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Anarchy as Modernist Aesthetic

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.
(Yeats)

Abstract: Both anarchists and bourgeois were morbidly fascinated by the anarchist attack in the form of a bomb. The anarchist bomb became, stereotypically, the signature or signifier of the movement. It signified social revolution and cosmic chaos. When anarchism declined as a political movement, the bomb was appropriated by the avant-garde as an aesthetic strategy of shock. This article tracks the relationship between anarchism and modernist aesthetics in the works of Richard Wagner, Andrei Bely, Henry Adams, G.K. Chesterton, and Joseph Conrad, arguing that modernism was charged with revolutionary potential.

In *Culture and Anarchy* Matthew Arnold warns that individual, politically-motivated action poses a threat both to social order and to aesthetic culture. More and more people, he writes in the chapter "Doing as One Likes" are "beginning to assert and put into practice an Englishman's right to do what he likes; his right to march where he likes, meet where he likes, enter where he likes, hoot as he likes, threaten as he likes, smash as he likes."¹ In affirming the power of culture to check the anarchic and destructive impulses of the willful individual, Arnold simultaneously affirms the need for a transpersonal authority and the legitimacy of the state. The loss of liberal hegemony, the discontent of the working class, the rise of pan-Germanic and pan-Slavic groups, and the activities of actual anarchists make 'anarchy' and 'order' the opposing terms of the fin-de-siècle.² The perceived opposition between the two was intensified by the work of Einstein, Mach, Heisenberg, Freud, and Bergson, whose various theoretical positions implied that all forms of control

1 Arnold: *Culture and Anarchy*, pp. 45–46.

2 Schorske: *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, pp. 116–75.

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In *Culture and Anarchy* Matthew Arnold warns that individual, politically-motivated action poses a threat both to social order and to aesthetic culture. More and more people, he writes in the chapter "Doing as One Likes" are "beginning to assert and put into practice an Englishman's right to do what he likes; his right to march where he likes, meet where he likes, enter where he likes, hoot as he likes, threaten as he likes, smash as he likes."¹ In affirming the power of culture to check the anarchic and destructive impulses of the willful individual, Arnold simultaneously affirms the need for a transpersonal authority and the legitimacy of the state. The loss of liberal hegemony, the discontent of the working class, the rise of pan-Germanic and pan-Slavic groups, and the activities of actual anarchists make 'anarchy' and 'order' the opposing terms of the fin-de-siècle.² The perceived opposition between the two was intensified by the work of Einstein, Mach, Heisenberg, Freud, and Bergson, whose various theoretical positions implied that all forms of control

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and order were tenuous and that chaos was endemic to all systems, human and cosmic.³ Henry Adams sums up this point in his autobiography when he remarks: "Chaos was the law of nature; order was the dream of man."⁴ What I call the 'discourse of anarchy' – both pro and con, political and aesthetic, 'social' and 'natural' – runs through modernism, suggesting that current critical assumptions about its politics, namely that it is elitist, escapist, and proto-fascist, are oversimplified.⁵

Like all binaries, the anarchy/order opposition is gendered, with order and the masculine aligned. Because women were prominent in anarchist politics – Emma Goldman, Voltairine de Cleyre, Olive Rossetti, Lucy Parsons, Louise Michel – the anarchist activist became the most threatening manifestation of the New Woman. Male anarchists were often, at least in theory, advocates of women's emancipation, with Peter Kropotkin, for example, writing sympathetically and at some length in his autobiography of Russian women's attempts to free themselves from constricting gender roles.⁶ Emma Goldman wrote essays attacking marriage and the nuclear family and praising Ibsen, whose heroines defied male authority; Ibsen was himself branded an anarchist by Max Nordau in *Degeneration*. The ubiquity of the female anarchist in the fiction of the period is further evidence of the popular association of anarchism with feminism. Henry James's novel of 1886, *The Princess Casamassima*, takes as its title character not the young male protagonist but a woman actively in sympathy with anarchist politics. Conrad focuses on another woman sympathizer in the short story "The Informer," and Upton Sinclair, in his 1926 novel about the Sacco and Vanzetti case, *Boston*, describes the involvement of two genteel women with Vanzetti and with workers' causes.⁷ Similarly, Dos Passos in *The Big Money* represents a young woman's conversion to workers' causes and her sympathy for Sacco and Vanzetti. The case did in fact attract the public sympathy of such prominent American women writers as Katherine Anne Porter, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Dorothy Parker, who picketed and were arrested during the trial.

