

Thomas Ostermeier and Peter M. Boenisch

‘The More Political We Are, the Better We Sell’:

A Conversation about the Political Potential of Directing Classical Drama and the Nasty Traps of Today’s Cultural Industry

Thomas Ostermeier (b. 1968) is recognised internationally as the most important contemporary German theatre director. He is best known for his productions of Henrik Ibsen’s Nora (2002) and Hedda Gabler (2005) and of William Shakespeare’s Hamlet (2008). He was awarded the Golden Lion of the Venice Biennale in 2011 for his lifetime achievements. Since 2000, Ostermeier has been Artistic Director of the Schaubühne in Berlin, the ensemble famous for its political work by director Peter Stein in the 1970s and 1980s. From 1996 to 1999, before he took over the Schaubühne, Ostermeier ran the Baracke, a small experimental space at Berlin’s Deutsches Theater. There, he introduced German audiences to radical international new writing by authors such as Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, Lars Norén, Biljana Srbljanović, and other contemporary playwrights. A confessed Marxist since his teenage years, Ostermeier left home at 14, lived rough for some time and played in a punk band, before training as an actor at University of the Arts Berlin. He then studied directing in the class of Brecht-heir Manfred Karge at Berlin’s Ernst Busch Theatre Academy. Fourteen years ago he started his Schaubühne-tenure with the publication of the theatre manifesto, ‘The Mission’. This short text called for a ‘new realism’ in theatre, understood as ‘a view on the world with an attitude that demands change.’¹ Recently, Ostermeier provoked debate in German theatre by defending the public financing of institutionalised state and city theatres, which receive the bulk of the nation’s theatre funding, against cuts. He controversially suggested that experimental performance makers, who side with the calls to take money away from the established theatre institutions, inadvertently turn into apologists of the neoliberal cause.

Ostermeier’s production of Ibsen’s Ein Volksfeind (An Enemy of the People) premiered at the Avignon Festival in July 2012 and appeared at the Melbourne Festival in October of the same year. In the fourth act, the protagonist Doctor Stockmann addresses the assembled public not with Ibsen’s original speech, but with the notorious French anti-globalisation manifesto The Coming Insurrection, which Ostermeier inserted. Following the speech, he also offers space for an open discussion between the audience and the characters about this text; depending on the audience’s willingness to debate, it may last anywhere from a few moments to twenty minutes, before the play resumes with the fifth act. Ostermeier is also Professor of Theatre Directing at the renowned Ernst Busch Theatre Academy in Berlin.

Peter M. Boenisch (b. 1971) is a German theatre researcher who has worked in the UK since 2003. He is Professor of European Theatre at the University of Kent, and was a co-founder of

the European Theatre Research Network (ETRN), with Paul Allain and Patrice Pavis. His book Directing Scenes and Senses: The Thinking of Regie is forthcoming with Manchester University Press (Spring 2015). Together with Ostermeier, he is currently working on a book titled The Theatre of Thomas Ostermeier, to be published by Routledge in 2016, from which this interview is taken. Their conversation took place at the Schaubühne Berlin in May 2014.

Peter M Boenisch When we discuss radical, resistant contemporary theatre work, we usually think about experimental performance art first, and not necessarily about the staging of dramatic works from the bourgeois classical Western canon, as you produce them at the Berlin Schaubühne ...

Thomas Ostermeier Before we even begin talking about ‘performance of resistance,’ I find it very important to challenge the underlying opposition in your question: that between performative, non-narrative and progressive work on the one hand, and narrative, linear, allegedly outdated dramatic theatre on the other. Such binary thinking goes against the very core of postmodern thought, which tells us that everything is possible. It therefore appears extremely peculiar to me to find, time and again, apologists of postmodern contemporary performance art rejecting institutionalised, dramatic theatre as outright evil. In fact, this is a disastrous position. For one, because it is purely ideological, but also because it entirely avoids recognising the fact that there exists, in the fields of both dramatic theatre and of performance art, genuinely progressive work as well as not so progressive work. I find that those who in their work today merely repeat the non-narrative formal games of performance art for the hundredth time are much greater conservative epigones than those who start from scratch with a dramatic text, or in whatever form. For years now, I have been warning against the unreflected partisanship for performance forms that affirm what I have described already 15 years ago at the Baracke as ‘capitalist realism.’ If you attempt to critique today’s world by suggesting that everything is so complex and such an impenetrable rhizome that we can only articulate little fragments of reality in our work, then that’s nothing but grist to the mills of those in power who must relish such ‘critique’ which doesn’t even attempt to name and tell stories about the big, urgent problems in our society. Of course, the form of classical drama has a long time ago become part of the commodified Hollywood realism that dominates our ways of seeing the world. But I find it very important that we don’t ignore the fact that—not for the wider public, but in our own theatre-internal discourse, and in our own theoretical debates—we have arrived at a no less dominant, even dogmatic aesthetic horizon, and that is postdramatic theatre. Performance art has become a hermetically sealed world just as much as dramatic theatre. As soon as it became the majority discourse, performance and postdramatic theatre lost their power to be emancipatory. I therefore very deliberately call for a provocative battle on this crucial point.

