Dissonância
revista de teoria crítica

Título	The spell of authority. On Adorno's philosophy of the *Bann*
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Fonte	*Dissonância: Revista de Teoria Crítica*, v.3 n.2, Dossiê Theodor W. Adorno, 2º semestre de 2019, pp. 213-254.
Link	https://www.ifch.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/teoriacritica/workflow/index/3651

Formato de citação sugerido:

THE SPELL OF AUTHORITY

ON ADORNO'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF THE *BANN*

Allan M. Hillani[1]

ABSTRACT

This paper presents an interpretation of the concept of *Bann* (commonly translated as "spell") in Theodor W. Adorno's work. Although rarely discussed, the concept of *Bann* is central for Adorno's philosophy and appears in all his major writings. Through the inquiry of the origins of the concept, the paper presents how the word *Bann* articulates the "legal" and the "magical" dimensions of authority (not only political, but also epistemological authority). The constellation of political meanings of *Bann* enables an interpretation of Adorno that contests the usual de-politicized reading of his work. Finally, the paper shows how Adorno's aesthetic theory is an attempt of providing how it is possible to escape the *Bann*.

KEYWORDS

Adorno; Bann; Spell; Authority; Politics.

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O ENCANTO DA AUTORIDADE
SOBRE A FILOSOFIA POLÍTICA DO *BANN* EM ADORNO

RESUMO

O presente trabalho apresenta uma interpretação do conceito de *Bann* (geralmente traduzido como "encanto" ou "feitiço") na obra de Theodor W. Adorno. Apesar de raramente discutido, o conceito de *Bann* é central para a filosofia de Adorno e aparece em todos os seus principais escritos. Por meio da investigação das origens do conceito, este trabalho apresenta como a palavra *Bann* articula as dimensões "jurídica" e "mágica" da autoridade (não somente a autoridade política, mas também a epistemológica). A constelação de sentidos políticos de *Bann* permite uma interpretação de Adorno que contesta a leitura usual de sua obra como despolitizada. Por fim, o trabalho mostra como a teoria estética de Adorno é uma tentativa de oferecer uma teoria de como é possível escapar do *Bann*.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Adorno; Bann; Encanto; Autoridade; Política.

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1. Introduction

In his lectures of 1964-65 on history and freedom, one of the courses Adorno gave in Frankfurt when working on *Negative Dialectics*, he presents the word *Bann*, usually translated as "spell", as one of the main concepts of his philosophical enterprise:

In these lectures—almost without my having been fully aware of this when I set out—the concept that has turned out to be crucial for the theory of history, and incidentally also for the theory of progress, has been that of the *spell* [*des Banns*]. The concluding sentence of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* states that all living things are, or seem to be, under a spell [*unter einem Bann steht oder unter einen Bann zu stehen scheint*]—and both statements, i.e., that they *are* under a spell and that they *appear* to be under a spell, are probably equally valid. This idea is really an unspoken premise and it could be said that my efforts here, and my own philosophical work more generally, are concerned with what we, that is to say, Horkheimer and I, called a spell [*Bann*], and with our attempts to explore this concept of the spell [*diesen Begriff des Banns*] in all its implications. The fact is that, once you have experienced such an insight—and let us assume for a moment that it is not quite without merit—it frequently turns out to contain far more possibilities than is evident at first sight, possibilities that reveal themselves only gradually, over time (Adorno 2006: 172–173).

Coming from Adorno, a stark affirmation as this one is startling, but even more so considering how little the concept of *Bann* has been discussed by the specialized literature.[2] The word appears several times in both *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*, and Adorno's statement indicates that it is the link between his earlier and later works, but for some reason the attention given to it pales in comparison to other key con-

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[2] For instance, the word is not mentioned in the *Cambridge companion to Adorno* (see Huhn 2004), nor in the *Cambridge companion to the critical theory* (see Rush 2004), nor in *Theodor Adorno: key concepts* (see Cook 2008), not even in the colossal three volumes of the *SAGE handbook of Frankfurt School critical theory* (see Best, Bonefeld, and O'Kane 2018). A noteworthy exception is Christopher Turner's paper dedicated to the topic (see Turner 2016).

cepts such as "identity thinking", "culture industry", or "dissonance". Besides, the statement becomes mysterious when one realizes that the word *Bann* does not appear in the last sentences of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which are:

> But although the progressive ticket tends to produce something worse than its content, the content of the fascist ticket is so vacuous that it can be maintained as a substitute for something better only by desperate efforts on the part of the deceived [*Betrogenen*]. Its horror is that of the blatant but insistent lie [*Lüge*]. While it admits no truth by which it might be measured, its absurdity is so monstrous as to bring truth negatively within reach, so that it can be kept apart from those deprived of judgment only by their total abstention from thought. Enlightenment itself, having mastered itself and assumed its own power, could break through the limits [*die Grenzen*] of enlightenment (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002: 172).

The two ideas guiding the passage are those of "deceit" or "lie",[3] and of breaking enlightenment's "limits [*Grenzen*]," which could also be translated as borders or boundaries. The paragraph suggests that the enlightenment, at the same time, deceives and limits—in some cases, the deception is this very division between an inside and outside, as it is with the opposition between enlightenment and myth—and that this deception and limitation can be overcome by a self-reflective reason that does justice to its "enlightening" potential, but there is no mention to *Bann*.

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[3] Also, the first chapter of the book, "The Concept of Enlightenment", ends with a denunciation of the "outright deception of the masses [*totalen Betrug der Massen*]" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002: 34).

However, instead of contesting Adorno's statement, I want to argue that these two ideas are indeed connected to his concept of *Bann*. As I will demonstrate, this German word has a very strange polysemy, linked to its medieval usage, that articulates precisely these two senses of "illusion" and "border". Nonetheless, it is interesting to note how Adorno, in the quoted passage of his lecture, oscillates between the idea of *Bann* being a fact and a semblance ("that they *are* under a spell and that they *appear* to be under a spell, are probably equally valid"). Rather than being indecisive, Adorno seems to be playing with the ambiguity of the word. As Christopher Turner notes, Adorno's *Bann* is "both real and an illusion, a real force in the material world and a concealing semblance that deludes those under it" (Turner 2016: 205). This tension between reality and semblance (*Schein*) is also a fundamental dimension of aesthetics, which also hints to the role later assumed by the *Bann* in Adorno's aesthetics.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to explore Adorno's concept of *Bann* in its multiple senses and explore its consequences. My hypothesis is that, in doing so, we can perceive an underlying political problem that permeates Adorno's major works, especially *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*. But before we are able to examine Adorno's concept, it would be fruitful to inquire into its origins. In the next section, I attempt to present a brief etymology of the word *Bann*, and to give a partial account of its appearances in some major works which had great influence upon Adorno. The difficulty of doing this with the concept of *Bann*, however, is that differently from

"ideology", "fetishism", or "taboo", its source is much more oblique and mysterious.

