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Brecht's Gale

Innovation and postdramatic theatre

MICHAEL SHANE BOYLE

> The precondition of a dialectical portrayal is not the application of a method … but rather the categorical critique.
> Michael Heinrich (2012: 38)

Even for someone who has never heard of Bertolt Brecht, his demand 'For innovation – against renovation!' may sound strangely familiar.[1] Today the communist director's call echoes like an entrepreneurial rallying cry fit to be printed on the cover of *Wired* or a Silicon Valley billboard. Of course, the innovations Brecht imagined had nothing to do with Uber or iPads. Issued just before the Nazis swept into power in 1933, Brecht had in mind rather the measures artists should take to transform the theatre into a weapon of anti-capitalist struggle. This essay considers the historical gulf that separates us from Brecht in terms of the aspirations we tend to pin on innovation as well as theatre.

As a term, 'innovation' saturates the world of contemporary performance, even though what it actually means is anything but self-evident. For instance, when an actor receives an 'innovative theatre award', what are they actually being awarded for?[2] When a venerable theatre like London's Royal Court teams up with the investment bank Coutts as an 'innovation partner', what is the cost? And if a critic praises a performance for its innovation (or pans it for a lack thereof), what are they actually saying? As the possible answers to these and any number of similar questions should suggest, innovation in performance today can mean many things – so many, in fact, that the word itself teeters on the edge of meaninglessness.

The shaky ground on which 'innovation' stands was not set by the performance world alone, which only shares in society's insatiable thirst for innovation. Pundits often attribute the currency of innovation-speak today to the so-called New Economy of the 1990s that gave us the first dotcom bubble and its craze for 'the new *new* thing' (Lewis 1999). Although that bubble burst in 2000, followed soon after by the 2008 collapse of the global financial system and its arsenal of shady investment tools, dreams of innovation continue to flourish. Today all manner of companies and governments spend millions to hire innovation experts or to start their own innovation initiatives. The word 'innovation' is a key ingredient for the mantras repeated in annual shareholder reports and self-improvement seminars alike. Even my place of work, Queen Mary University of London, boasts of its own 'Innovation Centre'. As Benoit Godin, author of *Innovation Contested*, writes: 'Today, innovation means anything, everything … and nothing' (2015: 11).

To clarify the stakes of innovation in theatre, one must not mistake innovation as a value in itself. Any particular innovation, to be described as such, needs to be situated within broader processes of social transformation. I have in mind two specific types of process: one that pertains to the cultural apparatus we call theatre, and the other to the society within which theatre sits at any given historical moment.

My own understanding of the latter process is in line with Karl Marx's analysis of capital, which holds that capitalist society only survives thanks to its 'constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation' (Marx and Engels 2008: 38). As productive forces and capacities develop, Marx argued, they inevitably come into conflict with

[1] Brecht issued this declaration on at least two occasions: in a 1930 essay co-authored with Peter Suhrkamp (Brecht 2015a: 70), and, later, in a 1932 speech (Brecht 2000a: 45).

[2] See The New York Innovative Theatre Awards: http://www.nyitawards.com/aboutus

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social relations and conditions that have grown inadequate to support them. These underlying contradictions 'lead to explosions, cataclysms, crises, in which by momentous suspension of labour and annihilation of a great portion of capital the latter is violently reduced to the point where it can go on' (1993: 750). Capitalism does not just expect such ruptures, it counts on them to reveal new ways to expand and new methods by which to exploit. The constitutive contradictions of capitalist society entail both its creative capacity as well as the devastating toll it takes on human life. As time moves on 'these regularly recurring catastrophes lead to their repetition on a higher scale, and finally to their violent overthrow' (ibid.). Marx's dialectical analysis of capital promises two futures, one defined by intensifying immiseration and the other by capitalism's end.