Peter M Boenisch The Schaubühne certainly wants to align itself with emancipatory political theatre work. Your current Spring 2014 season programme brochure starts right away with an interview you led with Italian political philosopher Antonio Negri. But can the drama of Ibsen or Shakespeare still, or again, be radical, resistant, subversive, political today, in the age of what Negri describes as ‘empire’ and ‘multitude’?



Fig 1. 'The old idea of the independent theatre artist who functions outside of the institution no longer works today': German theatre director Thomas Ostermeier. Photo © Paolo Pellegrin.

Thomas Ostermeier This is such a complex topic! I feel we need to start by zooming out to the bigger picture before we can discuss Ibsen and Shakespeare. Two central questions come immediately to my mind: first, what is politics at all in today's world, and second, how does today's cultural industry function? I see an important connection here, which we have referred to in our *Enemy of the People* through text we introduced in the fourth act—*The Coming Insurrection*—arguably one of the most radical political manifestoes of the past decade. It says there that it has become fashionable to critique our society in the vain hope to save it, in the theatre, and through art more generally. This points us to a notable desire for political relevance in today's cultural sector, which I see as a phenomenon of the past decade. Many institutionalised, but also many independent cultural producers have begun to feel a longing for relevance, and so they discovered politics.

Yet, the old idea of the independent artist who functions outside of the institutions as the avant-garde of a future, and who offers from this standpoint a radical critique of our society, no longer works today.

Instead, it has become the ultimate selling point for artists that they seem to stand outside of the institutions, and I would suggest many artists have discovered this as their selling point. So, on the one hand, making critical and political art affords you credibility and authenticity as an artist, but on the other hand this very authenticity is exactly what today's art market wants to buy. As artists we therefore find ourselves stuck in an extreme contradiction: the more we position ourselves outside of the dominant cultural industry and the more we articulate our radical independence, the more we become attractive for that very cultural industry. One of the most salient examples of recent years must be Tino Sehgal who is explicitly politically minded, who attempts to remain unmarketable by not giving interviews, by not producing any documents, or any recordings, anything that could become sellable, who thereby seeks to prevent his art from becoming a cultural commodity—and precisely for this very reason his market value has risen exponentially. I would not for a moment suggest that this is a conscious speculation of Tino Sehgal, but still, his art was unable to escape from these mechanisms: he who can most credibly argue for standing outside the system achieves the highest market value within the system.

I therefore think our reality has become far more complex than the, again, strictly binary idea suggests—that there exists, on the one hand, the affirmative, institutional world, and on the other hand there is the world of resistance outside of these institutions. Such a concept is no longer adequate, and that's the crux when you discuss ideas of subversion, radicality, and

resistance. Both worlds rather function as communicating pipes, as [Niklas] Luhmann might express it. The still existing institutions of our society can only survive if they replenish and refresh themselves from time to time with people who have stood outside the system, who have been in fact extremely critical of the system. I am a very good example for this. This is quite a nasty position if you want to resist, subvert and do radical work.



Fig 2. Director Peter Stein brought Schaubühne Berlin to international fame in the 1970s and 1980s. Since 1981, it has been based in architect Erich Mendelsohn's 1920s UFA cinema building at Lehniner Platz. Thomas Ostermeier has been the company's Artistic Director since 2000. Photo © Torsten Elger.

Peter M Boenisch When a theatre in Toronto, as it recently happened, purchases your *Enemy of the People* wholesale to stage an exact copy, not unlike the Disney shows or musical productions which you can see in identical copies all around the globe, it certainly seems to signal this tension or even trap in your own work.