2. Elective Ambiguities

Fredric Jameson is one of the few authors to give attention to the *Bann* in Adorno's work. He describes the term as "the great magic "spell" [*der Bann*] in which modern life is seized and immobilized", an idea that has a paradoxical dynamic "since it is precisely enlightenment and the desacralization of the world—Weber's *Entzauberung*—which can be characterized as the realm of a whole new fetishization: a term Marx explicitly borrowed from eighteenth-century anthropology" (Jameson 1990: 27–28). Thus, Jameson's answer to the problem of the origin of Adorno's concept involves an inversion of Weber's "disenchantment" thesis and a reference to Marx's fetishism. Although Jameson is clearly right that these two authors influenced Adorno's choice, it is awkward that the word itself, *Bann*, is rarely used by them. The cases in which the word is indeed used, however, may help our inquiry.

The word appears only twice in Marx's *Capital*. First, in a footnote of the chapter on the working day, when discussing a report from the Children's Employment Commission, Marx translates "spell of labour" (originally in English in the report) as "Arbeitsbanns (spell of labour)" (Marx 1976: 375n.71), keeping the original in parentheses. Later in the same chapter, when recounting the struggle for the reduction of the working day, he states that "everywhere the working class was

outlawed [*verfemt*], anathematized [*in den Bann getan*], placed under the '*loi des suspects*'" (Marx 1976: 397). Similarly, although the word doesn't appear in Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, there is one relevant mention in *Economy and Society*. In the section on "sociology of law", when discussing the relevance of the forms of political domination on the formal aspects of law, Weber states:

> The older forms of popular justice had originated in conciliatory proceedings between kinship-groups. The primitive formalistic irrationality of these older forms of justice was everywhere cast off under the impact of the power [*Gewalt*] of princes or magistrates (*imperium*, ban [*Bann*]) or, in certain situations, of an organized priesthood. With this impact, the substance of the law [*Rechtsinhalt*], too, was lastingly influenced, although the character of this influence varied with the various types of domination [*Herrschaft*]. The more rational the domination apparatus [*Herrschaftsapparat*] of the princes or hierarchs became, that is, the greater the extent to which administrative "officials" were used in the exercise of the power, the greater was the likelihood that the legal procedure would also become "rational" both in form and content. To the extent to which the rationality of the administration of justice [*Rechtspflege*] increased, irrational forms of procedure were eliminated and the substantive law was systematized, i.e., the law as a whole was rationalized (Weber 1978: 809, transl. mod.).

Thus, although Jameson mentions the cases of "disenchantment" and "fetishism", it is important to note that the word *Bann* is not used by the authors when treating these topics. On the contrary, both in Marx's discussion of fetishism

and in Weber's conceptualization of disenchantment, the word used is *Zauber*, not *Bann*.[4]

As Christopher Turner argues, it is necessary to distinguish *Zauber* from *Bann* since, for Adorno, the dialectic of enlightenment is "a process by which the supposedly original enchantment of nature as a shamanic praxis or mythic institution is superseded by the disenchantment of nature as enlightenment project of reason". However, both are forms of domination of nature that engender side-effects that unwillingly negate each other: "enchantment engenders not self-preservation but disenchantment, while disenchantment engenders reenchantment, ideological distortion, and even regression to barbarism". *Bann*, on the contrary, is a concept that "critiques enlightened disenchantment as in fact a pernicious form of "magical thinking" (and thus a failure on its own terms) to the extent that it fails to reckon with what falls 'outside' its purview" (Turner 2016: 207).

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[4] *Zauber* (magic) is precisely what is being superseded by the process Weber calls "disenchantment [*Entzauberung*]" (Weber 2001: 61, transl. mod.), while Marx, in the subchapter on the fetish-character of commodities, mentions the "whole mystery of commodities, all the magic and necromancy [*all der Zauber und Spuk*] that surrounds the products of labor on the basis of commodity production" (Marx 1976: 169). It is also worth noting that Freud in his *Totem and Taboo*—a highly influential work for Adorno—also uses the word *Zauber* instead of *Bann*, except when he mentions the "ban upon shedding blood [*Blutbann*]" (Freud 1990: 149), and in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, while Bann is also not used, he refers to the "magnetic magic [*magnetischen Zaubers*]" when discussing Le Bon's "prestige" (Freud 1990: 18). The word *Bann* is also absent, for instance, in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* and in Goethe's famous poem *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, which only makes Adorno's choice even more unique and worthy of proper analysis. Of course, Adorno is hinting to these previous reflections on magic and modernity, but Adorno's choice for the concept of *Bann* is singular, no matter how much it, in fact, resembles Marx's fetishism or Freud's magical analogies, for instance.

In order to grasp the specificity of *Bann* (and the importance of differentiating it from *Zauber*), one must investigate its origins. The German word *Bann* is characterized by an interesting ambiguity that put into question the usual interpretation, at least in Adorno's text, of merely an alternative word for ideology – something that the common translation as "spell" sometimes falls to. As Turner points out, "*Bann* and *bannen* are derived from an archaic German verb *bannan*, whose three main senses were 'prohibition [*Verbot*]', 'to summon [*aufbieten*]', and 'to command [*gebieten*]'" (Turner 2016: 206). In the *Duden* dictionary, the word has two main meanings: 1) exclusion or expulsion from a community, usually in a medieval context; and 2) a sphere of influence, a magical power, a spell or enchantment of which one can hardly escape.[5] In the *Grimm*, the word is translated to Latin as "*edictum, interdictum, proscriptio*", and has five entries, all of them oscillating between, on the one hand, establishing a limit, giving an order, expelling someone from the community, and on the other, a magic power over someone.[6]

It is interesting to note that both meanings have echoes in French and English. *Ban* in the *Merriam-Webster* is defined

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[5] A third meaning is historical. "*Bann*" was an internal group of the Hitlerian youth.

[6] Christopher Turner discerns them as the following: "1) The power (legally, the jurisdiction) to banish (in the case of secular authorities) or to excommunicate (in the case of religious authorities); 2) The area throughout which the force of those with the authority to banish/ excommunicate (in sense 1) extends and applies [...]; 3) A publicly announced commandment or prohibition; an edict; 4) The publicly declared penalty against a delinquent [...]; 5) A rather derivative usage—curse, spell, fetter, prohibition in general, without any court specifically having pronounced it" (Turner 2016: 206-207).

as "a prayer that harm will come to someone" and as "an order that something not be done or used".[7] In the Middle Ages, it meant "a king's or a lord's area of power or authority"; "a king's power to command and prohibit under pain of punishment or death, mainly used because of a breach of the king's peace"; "a royal proclamation, either of a call to arms, or a decree of outlawry"; "in clerical terms, excommunication or condemnation by the Church" (See Corèdon and Williams 2005).