3 For a study of these figures in their relationship to modernism, see Kern: *The Culture of Time and Space*.

4 Adams: *The Education of Henry Adams*, p. 451.

5 I am thinking here of Gilbert and Gubar's *No Man's Land* and of Marianna Togovrick's *Going Primitive*, as well as the title of a panel at the 1991 MLA convention: "What was Modernism and Why are People Saying Such Terrible Things about It?"

6 In a recent talk and upcoming article on German anarchism and 'free love,' Hubert van den Berg discusses the problematic attitude of male anarchists toward women's emancipation.

7 Sacco and Vanzetti were anarchists, Italian immigrants to the United States, executed after an infamous trial not unlike the Haymarket anarchist trial in Chicago in 1886.

In addition to the emancipation of women, the word 'anarchy' encodes, as in Matthew Arnold, working-class discontent and the extension of the franchise. Arnold's alignment of the state with culture virtually foretells coming debates in the arts in which certain major figures defend the state, order, and hierarchy against an implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) anarchist politics with its anti-statist, decentralizing, and individualist attitudes. In turn-of-the-century literature, therefore, the word 'anarchy' has a specific historical referent, the anarchist movement that was virtually coterminous with modernism, and, like modernism, was international and urban. The 'discourse of anarchy' in the arts was inflected according to the politics of the speaker. Henry Adams, Richard Wagner, and Andrei Bely, all of whom now have reputations as reactionaries, recognized and invoked the radical possibilities of anarchy and anarchism, while Matthew Arnold, Max Nordau, Yeats, and Eliot decried an anarchy that would, they feared, destroy culture. Positive appropriations of 'anarchy' by figures like Wagner, Adams, and Bely entail an idealist stress on a revolution in individual consciousness, but such idealism is also characteristic of much anarchist theory, which may in part explain the mutual affinity between the two.

In a significant instance of the relationship between aesthetics and politics, both anarchists and conservatives correlate social order with the aesthetic. The prominence of the figure of the collector in Joseph Conrad's two stories about anarchism, "The Informer" and "An Anarchist," is explicable in terms of this correlation. What Irving Howe calls Conrad's "exorbitant need for personal order" can be understood in light of the collector's dialectic of order and disorder, which in turn is a version of the dialectic that the anarchist Michael Bakunin postulates as anarchist: order and chaos, creation and destruction. "The desire for destruction," Bakunin famously remarked, "is also a creative desire."⁸ The collector's obsession with order implicates him, as Walter Benjamin suggests, in chaos: "Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories."⁹ Order, aesthetics, and the beautiful are important both to fictional representations of anarchism and to anarchism as a historical phenomenon; the movement attracted artists and intellectuals, including French Symbolists and Neo-Impressionists, who "related their redefinition of aesthetic form to the radical restructuring of society and during the early 1890s forged an active alliance with the French anarcho-communist movement."¹⁰ The anarchist painter Paul Signac speculated on the rela-

8 Quoted in Thomas: *Karl Marx and the Anarchists*, p. 289: "Die Lust der Zerstörung ist zugleich eine schaffende Lust."

9 Benjamin: "Unpacking My Library," *Illuminations*, p. 60.

10 Silverman: *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*, p. 212.

tionship between social and aesthetic order: "justice in sociology, harmony in art ... same thing."¹¹ Linda Nochlin writes about another painter, "For Pissarro, a convinced and professing anarchist, Impressionism was the natural concomitant of social progress, political radicalism, belief in science rather than superstition, individualism, and rugged straightforwardness in personal behavior."¹² Anarchist theorists like Kropotkin advocated a decentralized social order that would be, in essence, both natural and aesthetic, a way of life based on cooperation and mutual aid. The anarchist Alexander Berkman writes, "Disorder is the child of authority and compulsion. Liberty is the mother of order."¹³ Their conservative opponents, political and cultural, equated 'anarchy,' or lack of government, with social chaos and violence, as Edward Said points out when he writes that "figures like Matthew Arnold make an active identification between culture and the state."¹⁴ Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* really postulates alternatives: the state or barbarism, culture or anarchy.

