by a carnivalistic fortune wheel game invading the stage. Some audience members are then asked to participate by turning the wheel. Fortune wheel scene is then, again, interrupted by two fake “angry spectators” (actors) who get up in the middle of the second row and start leaving, muttering about the insulting content of the provocative scene. Before leaving the auditorium, one of them tells the actors that “these kinds of things are not to be said and done in a church”. The actors on stage are first shocked but then start to contradict them. Soon a voice in the microphone apologizes for hurt audience feelings and tells the stage actors to calm down and go on with the next scene. The two “angry spectators” leave with doors banging.

In scene number twelve, the aforementioned little girl is playing with Barbie dolls: a male doll is raping a young girl doll. The scene advances towards real sexual abuse of the little girl herself but gets cut right before and the actress playing the girl comes to the front of the stage to say, "it hurts even to act this scene", and exits. The thirteenth scene is a second news transmission in darkness, about the arresting of 245 child pornography producers and spreaders. The fourteenth scene is creating a comparison between a car dealership and the trade of wives. During the humorous scene two young women are sold to be wives of

eccentric Finnish men. After this scene there is a slide on the screen providing facts about Asian wife dealers. The next fact slide tells about selling people in pieces: illegal trade of human organs and the trade of sexualised bodies. The fifteenth scene is a story of a child prostitute who is moved from brothel to brothel around Asia, growing up, having had about 67 000 sex partners before ending up in a brothel Helsinki. After this scene comes a fact slide telling that sex trafficking is the fastest growing trafficking trade: 80% of all trafficking victims are exploited sexually and around 30 000 sex slaves die every year because of all sorts of exploitation.

Scene number sixteen is a dream of the prostitute including text taken from Song of Songs in the Bible and edited into a dramatically useful form. A young couple in love is dancing next to her, with a big white cloth, while the text is read by male and female voices. After the prostitute's dream, scene seventeen takes her into a violent dance with a customer of hers who ends up strangling her. After this scene there is a fact slide on the screen telling that only around one percent of the victims are rescued from their oppressors. The second to last, eighteenth, scene starts with transforming the stage into an office and dragging the body of the dead prostitute onto the office desk. A social worker and a trafficking victim, exploited in construction labour, then enter the office and discuss the legal procedures of the helping system. The body of the dead prostitute remains laying on the office table, under the social worker's nose, unnoticed. As a result of the discussion the construction worker is left without help due to the system rules. In this scene there are citations from the Finnish law defining strict limits of helping trafficking victims as well as contradicting Bible passages that urge to help everybody in need. The conclusion of the scene is that the actors step down the stage and put their hands on the shoulders of random front row spectators declaring they want to help "you, and you, and you", in other words: everybody.

Shifting to the nineteenth and last scene the music starts to play, the dead prostitute gets up from the desk and puts on a white dress. Actors dance the last dance, lyrics telling about the true beauty and value of the prostitute and how her wounds will be healed and fear will be gone. The final news transmission is situated in the future. It tells that Finland has become a trafficking-free country due to strict policies and nationwide campaigning, and the European Union is ready to adopt these measures too, to end modern slavery. The scenes that get most emphasis in the play, the key scenes so to say, are numbers seven and eight as an entity, number ten where the audience is challenged by two "angry spectators" and lastly, the entity of scenes through sixteen to nineteen that tell the story of the prostitute.

APPENDIX 2: Interview questions

Background questions:

1. Age, profession and e-mail address?
2. How many times have you gone to the theatre during the last year?
3. What was your knowledge level on trafficking before seeing the performance, on a scale from 1 to 3? (1 beginner, 2 average and 3 expert knowledge)
4. From which media had you heard about trafficking?

Questions considering the theatre experience:

1. How did you experience the performance? If something touched you, what exactly?
2. How would you describe the experience with one word?
3. Did the performance feel too long or boring?
4. Which facts did you retain from the performance?
5. Which made the facts more memorable, the play or the post-performance presentation?
6. Is theatre “a medium” in your opinion?
7. How does theatre differ from other (conventionally conceptualised) media?
8. What is the purpose of theatre in your opinion?
9. What was this performance’s purpose?
10. Is it possible for the performance to change something in you or in your thoughts?
11. Will this performance experience affect your actions?
12. Did you read the programme notes before the performance? Do you consider it useful or harmful?

APPENDIX 3: E-mail questionnaire questions

1. What do you most remember of the performance?
2. How would you describe your experience in one word?
3. What kind of feelings and mental states the watching experience evoked?
4. What did the performance change in you or your thoughts, if there were any changes?
5. Have you helped trafficking victims more after seeing the performance? In what ways did your concrete actions change?
6. How did the performance affect your way of thinking about trafficking victims, if there were any changes?
7. How distant a problem trafficking seemed, before and after seeing the performance?
8. In what ways, if any, the experience of seeing the performance was different from getting to know about trafficking through other media? What kind of a trace it left, when compared with other media?