Even though Marx does not theorize innovation as such in his work, major theories of innovation owe much to Marx's dialectical study of capital. But what does dialectics consist of for Marx? According to Marxian value-form theorists like Christopher J. Arthur (2004) and Michael Heinrich (2012), there are two identifiable dialectics at work in Marx's *Capital*: a historical dialectic and a systematic dialectic, both of which derive from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. The historical dialectic follows Hegel's philosophy of history, and describes how capital as a social system rises and falls. It is, in other words, 'a method of exhibiting the inner connection between stages of development of a temporal process' (Arthur 2011: 2). The thought of early figures like Friedrich Engels and Karl Kautsky exemplifies this reading of *Capital*. For them, Marx's historical dialectic revealed how capitalism develops, but also how advances in technology and worker organization would inevitably lead to capitalism's decline and the emergence of communism. This is the dialectic with which Marx is typically aligned; but it is also the dialectic for which he is most maligned, largely because of the economism and crude teleology that define its applications by others.

There is certainly no shortage of critics who use the historical dialectic as reason to dismiss dialectics and Marx. However, others defend the utility of both by arguing how readings of Marx that favour the historical dialectic misunderstand the dialectic Marx privileged in his study of capital (Heinrich 2012: 29–38). Instead of Hegel's historical dialectic, value-form theorists foreground the significance of Marx's systematic dialectic, which draws on the approach Hegel developed in *Science of Logic* and *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. As 'a method of exhibiting the inner articulation of a given whole' the systematic dialectic presents capitalism as a social totality and attends to the ceaseless shifts within it (Arthur 2011: 2). Even as capitalist society changes, its essence persists, shaped in the first instance by the valorization process through which capital transforms from money (M) to commodity (C) and into a changed order of money (M') (Marx 2015: 96–8). There are many benefits to examining capital in terms of a systematic dialectic. For one, this approach avoids erroneous historical predictions (and the entailed prescriptions) of the natural slide of capitalism into communism. And by treating capitalism as a totality, the systematic dialectic permits careful analysis of capital's internal relations and contradictions. Instead of attributing social shifts within capitalist society to exogenous factors, it forces critique of how changes in everything from government to political struggle constitute and are constituted by capital itself. As I will argue here, the systematic dialectic can even be useful for examining the relation of theatrical innovation to capital. The systematic dialectic has its own limits as well, not the least of which is the tendency to promote an excessively philological study of Marx that borders on obscurantist exegesis. More importantly, the totalizing position of the systematic dialectic can intensify one's conviction that capital must be abolished, while simultaneously fostering uncertainty whether this can ever happen.

If it were not for their shared hatred of the misery wrought by capital, the perspectives informed by the systematic dialectic and historical dialectic would seem to run at cross-purposes. But as interlocutors like the Endnotes

collective insist, instead of keeping these dialectics apart, we should try to treat them together: 'System must be grasped historically and history systematically' (Endnotes 2010: n.p.). A combined critique that avoids conflating these dialectics reminds us that capital sows the seeds of its own destruction, but that what follows thereafter is anything but certain. And herein lies the reason for taking seriously the varied hopes placed on innovation.

This essay on theatrical innovation does not seek to save 'innovation' from overuse or even to recuperate it. Instead, the term is an opportunity to clarify the possible social functions theatre can perform today. The next section posits Joseph Schumpeter's influential concept of 'creative destruction' as a way to grasp what critics and scholars often take innovation to be in contemporary performance. As an example, I consider the postdramatic dramaturgy of *Carmen Disruption*, which premiered in 2015 at London's Almeida Theatre. Schumpeter's definition of innovation allows us to chart not only *what* can be described as innovative about this production, but also how this example of theatrical innovation fits *within* a broader process of change in theatre itself. I argue that the spread of postdramatic theatre in Western Europe increasingly appears as the creative destruction of dramatic form in theatre, through which theatre as a cultural apparatus is renovated to suit shifting social conditions. By turning from Schumpeter to Brecht and his far different understanding of the sorts of innovation artists should pursue, the second half of this essay combines the perspective of a historical and systematic dialectic to grapple with the assumption that postdramatic form signals a radical political break in theatre.