In French it has similar meanings and origins. The main entry of "ban" in the *Larousse*, for instance, is "a lord's power of commanding; public proclamation of an order; an event; a lord's or a king's convocation of vassals for military service; an ensemble of convocated vassals; condemnation or banishment". Also, in Greimas' dictionary of old French he also links the term to the French word *bannière* (banner, flag), and to the German word *Band* (See Greimas 1968), which is quite an interesting suggestion, since, in the *Grimm*, *Band* is connected to ideas of bonding and binding, and is presented as a synonym for *Bann.*

Therefore, as Turner points out, translating the concept of *Bann* simply as spell "collapses it into a univocal sense that fails to do justice to Adorno's usage and leaves the reader with

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[7] Although uncommon, the first meaning appears, for instance, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, in a reference to Hecate, the Greek goddess of witchcraft: "Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time agreeing, / Confederate season, else no creature seeing, / Thou mixture rank, of midnight weeds collected, / With Hecate's ban thrice blasted, thrice infected, / Thy natural magic and dire property / On wholesome life usurp immediately" (Shakespeare 2016: 79).

a vague metaphor where a 'central concept', however elliptical, should be" (Turner 2016: 207). For instance, when Adorno states in the very first pages of *Negative Dialectics* that "contradiction is nonidentity under the spell of a law [*im Bann des Gesetzes*] that affects the nonidentical as well", he is drawing precisely upon the ambiguity between a spell that binds and an interdiction that bans (Adorno 2007: 6, trans. mod.).

Adorno's concept of *Bann* can in this sense be summarized as a form of authoritative statement that draws a boundary, that establishes a region, and banishes what the unfitting to an outside with a force sustained by some kind of luring power. Simultaneously it designates a jurisdiction over a territory and a population as well as the magic power that sustains this jurisdiction. What is relevant in all the mentioned cases is precisely this entwinement between law and magic in the medieval political imaginary, which Adorno seems to invoke when using the term. This etymological constellation makes the meaning of *Bann* to oscillate within a juridical and a magical sphere of power,[8] with the advantage of having both meanings at the same time. In an interesting dialectic, it is capable of revealing the magical properties of law, and the legal elements of magic.

However, if it is clear that the word *Bann* is full of ambiguity and enables Adorno to articulate two senses at the same time, one could still question if there is more than meets the

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[8] It is also interesting to note that the word *Bannkreis* (occasionally used by Adorno) is simply defined in the *Duden* as "sphere of influence", but that it can equally mean a more literal "spell circle." In fact, *Bannkreis* very oscillation of meaning between "magic circle" and "jurisdiction" seems to be proof of this connection between law and magic that characterizes the *Bann*.

eye in Adorno's usage of the term. Constantly in his works, Adorno is dialoguing with a wide range of authors, often without referring to them explicitly. By using key terms from psychoanalysis, Marxism, phenomenology, or German idealism, Adorno attempts to make claims not only about these intellectual traditions, but to position himself in relation to them, something that can be understood as a sort of "application" of the negative dialectical "method" he develops. But the word *Bann* is remarkable precisely because it does not allude to any thinker or tradition in particular, at least not immediately. Besides the passages from Marx and Weber already mentioned, the word appears only occasionally in the authors who most influenced Adorno's philosophy.[9]

There is one case, however, that stands out. Friedrich Nietzsche too uses the word *Bann* in key moments of two of his most important texts. The first appears in the second essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*, when he summarizes his hypothesis of the "origin of 'bad conscience'" as an "illness that man was bound to contract under the stress of the most fundamental

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[9] Georg Lukács, for instance, uses the expression *im Banne* in three different moments of his *History and Class Consciousness*, always in a sense that oscillates between a delusion and influence. Interestingly enough, the word is translated in three completely different ways in the English edition: "dominated [...] by this idea [*im Banne dieses Gedankens*]"; "groaning under the weight of necessity [*im Banne der Notwendigkeit*]"; and "wholly within the ambience of the capitalist state [*völlig unter dem Banne des kapitalistischen Staates steht*]" (Lukács 1972: 108; 250; 259). Similarly, Alfred Sohn-Rethel uses the term once in a text entitled "For a Critical Liquidation of Apriorism: A Materialist Investigation", when discussing the "spell of immanence [*Bann der Immanenz*]" (Sohn-Rethel 1978: 29), and Walter Benjamin refers to the "spell of the mythical forms of law [*Banne der mythischen Rechtsformen*]" in a key passage of his *Critique of Violence* to which I will return in the next section (Benjamin 1978: 300).

change he ever experienced—that change which occurred when he found himself finally enclosed within the spell of society and of peace [*in den Bann der Gesellschaft und des Friedens*]" (Nietzsche 1989: 84, transl. mod.).[10] For Nietzsche, the passage to social existence, when the human enter the *Bann* of society, involves necessarily a violent process of banishing our "animal past", a "declaration of war against the old instincts" upon which, for him, our "strength, joy, and terribleness had rested hitherto" (Nietzsche 1989: 85).

In a passage from *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno seems to counter this Nietzschean diagnosis without giving up on the idea that society is under a *Bann*. As he claims,

> The spell [*Bann*] seems to be cast upon all living things, and yet it is probably not [...] simply one with the *principium individuationis* and its mulish self-preservation. Something compulsive distinguishes animal conduct from human conduct. The animal species *homo* may have inherited it, but in the species it turned into something qualitatively different. And it did so precisely due to the reflective faculty that might break the spell [*der Bann zunichte werden könnte*] and did enter into its service. [...]. In human experience the spell [*der Bann*] is the equivalent of the fetish character of the commodity [*Ware*]. The self-made thing becomes a thing-in-itself, from which the self cannot escape any more. [...] The straighter a society's course for the totality that is reproduced in the spellbound [*im Bann*] subjects, the deeper its tendency to dissociation. This threatens the life of the species as much as it

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[10] In the third essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche also mentions the "magic of beauty [*dem Zauber der Schönheit*]" and the "spell of the Kantian definition [*dem Bann der Kantischen Definition*]" of the purposelessness of beauty proposed in the third *Critique*.

disavows the spell cast over the whole [*den Bann des Ganzen*], the false identity of subject and object (Adorno 2007: 345–346, transl. mod.).

The difference from Nietzsche's is that Adorno's *Bann* is a form of articulating a critique of instrumental rationality and capitalist social forms without falling into some kind of praise for irrationalism. Hence the role played by rational reflection in the quoted passage, and all over Adorno's work. The *Bann* is only "apparently" natural. In fact, its very "naturalness" is a semblance that can be broken by critical reflection. As Adorno claims elsewhere, in an "unconscious society" the "mythical forces of nature [*mythische Gewalt des Natürlichen*] reproduce themselves in expanded form, and so will the categories of consciousness produced by that society, including the most enlightened, inevitably grow delusive under the spell [*im Bann*]" (Adorno 2007: 348).[11] The *Bann* is not only the social imposition of society over our inner nature, the very idea of "liberating" this nature from the clutches of society is also under a "spell".