Thomas Ostermeier Well, you know, I would say the signal has been there much earlier. We are not supported by the city of Berlin to do Augusto Boal-type invisible theatre in underground stations. Our *Enemy of the People* has been shown at probably 80 percent of the world's most influential theatre festivals. Financially, we need such productions to survive. And indeed, in exact analogy to the phenomenon I have attempted to describe, the more we articulate ourselves politically, the better we sell. But, this does not mean that I sit down and think about how I can now create the next political piece. When I work on a play such as *An Enemy of the People*, or *Hamlet*, I find during rehearsals, and during my own preparatory reading of the play, traces of topics like resistance and subversion, and as a director, I then try to carve out these topics and to bring them to the foreground. These are topics we debate and negotiate in our productions. I would however not for a moment suggest that the show itself is an act of resistance.

Hamlet, for instance, is a resistance fighter, but that's the topic of the play. He is called upon to offer resistance in a political situation: 'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark!' Hamlet realises that something isn't right—isn't that the feeling of every adolescent, at whatever time, in whatever society? You can have that feeling growing up in China today, but equally you feel that something is rotten as you are growing up in New York, and you feel the same as you grow up in Lower Bavaria as I did. It's the topic of *Hamlet*. The Old-School-Shakespeare



Fig 3. To act or rather not to: Thomas Ostermeier's *Hamlet*, created in 2008, with Lars Eidinger in the title role, has been the director's most successful production to date. It is still in the company's repertoire and, in 2014, celebrated its 250th performance. Photo © Arno Declair.

scholarship would say, it is the classical tragedy of revenge. But Shakespeare introduces a truly interesting question for Hamlet: shall I—within the fiction of the plot, but also as a recognisable figure in a specific tradition of this genre, where the audience in Elizabethan London certainly expects me to take up my arms and to take revenge—shall I accept this fight against a politically corrupt, entirely degenerated system, or shall I break through the cycle of revenge? And here I see the genuinely political achievement and the emancipatory process of Hamlet: given the opportunity to murder Claudius, he does not do what Laertes and Fortinbras do, he does not go out and kill, but he breaks through the circle of violence and counter-violence. Isn't this the far more radical emancipation? A guy suddenly asks, shall I take up my arms – or rather do nothing, and sleep. 'I prefer rather not to,' as Bartleby says. Performing this, as we did, in Ramallah—a play which starts asking the question whether you should take up your weapons and resist—you publicly voice a question that 80 percent of your audience, and especially the young ones, are negotiating on a daily basis. Performing this in such a place, or performing in Moscow, a different set of political interferences come into play.

But the longing to get rid of the mission is also exactly what I would see as the Hamlet-sentiment of our own generation—and of course, with my theatre, I want to tell a story about ourselves, about our generation. We have a clear mission, but we also have the desire to shrug off this mission, because it is much too big. We know we simply won't be able to succeed in this mission to save the world, the world where the rule of the market economy has become absolute. It's the call we all clearly hear—we all have our own ghost of Hamlet's father in our minds because in the course of the 20th century there were people like Gandhi who resisted, also Rudi Dutschke in the 1968 German radical left, our own parents who started the Green ecological movement, or who on the contrary have been conservative and against all that. These are our own 'Old Hamlets' who call on us and say, something is rotten, you need to take

revenge, you need to change the world to save it. And we know that the only way to save our planet is a truly radical change. I talk about all this merely through existing stories, and at times we are able to bring these stories into a context where they transcend the fictional drama and touch the political reality, like when a young Palestinian comes to me after seeing our *Hamlet* and says, 'this is not theatre, this is real life.'

Peter M Boenisch In your more recent *An Enemy of the People*, you lift the fourth wall during the assembly scene in the fourth act, and you instigate a discussion with the audience after Dr Stockmann has read out the text of *The Coming Insurrection*. Has this been an attempt then to find a form where your theatre manages to similarly transcend the fiction also for a Western audience, who comfortably lives far away from a war and conflict zone: by creating theatre moments where the boundaries between fiction and reality become porous and fluent?

Thomas Ostermeier In *An Enemy of the People*, we have found in the play itself a moment—the public meeting Stockmann organises in the fourth act, and where Ibsen in the original text represents an audience on stage through actors who act the audience—which offered itself to transgress the frame of the theatre of representation, which I usually create, and to thereby trigger exciting and interesting phenomena for each spectator. A friend of mine recently saw the show and he was entirely baffled that the audience takes this moment seriously. He had expected them to say, stop pretending, we don't believe you, we know you are actors and not the mayor and the newspaper editor. But the audience engage with them as characters in this discussion.