SCHUMPETER'S GALE

'Innovation' is derived from the Latin verb *innoveri*, which means 'to renew' or 'to reform'. Thus, an innovation does not describe something that is entirely new; typically, it indicates something that has been altered by having something else added to it. In this sense, then, an innovation departs sharply from an invention. If the latter term, as one business textbook puts it, has to do with 'the first occurrence of an idea for a new product or process', then an innovation is 'the first attempt to carry it out into practice' (Fagerberg 2006: 4). Given such broad definitions, it should come as no surprise that the possible forms an innovation can take vary widely. According to the management theorist Peter Drucker, an innovation does not even have 'to be a "thing"' at all (2007: 11): it could be a product or a method of production, a technology or management technique, a way of entering or of creating a new market, a means of managing or of organizing employees. The list goes on. Often an innovation is simply something that already exists, but which is brought into a context where it seems new. For the literary critic Michael North, an innovation is defined less by its difference from what already exists than by the fact that 'it makes a difference'. In other words, an innovation is 'a novelty that sticks' (North 2013: 4). Businesses and investors tend to measure the difference an innovation makes according to axioms like 'diffusion' (Rogers 2003) and 'disruption' (Christensen 1997). What defines an innovation is how much it spreads across the playing field and how drastically it rewrites the rulebook. All this is to say that an innovation can only be grasped as such *in relation* not just to what it supplants or modifies but to other innovations with which it coordinates to generate systematic and historical change. As I chart below, this general logic of innovation overlaps in striking ways with how critics and scholars tend to speak of postdramatic theatre.

Much of what innovation means in business and beyond owes to the 'innovation theorist' Joseph Schumpeter (Fagerberg 2006: 6). As Schumpeter argued in the 1930s and early 1940s, the 'true significance' of any particular innovation can only be seen in light of the 'organic process' in which it participates (Schumpeter 2008: 83). The process he had in mind, of course, was creative destruction. First formulated in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1942), creative destruction distilled the Austrian-born economist's efforts throughout

the 1930s to rethink entrepreneurial innovation into the 'fundamental impulse that sets and keeps the capitalist engine in motion' (2008:83). Despite Schumpeter's ideological opposition to Marxian thought (which he called a 'power of darkness'), his theory drew profoundly from Marx's conclusion that capitalism cannot survive by maintaining the status quo (3). Instead, as Schumpeter argued, capitalism 'incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure *from within*, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one' (83). Creative destruction is often misunderstood as describing particular innovations that disrupt and dethrone existing products – such as the supersession of slide rules by calculators. Schumpeter, however, was interested chiefly in how such innovations grouped together to form a 'gale of creative destruction' that upturned existing social terrain, thus setting the scene for renewed growth within a capitalist economy. Also known as 'Schumpeter's gale', creative destruction was an attempt rooted firmly in a Marxian dialectical understanding of capitalism to explain how capital staves off its fatal contradictions through clusters of innovations. Schumpeter did not blithely glorify capitalism's internal contradictions, not the least because he saw in them the recipe for the decline of capitalist society and the emergence of socialism. He went so far as to liken himself to a doctor burdened with the unenviable task of diagnosing a patient with a terminal illness. He detailed this 'essential fact about capitalism' to help the capitalist class better navigate the dangerous terrain they 'have got to live on' (83). In certain ways, Schumpeter's gale resembles a systematic and historical analysis of capitalist society's dialectical inner workings and connections to what will replace it. It was meant as a reminder that capitalism must constantly innovate just to survive.

It may seem that this précis of Schumpeter has taken us far from the world of performance. But creative destruction not only undergirds much of what economists and entrepreneurs mean when they speak of innovation; it also resonates with how scholars and critics frame innovation in theatre – especially the emphasis they tend to place on the disruptive potential and diffusion of novel theatrical forms. Let's consider an example.

In April 2015, Simon Stephens' *Carmen Disruption* opened at the Almeida Theatre in London to critical acclaim. The byline of a review in *The New York Times* announced simply: 'Innovation at Almeida' (Wolf 2015). The play, which first premiered at Hamburg's Schauspielhaus in 2014, offers an elliptical response to Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, and some critics praised Stephens for his 'innovative and imaginative' take on the well-known 1875 opera (Lukes 2015). Others feted the staging, with one reviewer lauding Michael Longhurst's 'innovative direction' (Garton 2015) and another his 'directorial innovation' (Foster 2015). The recourse to 'innovation' by reviewers was meant to be complimentary, although what they actually mean with their compliments is difficult to parse. That is not to say, however, that critics were wrong to describe *Carmen Disruption* as innovative.