This quote from the *Genealogy* is not the only moment in which Nietzsche condemns the "taming" power of the *Bann.* In a key passage from the *Birth of Tragedy*, when he summarizes his thesis on the principles of art represented by the two Greek gods of aesthetics (Apollo and Dionysos), he makes a similar claim:

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[11] Similarly, in the *Aesthetic Theory* he states that "art extricates itself completely from myth and thus from the spell of nature [*Bann der Natur*], which nevertheless continues in the subjective domination of nature" (Adorno 1997: 66).

> In contrast to all those who are determined to derive the arts from a single principle, as the necessary source of life for every work of art, I have kept my gaze fixed on those two artistic deities of the Greeks, Apollo and Dionysos, in whom I discern the living and visible representatives of *two* art-worlds which differ in their deepest essence and highest goals. Apollo stand before me as the transfiguring genius of the *principium individuationis*, through whom alone release and redemption in semblance [*Erlösung im Scheine*] can truly be attained, whereas under the mystical, jubilant shout of Dyonisios the spell of individuation [*der Bann der Individuation*] is broken, and the path to the Mothers of Being, to innermost core of things, is laid open (Nietzsche 1999: 76).[12]

Apollo and Dyonisios, for Nietzsche, represent the two drives operative in aesthetics. Apollo embodies the one towards individuality and boundary-establishment, while Dyonisios stands for the cathartic transgression of limits and dissolution of individuality. It is the Apolline principle that is responsible for the aesthetic semblance (*Schein*) that works as an artistic *Bann*, while the Dionysiac collapses the distinction between aesthetic and non-aesthetic experience. For Nietzsche, one of the consequences of philosophical "Socratism" was to end this productive conflict in praise of abstract rationality,

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[12] The "spell" or "boundaries" of individuation is mentioned two other times in the *Birth of Tragedy* (Nietzsche 1999: 50; 53) and, in a discussion of Oedipus's fate, Nietzsche claims: "some enormous offence against nature (such as incest in this case) must first have occurred to supply the cause whenever the prophetic and magical energies [*magische Kräfte*] break the spell [*Bann*] of the present and future, the rigid law of individuation, and indeed the actual magic of nature [*Zauber der Natur*]" (Nietzsche 1999: 47–48).

something that could be reversed by a return to the spirit of Greek tragic culture.

Once again, Adorno seems to establish a critical dialogue with Nietzsche on the topic. In the chapter on semblance and expression (two terms that have a similar relationship compared to Nietzsche's Apollo and Dyonisios) of *Aesthetic Theory*, he states:

> Aesthetic self-relinquishment in the artwork requires not a weak or conformist ego but a forceful one. Only the autonomous self is able to turn critically against itself and break through its illusory imprisonment. [...] All the same, semblance is most strikingly obvious in expression because it makes its appearance as if it were illusionless even while subsuming itself to aesthetic semblance; [...] Expression is a priori imitation. Latently implicit in expression is the trust that by being spoken or screamed all will be made better: this is a rudiment of magic [*magisches Rudiment*], faith in what Freud polemically called the "omnipotence of thought". Yet expression is not altogether circumscribed by the magic spell [*magischen Bann*]. That it is spoken, that distance is thus won from the trapped immediacy of suffering, transforms suffering just as screaming diminishes unbearable pain. Expression that has been objectivated as language endures (Adorno 1997: 116–117).

For Adorno, therefore, the spell breaking capacity of art lays not in its power of dissolving reflection by an excessive aesthetic experience, but in the reflection that the very illusoriness of art enables. As he puts it "art is redemptive in the act by which the spirit in it throws itself away. Art holds true to the shudder, but not by regression to it". It is "by virtue of self-

reflection" that "what once seemed to be reality emigrates into imagination, where it survives by becoming conscious of its own unreality" (Adorno 1997: 118).

Thus, what both cases demonstrate is that, while Adorno attempts to preserve the demystification of "reason" found in Nietzsche, he is also trying to reclaim reason's power of putting an end to this bewitching state of affairs. In the next two sections I seek to demonstrate how the concept of *Bann* plays a major role in this project: first, by discussing the political constellation encompassing Adorno's concept of *Bann*, what I take to be the core of his political philosophy and of his critique of the State; second, by articulating how artworks, for him, can play a decisive role in breaking the *Bann* and producing political change.

3. The mythical Foundations of Authority: On the Two Functions of the *Bann*

Until now, I tried to show how the etymology of the word *Bann* contains two ideas. One, the idea of jurisdiction, of official authority, capable of giving sentences, banishing, prohibiting, calling the banners for war, establishing a territory with the monopoly of violence, etc. The second is a kind of magic spell, that lures and traps the individual under its influence. As stated above, both ideas are articulated in figures of political power that link magic and law, disclosing the spellbinding aspects of juridical power. My hypothesis is that this constellation of political meanings is not only present in, but *central* to

Adorno's work. Although not explicit, the political overtones of *Bann* enable us to see an underlying critique of the State [13] even in claims that, at first, only seems to be epistemological or "purely" philosophical. In opposition to the usual reading of Adorno's work as inherently depoliticized, the concept of *Bann* enables not only a better understanding of the dominating forms of rationality and their limits, but also how these forms of rationality are transposed to forms of political organization.

It is interesting that the entwinement of magic and law displayed in the concept of *Bann* is supported not only by etymology, but also by mythology. Georges Dumézil's *Mitra-Varuna*, his highly influential study on the Indo-European mythology, demonstrates how sovereignty was always represented by two antithetical but complementary entities: the magician-king and the jurist-priest, "the violent sovereign god and the just sovereign god" (Dumézil 1988: 78). In Vedic mythology, where the two functions are best represented, Varuna is the personification of the mysterious and magic law of gods that rules humanity, while Mitra is the god of man-made laws and common affairs. Varuna is the violent founder and binder, he intervenes exceptionally and magically, while Mitra is the juridical overseer of legal and religious rites. As Dumézil puts it, "Varuna is the 'binder'. Whoever respects

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[13] Adorno's theory of the State—or better, his critique of the State—is another unexplored topic in the literature. In this paper I want to emphasize the proximity of Adorno's critique of the abstract concept and the critique of law and the State by focusing on their relation to the *Bann*, but a wider account of the State can be found in *Negative Dialectics*—especially in the chapter on "World History and Natural History"—and in other works of the period.

satyam and *sraddha* (in other words, the various forms of correct behavior) is protected by Mitra, but whoever sins against them is immediately bound, in the most literal sense of the word, by Varuna". He compares Varuna to the Greek god Uranos, who "is also a 'binder', even though his 'binding' lacks any moral value. Uranos does not enter into combat any more than Varuna does. Like Varuna, he seizes whomsoever he wishes, and he 'binds' him. Once in his grasp, there is no possibility of resistance" (Dumézil 1988: 95).