In G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908), the anarchist poet Lucian Gregory, in expressing "the old cant of the lawlessness of art and the art of lawlessness," sums up the affiliation between the political and the aesthetic in this era as follows:

"An artist is identical with an anarchist," he cried. "You might transpose the words anywhere. An anarchist is an artist. The man who throws a bomb is an artist, because he prefers a great moment to everything. He sees how much more valuable is one burst of blazing light, one peal of perfect thunder, than the mere common bodies of a few shapeless policemen. An artist disregards all governments, abolishes all conventions. The poet delights in disorder only."¹⁵

Chesterton overstates the point deliberately (later, Gregory is unmasked as Satan) but he also lays out a set of connections between anarchism and the arts which were virtually hegemonic at the turn of the century but which have subsequently become eclipsed by other accounts. The shift in Richard Wagner's reputation – from dangerous anarchist to protofascist – is symptomatic of this reappraisal.

Already in Wagner the revolutionary and anarchic side of modernism is emergent. In 1848–49 Wagner became acquainted with the anarchist Michael Bakunin, participated in the Dresden revolt, wrote revolutionary pamphlets and the original sketch of the *Ring*.¹⁶ Siegfried is, according to Bernard Shaw

11 Quoted in Silverman, *Ibid.*, p. 213.

12 Nochlin: *The Politics of Vision*, p. 61.

13 Berkman: *ABC of Anarchism*, p. 8.

14 Said: *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, p. 174.

15 Chesterton: *The Man Who Was Thursday*, pp. 2–3.

16 Wagner describes this in his own autobiography, *Mein Leben*. Ernest Newman, in his biography of Wagner, gives the most detailed account.

and others, based on Bakunin;¹⁷ Shaw describes "Siegfried Bakunin" as forging the sword Nothung "with the shouting exultation of the anarchist who destroys only to clear the ground for creation"¹⁸ – an allusion to Bakunin's famous aphorism. Wagner read Proudhon and Feuerbach; the *Ring*, as I explain in more detail elsewhere, is imbued with anarchist critiques of law and property.¹⁹ Wagner was associated with anarchism by such diverse figures as the conservative Max Nordau, who states in *Degeneration*, "Wagner was a declared anarchist,"²⁰ and the American anarchist Benjamin Tucker, who wrote, "None of the newspapers, in their obituaries of Richard Wagner ... mention the fact that he was an Anarchist."²¹

The association of Wagner's music with 'anarchy' prefigures attacks on modernist musical aesthetics. Charges that Wagner was an anarchist may have been further prompted by his innovative treatment of harmony, the unresolved dissonances and extreme chromaticism of *Tristan* in particular, and the resultant undermining of classical tonality with its 'centrist' dependence on the tonic. Certainly the word 'anarchy' appears in the critical discourse on later, high modernist works because of their decentralizing tendencies: polytonality, polyrhythms, atonality, serialism. A contemporary critic described Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloe* (suite I) as "harmonic and polyphonic anarchy,"²² and another critic identified Debussy as "the head of the anarchists."²³ Ravel called his fellow artists and composers *Les Apaches*, a contemporary nickname for anarchists.²⁴ Carl Schorske writes that Schönberg "used Wagnerian harmonic devices to weaken the sense of tonal center, such as evading the dominant, which normally provides us with tonal location,"²⁵ and Carl Dahlhaus

17 Shaw: "The Perfect Wagnerite." Jacques Barzun also associates Bakunin and Siegfried in *Darwin, Marx, Wagner*.

18 Shaw: "The Perfect Wagnerite," p. 232.

19 In his *The Aesthetic State*, Chytry discusses Proudhon's influence on the composer.

20 Nordau: *Degeneration*, p. 22.

21 Tucker: *Liberty*, #315, 1.

22 Crocker: *A History of Musical Style*, p. 488. Crocker writes in response, "it is clear that 'anarchy' now meant not absolute musical disorder, but merely failure to confirm the familiar functions of triads and their derivatives in the delicate balance of tonal forces defined by Haydn. This refined order by now seemed natural, and deviations from it were regarded as open rebellion against nature and reasonable conformity with nature."