For one, the production could be said to innovate Bizet's opera itself. In the months including and surrounding *Carmen Disruption*'s run, there were no fewer than three productions of *Carmen* in London – though, as one critic noted, 'Stephens' version pushes the most boundaries'. Not only was *Carmen Disruption*, for opera fans, 'a dynamic reimagining of the passionate tale', but it was also simply 'an innovative piece of theatre' (Stanbury 2015). The play's connections to *Carmen* are pervasive, albeit oblique. Stephens took as his starting point not the opera, but his interview with the Israeli mezzo-soprano Rinat Shaham, who is celebrated for her portrayals of Carmen in productions around the world. As the play's title indicates, *Carmen Disruption* throws out the plot of Bizet's opera, even as four of Stephens' characters take their names from *Carmen*. The title character is now a male sex worker, and Don José is no longer Carmen's suitor, but a widowed taxi driver and single mother of two. There's also an Escamillo, though he is a ruined investment banker obsessed with bull markets rather than bull fights. And Micaëla remains heartbroken in *Carmen Disruption*, this time spurned by

her university lecturer instead of Don José (Stephens 2015b). Knotting the interweaving stories together is the Singer, an opera star loosely modelled on Shaham. The Singer does not actually sing in the production, although her foil, the Chorus, does. At the Almeida, Viktoria Vizin played the Chorus, dressed in Carmen's conventional Roma-style costume. Along with two cellists, she belted out Bizet's famous arias that had been drastically rearranged by Simon Slater with new lyrics from Stephens. Off-kilter takes on iconic phrases from the *Carmen* score float through the production, either sped up or slowed down, and often wrapped in amp-generated distortion. The language of the play departs entirely from the original, even as it was, Stephens insists, 'informed by the rhythms of Bizet's music' (Stephens 2015a). *Carmen*, or at least what it means to most audiences, is always in the air at the Almeida: a few recognizable and hummable measures. Redrawn in such a way, *Carmen* becomes an atmosphere for a story that has nothing to do with pre-industrial 1820s Seville, and everything to do with social atomization in an anonymous post-industrial European metropolis.

As a performance text without any stage instructions, *Carmen Disruption* does not so much warrant as require directorial intervention. Chief among the design and staging elements is a life-size dying animatronic bull resting in a heap centre stage the entire performance. The choice evokes the toreadors of *Carmen* but it also accumulates layers of symbolic meaning from Stephens' play. For one, the expiring bull literalizes the failing financial markets that all but devastate Escamillo's career. And late in the performance, the bull becomes a proxy for a motorcyclist who dies in an accident witnessed by each character. As performers describe the death, confetti falls from the rafters and a dark, viscous substance slowly oozes from the bull, forming what appears to be a pool of blood or oil. By the end of the performance, the bull is so overloaded with semiotic weight that its usefulness as a tool for representing Stephens' play is undone by its sheer presence. Many other elements unravel in similar ways. An LED screen mounted in the back of the play space, for example, begins by offering surtitles for the singing, as is appropriate to opera. It also does diegetic work throughout much of the production, displaying text messages and a stock ticker. But as the production proceeds, the screen severs connections not just to the play, but to meaning entirely. Phrases appear out of sync or scroll backwards, and, in the final minutes, letters appear as a jumble and cease to form words whatsoever.

The cumulative effect is a postdramatic dramaturgy that refuses to be overdetermined by Stephens' text. The performance coordinates myriad elements to create flashes of significance that owe only partly to the 'fictive cosmos' implied by the script (Lehmann 2006: 22). The production also takes a cue from the play's own attempts to explore the mediated conditions of theatre. This includes Stephens' interest in the life of an actor making a career of performing Carmen rather than *Carmen* itself, as well as the play's composition as interweaving monologues. Even though every performer remains on stage throughout the performance, none of them ever speak to each other. This use of postdramatic 'monology' directs attention away from any relations among fictional characters and to the shared experience between performers and spectators (Jarcho 2014).