However, the relevance of Dumézil's study is not only the deep analysis of how these myths were shared by several Indo-European peoples (especially the Romans), but what this shared mythology can say about actually existing political institutions, about how we are still trapped in this entanglement characterized by the pair Mitra-Varuna in the way the modern State is organized.[14] As Dumézil himself notes, these "sovereign gods", after all, are just "cosmic projections of earthly sovereignty" (Dumézil 1988: 66). The two poles are still present, for instance, in the modern conception of sovereign authority: the awesome and exceptional power that founds a political community and the jurisdiction over a territory and a people. The interesting implication of his thesis, therefore, is that sovereignty oscillates between the tyrannical-magical and juridical-religious dimensions, both necessary for its exercise.[15]

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[14] It is not by chance that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari resort to Dumézil's analysis to develop their theory of the apparatus of capture that defines the modern State (see Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 424–473).

It is quite remarkable how similar Dumézil's theory is to Benjamin's *Critique of violence*. In this text, Benjamin shows how law and the State are intrinsically linked to violence: first, because law needs violence to be enforced and preserved, what he calls "law-preserving violence [*rechtsetzend Gewalt*]"; second, because law depends on an original violence to be established in the first place, what he calls "lawmaking violence [*rechtserhaltend Gewalt*]" (Benjamin 1978: 332).[16] Law is always based on this dialectic of preservation and institution, of legitimate coercion and violent foundation. What should be noted, however, is that Benjamin characterizes this entwinement of law and violence and the vicious cycle between lawmaking and law-preserving violence as "mythical"—something that, for him, can only be opposed by a 'divine violence' that can end this cycle once and for all:

> The law governing their oscillation rests on the circumstance that all law-preserving violence, in its duration, indirectly weakens the lawmaking violence represented by it, through the suppression of hostile counterviolence. [...] This lasts until either new forces or those earlier suppressed triumph over the hitherto lawmaking violence and thus found a new law, destined in its turn to decay. On the breaking of this cycle

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[15] To show how all these connections are anything but arbitrary, it is interesting to note how Dumézil connects the pair Mitra-Varuna to two functions of debt (*nexum* and *mutuum*), and how Nietzsche in the *Genealogy* describes the State authority in terms of 'debt' (see Dumézil 1988: 99–101; Nietzsche 1989: 48–62). In another passage, Dumézil also links the antinomy articulated in *Mitra-Varuna* to the "opposition, so dear to Nietzsche and so perfectly real, between Apollo and Dionysos" (Dumézil 1988: 121).

[16] This relation between law and violence is already inscribed in the German word *Gewalt*, which usually is translated as "violence" but may also be understood as public power, political authority.

> caught under the spell of the mythical forms of law [*im Banne der mythischen Rechtsformen*], on the suspension of law with all the forces on which it depends as they depend on it, finally therefore on the abolition of state power, a new historical epoch is founded (Benjamin 1978: 300).

The word that must call attention in this passage is *Bann*, the "spell" that sustains the "mythical forms of law"—what divine violence must break from. Dumézil's analysis of the ancient myths of sovereignty thus meets Benjamin's critique of the mythical character of sovereignty. What Dumézil's analysis contributes to Benjamin's is precisely the articulation of the two functions of this *Bann*, how the lawmaking violence assumes magical and omnipotent traits while the law-preserving violence can become the 'legitimate' coercion of law enforcement.[17]

This entanglement between myth, sovereignty and *Bann* becomes especially interesting when we analyze the role of

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[17] It is not by chance that Giorgio Agamben—highly influenced by this Benjaminian text and working upon a suggestion made by Jean-Luc Nancy—proposed a conception of the "sovereign ban [*bando sovrano*]" as the originary structure of the State" (Agamben 1998: 58-9; see also Jean-Luc Nancy 1983: 149), and that he develops it not only in terms of law and violence, but also in terms of the original *tie* it imposes upon its subjects: "what the ban holds together is precisely bare life and sovereign power. All representations of the originary political act as a contract or convention marking the passage from nature to the State in a discrete and definite way must be left wholly behind. Here there is, instead, a much more complicated zone of indiscernibility between *nomos* and *physis*, in which the State tie, having the form of a ban [*bando*], is always already also non-State and pseudo-nature, and in which nature always already appears as *nomos* and the state of exception. [...] The ban is the force of simultaneous attraction and repulsion that ties together the two poles of the sovereign exception: bare life and power, *homo sacer* and the sovereign. Because of this alone can the ban signify both the insignia of sovereignty [...] and expulsion from the community" (Agamben 1998: 109–111).

myth in Adorno's critique. One of the main theses of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is how myth and enlightenment are structurally entwined under a *Bann*: "just as myths already entail enlightenment, with every step enlightenment entangles itself more deeply in mythology. Receiving all its subject matter from myths, in order to destroy them, it falls as judge under the mythical spell [*in den mythischen Bann*]" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002: 18, transl. mod.). The idea of a mythical *Bann* is also present in Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* in a related context, where he claims that it has been "secularized into compactly dovetailed reality", and that the reality principle, "which the prudent heed in order to survive in it, captures them as black magic [*böser Zauber*]; they are unable and unwilling to cast off the burden" (Adorno 2007: 347).

But what is most interesting in this passage from *Negative Dialectics* is how Adorno describes the identity principle in terms of domination, rule and legality a few sentences before: "whatever nonidentity the rule of the identity principle [*die Herrschaft des Identitätsprinzips*] will tolerate is mediated in turn by the identitarian compulsion". "Under the spell [*Unterm Bann*]", claims Adorno, "what is different—and the slightest admixture of which would indeed be incompatible with the spell—will turn to poison. As accidental, on the other hand, the nonidentical remnant grows abstract enough to adjust to the legality of identification [*Gesetzlichkeit der Identifikation*]" (Adorno 2007: 347). What Adorno's language hints to here is precisely the idea that the abstract concept operates as the

absolutist sovereign of thought, under which all particulars must be subjected.

This interlocking of legality and conceptuality is all over Adorno's work. The way he speaks about the concept and the State is remarkably similar, going beyond mere metaphor. Adorno states, for instance, that "the universal that compresses the particular until it splinters, like a torture instrument, is working against itself, for its substance is the life of the particular" (Adorno 2007: 346). Likewise, he denounces the violence within the system of law, a topic that is ubiquitous in his critique of the identity principle:

> The total legal realm is one of definitions. Its systematic forbids [*ebietet*] the admission of anything that eludes their closed circle [*Umkreis*], of anything *quod non est in actis.* These bounds [*Gehege*], ideological in themselves, turn into real violence as they are sanctioned by law as the socially controlling authority [*gesellschaftlicher Kontrollinstanz*], in the administered world in particular. In the dictatorships they become direct violence; indirectly, violence has always lurked behind them (Adorno 2007: 309).[18]

However, this sovereignty of the concept, just like political sovereignty, also can only be sustained by a "surplus" that binds us, that makes it authoritative. The legal powers of esta-

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[18] In the same paragraph, he also states that "law is the medium in which evil wins out on account of its objectivity and acquires the appearance [*Schein*] of good. Positively it does protect the reproduction of life; but in its extant forms its destructiveness shows undiminished, thanks to the destructive principle of violence. While a lawless society will succumb to pure license, as it did in the Third Reich, the law in society is a preservative of terror, always ready to resort to terror with the aid of quotable statutes" (Adorno 2007: 309).

blishing an inside and an outside of the abstract concept also depends on a magic-like property that keeps us in awe and makes us abide.