23 Pasler: "The Social Roots of Innovation in Music in Fin-de-siècle France," talk given at U.C. Berkeley, April 24, 1992.

24 Pasler.

25 Schorske: *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, p. 348. Schorske makes the following analogy: "The task of the composer was to manipulate dissonance in the interests of consonance, just as a political leader in an institutional system manipulates movement, canalizing it to serve the pur-

reflects on the twin impulses to anarchy and order in Schönberg's work.²⁶ Here 'anarchy' is a synonym for radical departures from the naturalized code of classical tonality, but it retains a political resonance. Schönberg's 'emancipation of dissonance' is suggestive of other kinds of emancipation. Just as anarchists break or defy the law, modernist artists, writers, and composers break or defy musical 'laws.' In this sense, anarchy becomes a synonym for 'noise,' for unresolved dissonance and disorder, which in turn suggest violations of the social and natural order. In forgetting the historical presence of political anarchists, we lose the force of references to 'anarchy,' which betray anxiety about politics as well as aesthetics and expose in the aesthetic a "displaced politics."²⁷

In debates about anarchy and order in the two decades before and after 1900, T.S. Eliot like Matthew Arnold, Max Nordau, and G.K. Chesterton, comes down firmly on the side of order. His defense of order and hierarchy in the essay "Ulysses, Myth and Order" has been canonized as an explanatory principle for modernism. Disagreeing with a critic who considers Joyce's *Ulysses* "an invitation to chaos," Eliot defends Joyce's mythical method as "simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy that is contemporary history."²⁸ For Eliot the aesthetic is properly 'classical' – orderly, balanced, produced by and for an elite. The nineteenth-century novel, he writes, could be formless because society itself still had form, but in the twentieth century it is myth, covertly ordering works like *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*, which must supply a model of organization for an anarchic society. Eliot's insistence on order is, I want to argue, in express opposition to the widespread critical sense of anarchy in the arts and of anarchism among artists, an association to which Ford Madox Ford gives expression in his 1911 memoirs: "among the

poses of established authority. In fact, tonality in music belonged to the same socio-cultural system as the science of perspective in art, with its centralized focus; the Baroque status system in society, and legal absolutism in politics ... Not for nothing was Rameau, the court musician of Louis XV, the clearest and most uncompromising theoretician of the 'laws' of harmony. The tonal system was a musical frame in which tones had unequal power to express, to validate, and to make bearable the life of man under a rationally organized, hierarchical culture. To make all movement fall in the end into order (the musical term is 'cadence') was, appropriately, the aim of all classical harmony in theory and in practice" (p. 346).

26 Dahlhaus: *Schoenberg and the New Music*. Dahlhaus writes, "The critics who raised a hue and cry about anarchy did indeed touch upon an essential aspect of the process" (p. 87) and "anarchical and law-giving tendencies conflicted in Schoenberg's thinking" (p. 89).

27 Larsen: *Modernism and Hegemony*, p. 8.

28 Eliot: "Ulysses, Myth, and Order," pp. 175–178.

bourgeoisie, whom it was my inherited duty to *épater*, I passed as a dangerous anarchist."²⁹

Another figure who, rather surprisingly, speaks the discourse of anarchy is the historian and Harvard professor Henry Adams, grandson and great-grandson of American presidents, who describes himself in the second half of his autobiography (privately published in 1906) as a "conservative Christian anarchist." In view of Adams's references to actual anarchists like Kropotkin and Elisée Reclus, I think this claim should be historicized. Anarchists are anti-capitalists, and Adams shared this attitude, observing that "society was dividing between anarchist and banker"³⁰ and remarking about capitalism, "of all forms of society or government, this was the one he liked least."³¹ Adams is a 'conservative' anarchist in that he nostalgically looks back to the pre-capitalist past, particularly the eighteenth century and the Middle Ages. His supposed 'Christianity' separates him from most anarchists, who, with the notable exception of Tolstoy, tended to atheism. But Adams consistently, if humorously, expresses an identification with anarchist activities, writing in a letter of September 1889: "Thus far, all has gone to disappoint us anarchists. We sacked a church, it's true, but Paris did not care."³¹ A week later he writes: "I found a tea-party in Lady Abinger's ballroom ... Heaven pardon me! But I wanted a bomb!"³³ To Adams and other writers of this era, anarchy or anarchism is a trope for the social and epistemological upheavals of modernity. Politics becomes nature. If order is only the dream of man in an anarchic universe, then identifying oneself as an 'anarchist' signals one's recognition of the primacy of chaos, the fragility of order.