The performance delivers what the title promises – it disrupts Bizet's opera, and does something similar to prevalent understandings of theatre. Even before audiences enter the theatre, the production unsettles theatrical expectations. To find your seat, you first take a detour through a dressing room where the Singer prepares. She is already in character, but also actually warming up. And when you finally enter the Almeida's auditorium, you do so via the stage. You see the house from the cast's perspective, which allows you to take in the extent to which designer Lizzie Clachan has transformed the theatre into an opera house replete with gilding and a jewelled chandelier. The manufactured opulence jars with the play space itself, dominated as it is by the bull gasping slowly for breath. The curved rear of the stage is a bare brick wall, spanned by a bank

of lights. Everything is coated with dust – bricks and other debris lie scattered all around. It is as if a tornado has ripped through the space. And once the performance begins, the disruptions only mount. As noted earlier, the entire cast remains on stage for the duration; when not speaking or performing, they sit down or wander the space. And at infrequent intervals, a stagehand appears to give them bottles of water. A premise of the dramatic theatre tradition is that performers pretend not to work (at least in their capacity as performers), something that staged moments of recovery such as this disturb (Ridout 2006). In her exemplary review for *The Guardian*, Susannah Clap called *Carmen Disruption* 'a depth charge to the theatre', one that did not so much destroy the theatre as try to make room for what else it can do (2015).

A postdramatic performance like *Carmen Disruption* does more than disrupt theatre – it also innovates it. As the very term suggests, however, postdramatic theatre should be seen as an innovation in relation to dramatic theatre specifically. For Lehmann, postdramatic dramaturgy does not signal an erasure of drama, but rather 'a paradigm shift', that is, 'the unfolding and blossoming of a potential of disintegration, dismantling, and deconstruction' always already within drama (2006: 24; 44). Although Lehmann calls the postdramatic an 'invention' (20), his much-cited survey of the qualities that make a theatre postdramatic instead of dramatic can easily be read as a list of innovations: 'it becomes more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information' (85). The concept of innovation is one way to grapple with the interdisciplinary character of much postdramatic theatre: what appears to be 'new' within a postdramatic theatrical situation is often conventional to other artistic environments, cultural contexts or historical moments. Postdramatic theatre, thus, is not an invention of a new theatre, but an innovation to dramatic theatre.

As I suggested above, to describe something as an innovation requires noting not only what it differs from and how, but also that this difference makes a difference. What defines innovation in *Carmen Disruption* is less how its difference to *Carmen* changes perceptions of Bizet's opera than what its specific disruption to dramatic theatre contributes to a general diffusion of postdramatic dramaturgy within theatre. Peter Boenisch has recently argued that, in continental Europe, 'it has become utterly unimaginable that one would not break free from the authority of the text' (2015: 3). Boenisch risks overstating his point about the prevalence of postdramatic approaches to performance on the continent in order to emphasize another claim – that postdramatic techniques still seem unconventional in Anglophone venues, at least when compared with German and Dutch peers. The embrace of and acclaim for a performance like *Carmen Disruption*, thus, matters for how it helps to diffuse postdramatic dramaturgy in the United Kingdom; that is, for what it contributes to a gale of creative destruction blowing through British theatres.

I should note that I am trying to represent the critical discourse *about* the diffusion of postdramatic theatre rather than any reality of it. As Liz Tomlin has argued, scholars and critics tend to assume postdramatic dramaturgy is not only innovative, but also radical. And like its status as an innovation, postdramatic theatre is measured as radical primarily in its relation to dramatic theatre's 'representation of fictional worlds and its upholding of the textual authority of the playwright' (Tomlin 2011: 9). The opposition of postdramatic and dramatic produces a binary by which the former becomes 'radical' only because it can imply dramatic theatre is 'traditional' or even 'reactionary' (9–10). This raises several issues for Tomlin, not the least of which is the usefulness of the term 'radical' to describe postdramatic theatre. As postdramatic practices spread and as the 'boundaries' that delimit what can be encompassed by the postdramatic category widen, the number of ostensibly radical performances grows, and the term 'radical' increasingly loses meaning (52). There is, as Tomlin notes, another limit to the descriptive

usefulness of 'radical' in the case of postdramatic theatre. Since postdramatic theatre is often defined in relation to its formal differences with dramatic theatre, its radicality pertains primarily to aesthetic form. And yet, critics and scholars often use this formal radicality as evidence that postdramatic theatre is also politically radical. Postdramatic theatre's refusal to communicate meaning is said to distinguish it from how a conventionally political dramatic theatre might add to or shape public opinion (see Jürs-Munby et al. 2013). According to some, that postdramatic theatre sidelines direct political commentary to disrupt what and how we know makes it well-suited to contesting post-political consensus.[3] For Tomlin, however, the connection often drawn between form and politics risks what Mike Sell terms 'the technical fallacy', the misapprehension that an innovation in form is also an innovation in politics (Sell 2008: 29). And as Ryan Anthony Hatch argues, just because postdramatic theatre operates in a different way politically than dramatic theatre hardly means it 'is better equipped than traditional dramatic forms to respond to the political complexities of our contemporary world' (2016: 124).