It is not by chance that Jay Bernstein puts the idea of authority in the center of his reading of Adorno. As he claims, "the relation of reason to authority is directly homologous with the relation of enlightenment to myth; in both cases the second term is defined negatively, as that which is to be overcome, with the result that both first terms become frozen and deformed" (Bernstein 2001: 133). The consequence of these identifications is twofold. Not only they enable us to see the mythological aspects of enlightenment and the authoritarian elements of reason, but also to read the claim in reverse: to see in myth already a form of rationalization and, to find rationality in the relationship of authority. It is not by chance that Weber's interpretation of the modern State involves not simply a separation between rational and irrational forms of "legitimate domination" or "authority" (*Herrschaft*), but in seeing how all forms of authority, including the legal-rational, are based in a surplus element that confers legitimacy upon it.[19]

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[19] As Weber claims: "loyalty may be hypocritically simulated by individuals or by whole groups on purely opportunistic grounds, or carried out in practice for reasons of material self-interest. Or people may submit from individual weakness and helplessness because there is no acceptable alternative. But these considerations are not decisive for the classification of types of domination. What is important is the fact that in a given case the particular claim to legitimacy is to a significant degree and according to its type treated as 'valid'; that this fact confirms the position of the persons claiming authority and that it helps to determine the choice of means of its exercise" (Weber 1978: 214).

Authoritative beliefs and commands, says Bernstein, "are accepted on trust or out of respect, and not from self-interest or habit or lassitude or need". What they entail is "a moment in which a belief or command is accepted, taken as worthy and acceptable, without reflective assessment". Authority is what gives persons, statements and situations "intrinsic normative force" (Bernstein 2001: 121). In this sense, authoritative claims are more than convincing and less than commanding. As Hannah Arendt had already noted, what defines its phenomenon is the production of obedience without coercion. As she puts it, "where force is used, authority itself has failed". At the same time, authority is also incompatible with persuasion and political debate, "which presupposes equality and works through a process of argumentation" (Arendt 2006: 92–93). What authority then implies is "an obedience in which men retain their freedom" (Arendt 2006: 105); or to put in Weber's terms, a "voluntary compliance", an "interest in obedience" (Weber 1978: 212).

What all of this entails is that authority cannot simply be reduced to a legal title, not even to sheer demonstration of force. Authority only capable of exercising its legal function if it is recognized as such, if it has that "surplus" that characterizes the power of producing immediate and unquestioned obedience, if it is capable of binding its subjects. If Adorno's intent with *Negative Dialectics* can be summarized as an attempt to unveil the precarious "authority" of abstract conceptualization, it is also a theory that exposes its hegemony as contingent and changeable. Also the same could be said about the modern

State and its legal structure: not only it is a historically contingent form of political organization, it also falls into the very same traps that abstract conceptualization does—hence the injustice and unfreedom that this abstract structure inevitably produces, and that Adorno constantly calls attention to. By denouncing the perverse consequences spurring from the sovereign authority of identity thinking and the modern State, Adorno attempts to pave the way for an alternative form of rationality capable of overcoming instrumental reason in both theory and practice.

This is why the *Bann* becomes so prominent in his analysis. This concept enables Adorno to theorize the limiting and spellbinding aspects of the abstract concept and the State, and how these two are deeply entwined. The authoritarian State-like violence with which universal abstraction treats particularity and difference can only be sustained because of the "spell" of authority that necessarily accompanies it,[20] something that denotes both the difficulties of "breaking" from it as well as the disastrous consequences of its unfettered expansion. Nevertheless, for Adorno, this is not unchangeable. Reflective thinking is one form to "make the spell disappear [*der Bann verschwände*]", for instance (Adorno 2007: 270). The problem, also

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[20] At first, the emphasis on authority and authoritarianism might seem to refer to the Pollock–Horkheimer debate on the authoritarian aspect of the capitalist State and its relation to fascism, but I follow Deborah Cook in her account of the differences between Adorno's notion of late capitalism and the ones proposed by Pollock and Hokheimer (see Cook 1998). Instead, I think that Adorno's reflection on law and the State in his late writings involves a deeper critique of the State-form itself in relation to the identitarian drive of social abstractions. Authoritarianism, in this sense, would not be a phase of the capitalist State, or its antithesis in the fascist State, but an always already present possibility of each and every State.

for Adorno, is how to transpose this reflective activity to practice and dispel the "spell" over minds and actions, so pervasive in modern societies.

4. Dispelling the spell: from aesthetic experience to political action

Adorno addresses the problem of political action in one of the last interviews of his life, one given to the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* in May 1969 right after cancelling his lectures due to a student demonstration against him. Explaining what he meant by saying that "people would try to implement [his theory] with Molotov cocktails", he makes an interesting assessment of his relation to political activity:

In my writings, I have never offered a model for any kind of action or for some specific campaign. I am a theoretical human being who views theoretical thinking as lying extraordinarily close to his artistic intentions. It is not as if I had turned away from praxis only recently; my thinking always has stood in a rather indirect relationship to praxis. My thinking has perhaps had practical consequences in that some of its motifs have entered consciousness, but I have never said anything that was immediately aimed at practical actions (Adorno 2002: 15).

It is true that nowhere in Adorno can be found a guideline of political transformation, clearly a conscious protest against the narrowness so common in political debates. "In response to the question 'What is to be done?'", Adorno says, "I

usually can only answer 'I do not know'. I can only analyze relentlessly what is" (Adorno 2002: 16).

Although the absence of normative aspects in Adorno's relentless analysis of "what is" is debatable,[21] what is worthy of notice is that Adorno mentions his "indirect relationship to praxis" in the context of the proximity of his theoretical thinking and his "artistic intentions". In 1969, Adorno was still working on the manuscript of *Aesthetic Theory*, which remained unfinished with his death. But it is in this unfinished text that one can find some striking aesthetic claims loaded with political overtones. In fact, I argue, it is in Adorno's aesthetic theory that his "positive" political theory is best articulated—not simply "translating" the aesthetic discussion to the political, but mainly in seeing how aesthetic modernism is the living proof that political change is possible.