But I think I now need to make one point very clear here. As an old school Marxist, I don't believe for a second that this is a political event, or that any political event could take place in the theatre, or in art, in the first place. Resistance, emancipation, revolution, and true, active politics happen when social movements unite and begin to shake up and change the existing conditions and power relations in a society. In our pacified Western societies in the capitalist centres, we live in entirely apolitical times. We have globalised and exported social and political struggle, and except for the odd news-image of African refugees whose bodies are sliced up by the razor-barbed wires that surround the Spanish exclaves in Northern Africa, or who drown in the Mediterranean off Lampedusa, we don't even see or hear anything. Of course some form of 'politics' happens, but not the radical emancipatory politics where everyone shares political conscience, and equal participation and co-determination for all is realised. A society without domination, without rule and hegemony. As for every engaged artist, this is the utopia on the horizon for me, too. But I am not so naïve as to believe for a moment that we would ever get there through art, or that we live, today, in times where there is even a faint chance of moving towards such a different society, even though our own societies are more and more split by an ever more extreme gap between the poor and the rich. Yet still, the situation has not become sufficiently tenuous that people would get involved in politics beyond their engaged slogans or the stupid talk shows on TV. For Western critical hipsters, the idea of actually involving themselves in party politics is short of revolting—so I have no hope for any revolution soon.

But enough of my analysis of our times and of the political potential of art. The upshot is that I aim for what I tend to describe as 'sociological theatre': theatre as a laboratory to observe human behaviour. Of course, politics is part of sociology, of society, but as to whether this theatre can then become emancipatory, even an act of resistance—I don't think so. It does however become interesting in those moments where boundaries start to blur: that's where moments of an emerging political consciousness suddenly appear, or at least of a game that



Fig 4. 'An experience in the theatre helps people to gather the courage to say no in the real life too.' In Ostermeier's 2012 production of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, protagonist Thomas Stockmann (Stefan Stern, at the lectern; with Ingo Hülsmann, front, as his mayor brother Peter) proclaims the anti-globalisation manifesto *The Coming Insurrection* in the fourth act, and is silenced by the people with paint bombs, instead of the stones of Ibsen's original text. Photo © Arno Declair.

irritates. But again, in *An Enemy of the People*, this is a straightforward dramaturgic manoeuvre. Stockmann is a narcissist, a grumbler, a querulous fellow and smart-arse who suddenly gets stubbornly resistant, and we set it up that the audience at some point says, shit, when all of our political leaders are corrupted by notorious self-importance and narcissism, when we cannot be sure whether their motive is really to bring the truth to light, or perhaps rather to finally get one over his brother who has looked down on him all his life—are then perhaps all our emancipatory movements undermined in their very foundations? For me, we have in our recent German history of the 1968 protests two political leaders who exactly illustrate this crucial question—Rudi Dutschke and Andreas Baader. The former managed to pacify his narcissism, the other drove it into militant extremism.

This is the debate I attempt to stimulate through *An Enemy of the People*, but once again I want to ask: is this then already resistant performance, or subversion? Even if, as it happened during our performance of the production at Buenos Aires, the scene triggers a tumultuous riot in the theatre where for about half an hour, a true, genuine controversy amongst factions in the audience took off, and it got short of a physical fight—I am sitting in the back row and rejoicing, but more like a schoolboy who has managed to play a clever prank that sets his parents against his teachers. It's the joy of playing with fire, of kindling conflicts which already exist beneath the surface, and to watch them blow up and escalate. But I wouldn't say it's political because there is no consequence to it.

Peter M Boenisch But isn't this the very place of art, of theatre—to create such spaces of the 'as if', spaces without consequence? If we adopt Jacques Rancière's distinction of 'the police' as the administration of the political, of the party politics of our neoliberal democracies, and of 'the political' as the moments where the configurations and the partition of the sensible, as he terms it, are modified—could we not argue that theatre today becomes political precisely where it offers us such new configurations and allows us to make different experiences? Of course, such an idea of 'political performance' falls way behind the Marxist idea of politics as you just described it, as actual change of the conditions of dominance, power and hegemony. Is Rancière's suggestion—which also comes from a Marxist tradition, though, via his teacher Louis Althusser—an attempt to save political theatre in what you just described as apolitical times, where no revolution is anywhere on the horizon?