I share similar unease about alignments of postdramatic form with political potential, but my concern has to do more with how enquiry into postdramatic theatre's politics draws attention away from its social function. By social function, I mean the varied roles postdramatic theatre plays in the reproduction of capitalist society and the organization of relations, conditions and forces of production. The social function of postdramatic theatre can include but is by no means encompassed by its political contributions. If, as Marx's analysis of capital suggests, 'all that is solid melts into air', it stands to reason that theatrical form should be no exception (Marx and Engels 2008: 38). Any new form theatre takes is shaped by and also shapes the conditions capital sets for it. Thus, postdramatic theatre is the creative destruction of *dramatic* form, out of which *theatre* can be renovated within a shifting social terrain. Changes to theatrical form certainly can inflect a theatre's political potential, but formal innovations do not necessarily entail a change in how theatre is positioned within capitalist society. This systematic perspective on theatre's relation to capital should not obscure the corollary point available in Marx's historical dialectic: capitalism unearths its own gravediggers. No figure in theatre history has worked more adroitly with Marx's twin dialectics than Bertolt Brecht.

BRECHT'S GALE

In 'Notes on the Opera *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*' written with Peter Suhrkamp in 1930, Brecht lamented the efforts of artists to bring opera 'up to date' in terms of the stories it staged and its methods of staging (Brecht 2015a: 61). Brecht, of course, was no opponent to experimentation, but insisted that '[i]nnovations such as this are to be critiqued as long as they simply serve to renovate institutions that have become obsolete'. He sought instead innovations that would 'carry out a fundamental *change in function* of the institutions' (69). As this suggests, Brecht distinguished between two types of innovation an artist might implement within a cultural apparatus like the theatre: renovating innovations and, what he called in no uncertain terms, 'real innovations' (70). A renovating innovation typically referred to the material an artist supplied to a given apparatus. This could include a formal experiment with photographic projections in theatre, or a radio play that tackles a previously unfamiliar topic. Brecht valued the freedom of artists to experiment, but warned them not to fall under 'the opinion that they own an apparatus that actually owns them' (62). For Brecht, a cultural apparatus operated along lines similar to a factory – division of labour and all. In this and other essays of the period, he even claimed artists were 'virtually proletarianized', not necessarily in terms of their economic status, but by virtue of their structural position within the production process (61).[4] 'Like the manual laborer', artists and other intellectuals employed in an apparatus like the theatre or the press were alienated from the tools they need to

[3] Two of the most frequently cited theorists of post-politics in the discourse on postdramatic theatre are Jacques Rancière (1999) and Chantal Mouffe (2005).

[4] Brecht reiterated this perspective on the proletarianization of artists in several essays of the early 1930s (see 2015b, 2000b).

create their work; they only have their 'naked labour power to offer' (2000b: 162).

What should be a useful analogy in Brecht's writing of the time blurs too easily into a shaky conflation of intellectual and manual labour. But Brecht toed this line in order to spell out the pressures, conditions and opportunities that newly technologized means of cultural production offered artists. Brecht's key term for describing these productive forces is 'apparatus', which for him encompassed 'every aspect of the means of cultural production, from the actual technological equipment, to promotion agencies, to the institutions such as the opera, the theatre, the radio etc.' (Mueller 2006: 103). Artists were free to sell their labour to an apparatus, but had little say over what types of commodities it actually churned out using their labour power. As Brecht argued, even scripts with revolutionary themes could be 'raw material' for a 'finished product manufactured by the apparatus' (2015a: 62). Cultural apparatuses required a continuous stream of material, not just to keep going but also to keep their offerings novel for consumers. The freedom of artists to supply new topics or forms to a theatre, according to Brecht, more often than not 'merely satisfies the old needs with new stimuli, and thus has a purely conserving role' (68). In other words, the mere provision of innovations to a cultural apparatus could do little to transform the purpose it served in society. In fact such efforts only helped it to pursue its designated social function, which for Brecht was shaped by the shifting demands of capitalist reproduction. Given that the character and organization of work and of theatre has transformed markedly since 1930s Germany, how do the formal innovations in a postdramatic performance like *Carmen Disruption* compare to Brecht's renovating innovations?