It is not a surprise, therefore, that the *Bann* also plays a major role in this text. Addressing precisely this problem in a discussion of ugliness in art, Adorno claims that beauty is not the "platonically pure beginning but rather something that originated in the renunciation of what was once feared, which only as a result of this renunciation [...] became the ugly. Beauty is the spell over the spell [*Schönheit ist der Bann über den Bann*], which devolves upon it" (Adorno 1997: 47). Beauty conceptualized as *Bann* has the same juridic-magical connotations that were present in the abstract concept, but with a deter-

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[21] See, for instance, Fabian Freyenhagen's theory that Adorno's primacy of the object and the role played by suffering in his theory impose a normative content (Freyenhagen 2013).

mining difference: its spellbinding capacity is explicitly illusory while its capacity of setting limits and excluding ugliness (or "dissonance" in general) is contained within the aesthetic realm. Both problems are articulated in the concept of *Schein*, a word that can be translated as aesthetic semblance, appearance, or illusion, but that also has as possible meanings the effect of a shining glow and even a legal document or certificate. As Jameson exemplifies, aesthetic *Schein* is what may vanish away from a work of art, "abandoning its spectators to the idle activity of staring at pieces of smeared canvas or witnessing, with no little embarrassment, a little group of people striding around a platform waving their arms improbably and opening their mouths" (Jameson 1990: 165).[22]

Therefore, *Schein* is an essential part of artworks, without which they would lose the "double character" that makes them more than mere objects. *Schein* is the illusory appearance that sustains the unity of the work of art, its "immanent closure" (Adorno 1997: 101), which appears as something beyond a combination of paint over canvas, or a sequence of sounds and

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[22] It is worth mentioning that, for Adorno, the abstract concept is itself a *Schein*, a form of illusion that vanishes when reflected upon. As he puts in *Negative dialectics*, "the suppression of nature for human ends is a mere natural relationship, which is why the supremacy of nature-controlling reason and its principle is a delusion. When the subject proclaims itself a Baconian master of all things, and finally their idealistic creator, it takes an epistemological and metaphysical part in this delusion [*Schein*]. The practice of its rule [*In der Ausübung seiner Herrschaft*] makes it a part of what it thinks it is ruling [*was es zu beherrschen meint*]; it succumbs like the Hegelian master. It reveals the extent to which in consuming the object it is beholden to the object. What it does is the spell [*der Bann*] of that which the subject believes under its own spell [*Bann*]. The subject's desperate self-exaltation is its reaction to the experience of its impotence [*Ohnmacht*], which prevents self-reflection" (Adorno 2007: 179-180).

words. Artworks' value lies precisely in their appearance, in how they "appear as intrinsically valuable, valuable in and of themselves" (Bernstein 2004: 147). It is this power of seeing in something more than what it is that Adorno connects to the magical origins that resist the "disenchantment of the world". Only in its magical element, says Adorno, "is art's mimetic character preserved [...]. Emancipated from its claim to reality, the enchantment [*Zauber*] is itself part of enlightenment: its semblance [*Schein*] disenchants the disenchanted world [*entzaubert die entzauberte Welt*]" (Adorno 1997: 58, see also Feola 2018: 31).

This idea that art's enchantment can disenchant the disenchanted world—which, far from "disenchanted", is under the *Bann* of abstract reason—appeared before in an astonishing aphorism from *Minima Moralia* called "Magic Flute". There, Adorno makes clear the entanglement of beauty's relationship to magic, its link to the *Bann*, and how it can enable critical reflection. In what seems to be a clear reference to the role of money in capitalism, Adorno is interested in showing how the glittering *Bann* of gold and precious stones, although "dispelled" by enlightenment, survived as "the power [*Macht*] of radiant things over men, in whom they once instilled a dread that continues to hold their eyes spellbound [*gebannt*], even after they have seen through its claim to domination [*herrschaftlicher Anspruch*]" (Adorno 205: 224). The reversal of this process, however, lies in the very contemplative character of such precious objects:

> Contemplation, as a residue of fetishist worship [*fetischistischer Anbetung*], is at the same time a stage in overcoming it. As radiant things give up their magic claims [*magischen Anspruchs*], renounce the power [*Gewalt verzichten*] with which the subject invested them and hoped with their help himself to wield, they become transformed into images of gentleness, promises of a happiness cured of domination over nature. This is the primeval history of luxury, that has migrated into the meaning of all art. In the magic of what reveals itself in absolute powerlessness, of beauty, at once perfection and nothingness, the illusion of omnipotence is mirrored negatively as hope. It has escaped every trial of strength [*Machtprobe*]. Total purposelessness gives the lie to the totality of purposefulness in the world of domination, and only by virtue of this negation, which consummates the established order by drawing the conclusion from its own principle of reason, has existing society up to now become aware of another that is possible. The bliss of contemplation consists in disenchanted enchantment [*Die Seligkeit von Betrachtung besteht im entzauberten Zauber*]. Radiance is the appeasement of myth [*Was aufleuchtet, ist die Versöhnung des Mythos*] (Adorno 2005: 224–225, transl. mod.).

Thus, aesthetic reflection cannot be reduced to pure rational reflection. It happens under the "spell" of *Schein*—not *despite* it, but *because* of it. It is the illusoriness of art that denounces the illusoriness of "reality" as something immutable and necessary. As Turner points out, "the only way out of the *Bann* is in some sense through the *Bann* itself" (Turner 2016: 219).

Moreover, another thing that becomes clear in this passage (and that also denotes a fundamental aspect of artworks)

is their "bindingness",[23] that is, how they reclaim attention and interest despite being purposeless. Aesthetic form, says Adorno, is "the objective organization within each artwork of what appears as bindingly eloquent [*stimmig Beredten*]. It is the nonviolent synthesis of the diffuse that nevertheless preserves it as what it is in its divergences and contradictions" (Adorno 1997: 143). This power came to the fore when the arts became autonomous, when they became "aware that their previous sense of authority was borrowed (from the gods and kings and empires they celebrated)", and started to reflect about what it means to be "just art" (Bernstein 2014: 1075). What started to become relevant was not what was being *represented* in art, but "representation" itself, which in art is always a semblance, aesthetic *Schein.*

According to Bernstein, "binding" is Adorno's word for "objective authority". Authentic artworks are, according to him, "rationally compelling but in a manner that refuses determining judgement with its conceptual demands" (Bernstein 2014: 1087).[24] This authority has been historically negated since the abstract concept has tried to impose, as an absolutist sovereign, its sole authority (Feola 2018: 25–26; Bernstein 2014:

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[23] "Natural beauty", Adorno claims, "is perceived both as authoritatively binding [*zwingend Verbindliches*] and as something incomprehensible that questioningly awaits its solution. Above all else it is this double character of natural beauty that has been conferred on art. Under its optic, art is not the imitation of nature but the imitation of natural beauty" (Adorno 1997: 71).

[24] It is interesting to note, as Feola does, that this aesthetic authority, as is the case with all kinds of authority, also demands that "the subject of aesthetic experience must enact a *willingness to be shaken*", that is, a form of recognition of a surplus that creates this effect" (Feola 2018: 32).

1086). Nevertheless, the arts persisted making their claims. Adorno's answer of how this could be so, is that the arts are forms of expression of the sensible particular, something, for him, intimately connected to suffering: "suffering remains foreign to knowledge; though knowledge can subordinate it conceptually and provide means for its amelioration, knowledge can scarcely express it through its own means" (Adorno 1997: 18). It is only in the arts that both sensuous particularity and human suffering can be expressed, can assume a non-violent form, can become somehow coherent.