Thomas Ostermeier His idea of organising experience is certainly interesting. It might be an apt description of the experience of *An Enemy of the People*, where spectators get so emotional and so upset that they forget that the actual reason for their emotions, for their rage has been a theatre performance, and not a real political scandal. It is every director's dream to create such moments. The question whether the changing and redistribution of experiences is political is plausible and right—yet I would want to ask: *Cui bono?* What for? That's what I really wonder about a lot of current political thinkers, especially when they start discussing and analysing art works: What is their utopia? Behind every concept for political art, there has to be an answer to this one question: *what for?* Is it the vision of a radically different society? Or is it, as *The Coming Insurrection* hints at, to provide another crutch to keep our postdemocratic society going, another anaesthetic infusion into the veins of a dying society? Where do you want to go with your political art?

Peter M Boenisch What for—on that question, I would like to return to a point you made earlier. You spoke about the 'Hamlet mentality', that we have this desire of rather wanting to escape from the burden of a mission that we feel, the mission of having to act and to really do something in order to secure the future and the survival of our planet. I recognise this

description for our own generation, for those who have grown up in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet, with the next generation, with our students for example, it often seems to me that the mere discovery that such a mission exists, that it is possible at all to have such a mission—the discovery of ‘old Hamlet’ and his ghost if you like—is already a crucial ‘political’ discovery for them. The fact that there is something beyond the circulation of goods, of media and information, beyond the marketplace of creativity and innovation, in which theatre to a very large degree is fully integrated nowadays, can actually already be this reason you are demanding, at least I would think so. Talking to this generation about your *Hamlet* production, for instance, I heard less about the ‘I’d rather not to’-position, but far more about the discovery that you can stage *Hamlet* as something different than the reproduction of a classical text one ‘does’ and one has to know at school, but in a way that opens a space for thinking, as something that actually asks relevant and very personal questions. This seems to be quite an experience, a political experience to a large degree, for this generation.

Thomas Ostermeier And giving them this experience, you make them even more capable of surviving in our global capitalism, because they can then think more creatively, and are able to offer this creativity for sale on the market place. Capitalism desires nothing more than people who think differently, and thereby perhaps invent the next iPhone. Here we return to the very reason why critical art, why ‘performances of resistance’ have become so popular recently: contemporary capitalism has realised that it won’t be able to survive if it drowns and kills off the ability to think differently in its economy of numbers, of zeroes and ones, of profits.

Peter M Boenisch So we’re back to the trap in which critical art is stuck. What, then, for you is the impulse and appeal of responding to this situation by staging dramatic classics?

Thomas Ostermeier They are Trojan horses. It’s as simple as that. You write on the tin *An Enemy of the People*, *Hedda Gabler* or *Hamlet*, and you cater to the audience, the same audience who also fill our museums from MOMA in New York to the Tate Modern in London, or the Nationalgalerie here in Berlin. Our bourgeois class, confronted with a loss of meaning and driven by a desire to make sense of the world, seeks to satisfy this desire by turning to the classical canon of art. That is why after the era of postmodernism we have recently seen the return of classical culture, of *Bildung*. I have the feeling that once again it is expected that you know what a symphony is, that you know your stuff about art history and also about the literary classics. That’s why people come to pick up this knowledge in the theatre. They say, I won’t manage to read *Hamlet*, but if Ostermeier does it at the Schaubühne, then I go and watch it, so I know what it is about because I might need it at some point. So I imply people get their dose of the classical literary canon to fill their knowledge gaps, and I then show them the classics as if they were a contemporary play.

Peter M Boenisch So, you don’t see the classics as offering another perspective, a timeless view on the conflicts of our present, or make a case along these lines?

Thomas Ostermeier No, I wouldn’t make that case. My huge fondness for Ibsen results from the pure fact that our own society has returned to absolutely bourgeois values. The biggest desire for many in our German society today, which I can speak about best of course, is to be able to make ends meet financially. For them, the utopia is a couple who earn well, who live in a decent flat, furnished in today’s entirely trivial and generalised style, with the kids attending the best possible school and ideally an international school, learning the violin and playing classical music, going with them to the theatre, and training them from as early on as possible how to survive in globalised capitalism. This is their ultimate attempt to be able to survive in

global capitalism, by acquiring certain weapons and a certain shell that help you to survive. And a big part of it is the classical bourgeois canon. With all that, you come very close to the problems, to the ideas of happiness which you find in Ibsen's characters—and at the same time you are very far from, say, Goethe.