Before turning back to postdramatic theatre, we need to recall that Brecht went to such pains to detail the conditions artists faced because he saw radical potential in this bleak situation. His thinking at the time was informed by his study of Marx, especially as it had been guided by friends like the communist theorist and activist Karl Korsch (see Kellner 2010). Like other council communists of the time, Korsch viewed sites of production like factories as the key realm of social reproduction, and thus privileged them over the state as the target for intervention. Council communists set themselves the revolutionary task of transforming factories from tools of exploitation into resources that could satisfy the real needs of the proletariat (Korsch 1977). Brecht extended this perspective to the realm of cultural production, and hoped to find ways to functionally transform (*Umfunktionieren*) apparatuses to serve the ends of class struggle. Just as factory workers cannot change the social function of a factory via the labour they supply it, so too, Brecht believed, artists will not transform a theatre simply by providing it with new or different material. An artist working within a bourgeois apparatus is free to suggest whatever innovations they want, but only so long as these changes do 'not threaten the social function of this apparatus'. However, these were exactly the type of innovations Brecht claimed were necessary, innovations that 'might press for a change in [an apparatus'] function and so would reposition it in society' (2015a: 62). Brecht demanded innovations that altered not just what was provided to an apparatus, but the role that apparatus played in society. 'Real innovations', he insisted, 'attack the base' (2015a: 70).

What Brecht had in mind can be seen most clearly in his call for artists to modify the then rather-new technology of radio from a means by which political elites distributed information to the masses into a 'communications apparatus' that could help foster debate and organize the masses (Brecht 2000a: 42). For Brecht, such a thoroughgoing change required completely rethinking the approach that artists took towards radio. Instead of simply supplying radio with further fuel for it to perform its existing social function, Brecht pressed for a process that revised radio's purpose to suit the needs of proletarian struggle. By Brecht's standards, the benchmark of an innovation went beyond what it added in terms of the form or content of material. Even a revolutionary polemic could be offered as an edgy novelty. In the case of

radio, a real innovation included the attempt to literally rewire radios so that listeners could speak back to those doing the broadcasting. Brecht himself experimented with implementing real innovations in film most notably in his ill-fated endeavour to institute a working method of 'co-determination' among all workers involved in the production process for a film of *The Threepenny Opera*. Perhaps the most successful of Brecht's innovations came with the *Lehrstücke*, a theatrical experiment of the early 1930s that sought to eliminate the distinction between actors and audiences in a coordinated process of learning. As with council communists who believed in the revolutionary potential of a movement that seized control of a region's factories, Brecht averred the revolutionary need to functionally transform the means of cultural production.

For Brecht, real innovations were important not only for the change they made to a cultural apparatus, but also for how this difference could make a difference in society itself. Brecht's theory of innovation, like Schumpeter's, was indebted to Marx's dialectics. As David Barnett has argued, dialectics gave Brecht a lens through which to interpret and historicize social conditions and events on stage (2013, 2011). But in Brecht's theory of innovation, this materialist analysis of capital amounted to more than a 'dialectical performance philosophy' that shaped an innovative *product* for the stage (Barnett 2013: 48). It required a *process* of innovating theatre so that theatre could intervene in social reproduction itself.

Both Schumpeter's and Brecht's respective theories of innovation insisted that the future of capitalism could be transformed by human action. Schumpeter focused on how innovations implemented by entrepreneurs would help capital reproduce itself. Brecht, by contrast, emphasized innovations that could weaponize cultural apparatuses against capitalism. Even though his perspective was by no means limited to a systematic understanding of capital, Brecht was largely unconvinced that capitalism, by virtue of its own tendencies, would fall into disrepair and naturally give rise to communism. As he averred in 1932: 'Capitalism cannot die, it must be killed' (2000b: 181). Such sentiment led Brecht to imagine the role that theatre, along with other cultural apparatuses like radio and film, could play in an anti-capitalist gale of efforts to upturn capitalist society.