However, this remains always a semblance. Art, by itself, is not capable of doing justice to the particular, or giving true expression to its suffering. "Redemption through semblance [*Schein*] is itself illusory", says Adorno, "the artwork accepts this powerlessness in the form of its own illusoriness" (Adorno 1997: 107). If art could truly do so, it would be its end:

> What takes itself to be utopia remains the negation of what exists and is obedient to it. At the center of contemporary antinomies is that art must be and wants to be utopia, and the more utopia is blocked by the real functional order, the more this is true; yet at the same time art may not be utopia in order not to betray it by providing semblance [*Schein*] and consolation. If the utopia of art were fulfilled, it would be art's temporal end (Adorno 1997: 32).

If art, then, cannot itself become utopia—that is, if it cannot become itself the means of change of reality, at the risk of reinforcing this very reality—then what can it become? I would argue that, for Adorno, aesthetics (at least in modernism, when

art becomes conscious of itself as art) shares its core problems with politics. Both are attempts to break out from the *Bann* (of reality, of the concept, of the State, of beauty), but can only do it *through* this *Bann*, not from without it. The role of experimentation, of the vanguard, of shaping and forming, of composition, are just a few of the aesthetic themes discussed by Adorno that have clear political consequences when read with this in mind. It is not by chance that these very words also belong to political discourse. In many cases, when taken out of context, some passages from *Aesthetic Theory* become indistinguishable from a political analysis, which I take to be clearly part of Adorno's intention, given his praise for subtleties and ambiguities (of which the concept of *Bann* is merely an example).

Take, for instance, a moment in which he discusses the problem of the "new". "The relation to the new", says Adorno, "is modeled on a child at the piano searching for a chord never previously heard. This chord, however, was always there; the possible combinations are limited and actually everything that can be played on it is implicitly given in the keyboard". The new is "the longing for the new, not the new itself: that is what everything new suffers from" (Adorno 1997: 32). That the new can appear where all seems already determined, is by itself a living proof that political transformation is possible. And as is the case with aesthetic innovation, what matters in innovation is the process itself, the "longing", instead of the pre-established goal.

Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* is full of moments such as this one, showing how art is not the means of political change, but the symbol of its possibility.[25] In another passage, Adorno gives a beautiful account of the difference between aesthetic time in music and the chronological time within which the latter unfolds:

> [...] there is no mistaking time as such in music, yet it is so remote from empirical time that, when listening is concentrated, temporal events external to the musical continuum remain external to it and indeed scarcely touch it; if a musician interrupts a passage to repeat it or to pick it up at an earlier point, musical time remains indifferent, unaffected; in a certain fashion it stands still and only proceeds when the course of the music is continued. Empirical time disturbs musical time, if at all, only by dint of its heterogeneity, not because they flow together (Adorno 1997: 137).

If time, space, and causality, are fundamental forms of control over nature, in art "they are themselves controlled and freely disposed over. Through the domination of the dominating [*Durch Beherrschung des Beherrschenden*], art revises the domination of nature [*Naturbeherrschung*] to the core". In subverting, suspending or abolishing these formal conditions of domination, art not only exposes the "semblance [*Schein*] of inevitability that characterizes these forms in empirical reality", but also shows the possibility of changing them: "as a musical composition compresses time, and as a painting folds spaces

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[25] Artworks, as puts Bernstein, "bear upon another *form* of human encountering, and hence another way in which things and persons can be experienced" (Bernstein 2014: 1076).

into one another, so the possibility is concretized that the world could be other than it is" (Adorno 1997: 138).

Of course, Adorno is not proposing to abolish the laws of physics. "Space, time, and causality are maintained, their power [*Gewalt*] is not denied", he clarifies. What art enables it that "they are divested of their compulsiveness". This is one of the powers of the artistic *Schein*. "Paradoxically", states Adorno, "it is precisely to the extent that art is released from the empirical world by its formal constituents that it is less illusory, less deluded by subjectively dictated lawfulness, than is empirical knowledge" (Adorno 1997: 138). As Bernstein points out, "artworks are not real things, but semblances of real things", and it is *because* they are semblances that "they can enact relations of universal and particular not possible in current empirical experience" (Bernstein 2004: 160). Art's "distortion" (or "refraction", in Adorno's terms) of space, time, and causality is both its nexus to the social world and the emblem of its blocked potentialities. If it is true that "there is nothing in art, not even in the most sublime, that does not derive from the world", real art lives in conflict with this world (Adorno 1997: 138).

Thus, art matters for Adorno not because it, by itself, can change the world, because itself is the practice of emancipation, as some shallow critics propose. Art matters because it is the living proof of an alternative, because it is a promise of another world, and because it carries in it the inevitable fact that political emancipation cannot be realized abstractly. In this sense, Adorno's beautiful example of the interruption of time

in music could perhaps be read as a silent reference to Walter Benjamin, who also took seriously the possibility of suspending time:

> The awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode is characteristic of the revolutionary classes at the moment of their action. The great revolution introduced a new calendar. The initial day of a calendar serves as a historical timelapse camera. And, basically, it is the same day that keeps recurring in the guise of holidays, which are days of remembrance. Thus the calendars do not measure time as clocks do; they are monuments of a historical consciousness of which not the slightest trace has been apparent in Europe in the past hundred years. In the July revolution an incident occurred which showed this consciousness still alive. On the first evening of fighting it turned out that the clocks in towers were being fired on simultaneously and independently from several places in Paris. An eye-witness, who may have owed his insight to the rhyme, wrote as follows: *Qui le croirait! on dit, qu'irrités contre l'heure / De nouveaux Josués au pied de chaque tour, / Tiraient sur les cadrans pour arrêter le jour* (Benjamin 1968: 261–262).

If true art is not a substitute for politics, it is at least the assurance of its possibility. As calendars in Benjamin description, artworks are objects of remembrance. Remembrance of human suffering, remembrance of the material constraints of freedom, remembrance that history is not over. In his lectures on freedom and history, Adorno claims that "the eternal sameness of the historical process that I have attempted to explain with the aid of the concept of the spell [*Bann*] would go into reverse at the point at which want was abolished", and complements: "eradicated in all seriousness, not just on the surface,

but for all mankind, universally and on a global scale" (Adorno 2006: 183). The *Bann*, the spell casted upon us by a bewitched system of violent ordering, cannot be dispelled by art. Art can only give us hope that this is possible. This is where aesthetics ends and history, the politics of humankind, starts. It is not by chance that in the very end of the manuscript of *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno compares art with "the writing of history", and wonders what art would be if it "shook off the memory of accumulated suffering" (Adorno 1997: 261). It seems that an answer will only be possible when we finally get free from the sovereign *Bann* and justice is served to those who suffer unjustly.

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