Peter M Boenisch Departing from the very same analysis of our current society and of the problems of global neoliberal capitalism, other artists would still, as a consequence, do the opposite, and turn away from the classics and the established theatre institutions, towards the off-scene and experimental performance.

Thomas Ostermeier But as I said in the beginning I don't think at all it is a question of form, but of modes of organisation. If I were to do experimental theatre in the off-scene, I would need to be aesthetically even more conventional in order to survive—and remember I find that much of what you call 'experimental performance' has in fact become no more than a convention, too. I find that I am able to work in much greater liberty than in the so-called independent theatre right here, in this institutionalised theatre bunker. To start with, I can be sure that my employees get paid every month.

Peter M Boenisch So it is about exploiting ...

Thomas Ostermeier Exactly so. You exploit the freedom which spaces like this offer. But again the all-important question is—*cui bono*? These spaces of play, of freedom—that's all fine, but as an artist working within this space of liberty you must have a certain utopia you want to present to your audience. Otherwise your theatre is no different from a theme park of classical culture.

Peter M Boenisch So what is your personal utopia, then?

Thomas Ostermeier Again, a lot is going through my mind on this question. I think that the self-understanding of our society, where we have come to a basic agreement that we have a state, we pay taxes, and in return for these taxes that we collect in our rather prosperous, rich society, the state guarantees some basics, such as security against attacks, our personal safety, then also streets, infrastructure, hospitals. I think it has become quite utopian today to insist that art and theatre belong to these things for which our society distributes its wealth, and to insist that theatre art is not a bad thing because it helps our society to survive. It offers spaces where we attempt to understand ourselves through play, through things that have no space in our everyday life—and not having these spaces would lead to alienation, to a spiritual coma, to utter idiocy and stultification, as Rancière calls it. Art therefore immunises our society, and for this reason it is right to say we need art, and so we do not at all need to defend art in economic or in any other terms.

Peter M Boenisch Such a utopia sounds more like a defence of an old world and of values some want to give up, rather than as projection of a different, future world, doesn't it?

Thomas Ostermeier The utopian moment here is to insist on positive terms, and not to consider the public financing of art—and I reject the terms subvention or investment here—as burden and problematic legacy which we cannot afford anymore and have to get rid of. What nonsense! Public finances for the arts even in Germany are less than two percent of the public budget, and theatre accounts for around 0.5 percent of it! And still, there is no public outcry,

not even of leading intellectuals in our society, when it is suggested that we are unable to afford this.

Peter M Boenisch So your political utopia is to insist on theatre art as public common, in the same way as others currently defend, for instance, water, health and education as ‘commons’ against their neoliberal marketisation and commodification?

Thomas Ostermeier This is my approach to my role and to my function within this industry, and why I am doing it. But no, my true utopia of course is to overcome the material and political realities and to arrive at a society without domination and suppression. Everything else is day-to-day pragmatism.

Peter M Boenisch Jodi Dean would argue here that by producing theatre art, by making spectators engage with and articulate their political energies in your ‘Enemy of the People’-production, you absorb these energies and prevent them from being invested in realising such a radical utopia.

Thomas Ostermeier And Julien Coupat, who is thought to be one of the leading authors of the anonymous *Coming Insurrection*—manifesto would agree; their arguments are in many points very similar. And it is certainly correct to suggest that you pacify radical energies and channel them into art, away from direct action, and that you therefore appear like the henchmen of the dominant affirmative political doctrine. I can absolutely see what Dean is suggesting, and I sympathise with the point she makes. But take the concrete example, our *Enemy of the People*. In the performance just two days ago, I once again had this feeling that there were many young people in the audience—those young people you described earlier rather accurately. A young spectator in her early 20s said in the discussion about why she had raised her hand to support Stockmann, ‘I believe it is important today to say no in the first place, to raise your voice and say, I am against it.’ This brings us back to emancipation and core enlightenment values: Can such a theatre experience trigger a process of developing political consciousness, where you say—man, shit, why don’t I get as upset and swept along as I did in the *Enemy of the People* on a daily basis, when I watch the news, when I hear, to take just a very small local problem, about the privatisation of the water supply in Berlin? I can very well imagine that making such an experience in the theatre helps people to gather the courage to say no in real life too, and to get more active and involved in everyday politics. This is my riposte to Dean’s position. But perhaps it is only wishful thinking.

Notes

1. Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz (2000) ‘Der Auftrag’, originally published in the programme brochure for the spring season 2000, available at <http://www.schaubuehne.de/uploads/Der-Auftrag.pdf>