If Brecht's theory of innovation promotes a particular unfolding of history whereby the social conditions undergirding exploitation are dismantled, then, in Brechtian terms, Schumpeter's gale aspires to renovate capitalist society. While Schumpeterian innovations allow capital to forestall its contradictions, Brechtian 'real' innovations bring them to a head. Schumpeter's gale pushes capitalist society to reproduce itself, while Brecht's gale looks to push society beyond capitalism. Schumpeter offers a theory of systematic renovation – making new for the sake of preservation – while Brecht offers us one of historical transformation.

THE POSTDRAMATIC GALE

I described above a process of creative destruction at work within theatre generally, one that can be traced theoretically to the disruption of dramatic theatre by postdramatic theatre. Of what use, then, is Brecht's gale for grappling with the innovations we find in a postdramatic performance like *Carmen Disruption*? And how is the diffusion of postdramatic theatre transforming the social function of theatre today?

For some, the defining 'formal innovations' that distinguish postdramatic theatre from dramatic theatre also constitute a shift in its political potential 'beyond commitment, beyond the primacy of *content*' (Woolf 2013: 36). Brandon Woolf here echoes Lehmann's influential perspective that postdramatic theatre is 'political precisely to the degree in which it interrupts the categories of the political itself' (Lehmann 2006: 179). Rather than add to 'the daily flood' of news and opinion that claims to make sense of reality while only obscuring it, postdramatic theatre ostensibly calls our entire media society into question by disrupting perception and promoting dissensus

(Lehmann 2006: 181; Boenisch 2015). Early in *Postdramatic Theatre*, Lehmann argues that the postdramatic emerged in tension with social transformations of the 1970s, namely sweeping developments in media and communication technology. The postdramatic is, he argues, 'theatre's response' to the '*omnipresence* of the media in everyday life since the 1970s' (Lehmann 2006: 22–3). This rare moment of historicizing in Lehmann's account is telling: to explain postdramatic theatre's orientation towards a 'politics of perception', he brushes aside the post-war restructuring of the global production process that was co-constitutive with (if not determining of) this 'caesura of the media society' (22). Woolf's reading of Lehmann draws on Walter Benjamin's interpretation of Brecht to suggest that the political quality of postdramatic theatre comprises a functional transformation in the Brechtian sense: 'It is thus Brecht-via-Benjamin's notion of *Umfunktionierung* that is front-and-centre in the movement from the dramatic to the postdramatic' (Woolf 2013: 37). Woolf helpfully notes that postdramatic theatre functions differently than a dramatic or even Brechtian theatre. And I am generally convinced by the case he and others make that the formal innovations of postdramatic theatre define this changed function. But what function exactly do such formal innovations transform? It is, as Woolf argues, the theatre's political function. In the academic discourse around postdramatic theatre, formal innovations are said to shift the role theatre aspires to play in politics (Jürs-Munby et al. 2013). But does this shift also entail a transformation in theatre's social function?

The realm of the political, while certainly imbricated in the social, is nonetheless distinct from it. And for Brecht, the function transformed through a process of *Umfunktionierung* was specifically that of a 'social function' (2015a: 62). To clarify this point further it is useful to introduce a term Benjamin uses to elucidate Brecht's theory of *Umfunktionierung*. According to Benjamin, an artwork must be evaluated for not just its political 'attitude' but also its 'technique', that is, its 'position in' the social relations of production of its time (2008: 81). Benjamin's notion of technique prioritizes the social position of an artwork, rather than any identifiable politics it might have. As Benjamin reminds us, Brecht insisted that artists and intellectuals 'not supply the apparatus of production without, to the utmost extent possible, changing it in accordance with socialism' (85).

Socialism today means many things, but we can confidently assume that Benjamin in 1934 attaches to the term a similar meaning as does Brecht. It does not indicate only a programme or collection of political opinions. When Benjamin foregrounds Brecht's 'far-reaching demand' that artists transform apparatuses 'in accordance with socialism', he imagines actual efforts that aim at 'serving the class struggle' (ibid.). That means attacking and abolishing the very social relations that undergird capital. How that is to be done is another matter, though history suggests it will require something in addition to taking political rule or fomenting dissensus. According to Brecht's theory of innovation, theatre should focus on destroying conditions of exploitation and immiseration, rather than one of capital's fleeting social formations.

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