The antinomy between anarchy and order also informs Andrei Bely's radically modernist novel *Petersburg*. Bely was not himself an anarchist or a revolutionary, and *Petersburg*, although set in the year and place of the 1905 revolution, is not a historical novel like *Les Misérables* or Zola's *Paris*. In keeping with Russian literary tradition, Bely represents the city of Petersburg as a doomed attempt to impose order upon chaos. As the State and Petersburg, the site of a vast government bureaucracy also satirized by Gogol and Dostoevski, are aligned with the forces of order, the islands that surround the city are aligned with revolution and anarchy. The conspirators in *Petersburg* are not specifically anarchists – they speak of 'the Party' – but anarchy is the larger issue, and an-

29 Madox Ford: *Memories and Impressions*, p. 135.

30 Adams: *The Education*, p. 94.

31 Ibid., p. 344.

32 Adams, *Letters of Henry Adams 1892–1918*, p. 239.

33 Ibid., p. 240.

archist ideas are present in the novel, particularly in the character Dudkin, "whose mind is a virtual compendium of anarchist theories popular at the turn of the century."³⁴ Dudkin is a representative of the so-called 'mystical anarchists' whose ranks included Vyacheslav Ivanov, Georgy Chulkov, and Alexander Blok. Admirers of Wagner and Nietzsche, they believed in "the 'non-acceptance of the world' and the revolt against all external conditions, towards a complete freedom of the spirit."³⁵ Their existence provides further confirmation of the link between anarchism and modernism.³⁶ Bely's *Petersburg*, which I think is exemplary of the modernist appropriation of anarchy, takes the bomb as its principal metaphor. The bomb in *Petersburg* participates in the logic of the sublime in that it is terrifying and its function is to explode limits, to expand and destroy consciousness. As such, it already resides within its target, the government official Apollon Apollonovich, of whom Bely writes: "Everyone was astonished at the explosion of mental forces which poured forth from this particular cranium in defiance of all Russia."³⁷ The dialectic of chaos and order is therefore not only to be found externally, in the relations of father and son, bureaucrat and terrorist, or Petersburg and the islands, but is constitutive of the very source of authority and order.

The bomb's modernity and its metaphorical richness make it a salient trope not only in *Petersburg* but also generally in the cultural discourse of the period. Because the bomb bears a metonymic relationship to anarchism and because it stands as the limit position of a revolutionary politics, anarchism itself verges on the unrepresentable and tends to elude coherent discursive formation. In fictional representations of anarchism, as in some descriptions written by anarchists themselves, the bomb as the anarchist sublime is the unrepresentable vortex around which events converge. In *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida implicitly identifies the relationship of the sublime to the anarchist bomb. After observing that "the true sublime ... inadequately presents the infinite in the finite and delimits it violently therein," he explains: "The content (the infinite idea, in the position of signified and no longer of symbolized) destroys the signifier or the representer. It expresses itself only by marking in its expression the annihilation of expression. It smashes to smithereens the signifier which would presume to measure itself against its infinity."³⁸ The

anarchist bomber is himself often destroyed by his own weapon, which the anarchist Auguste Vaillant described as the "voice" of the oppressed.³⁹ Just as the sublime, encapsulated in the bomb, exceeds representation, the anarchist rejects representation, both as a form of government and in the aesthetic. Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, Frank Harris's *The Bomb* (an account of the 1886 Haymarket bombing in Chicago) and Zola's *Paris* thematize the psychological effect of bomb attacks – which is terror, a defining trait of the sublime. Anarchists themselves, in endorsing what they called "propaganda by the deed," also often figured the bomb in aesthetic terms, calling dynamite "sublime stuff" and likening explosions to "the cry of an entire class."⁴⁰ In allying itself with the natural forces of chaos, the human mind has itself become the ultimate source of destruction. "I am dynamite," boasts Nietzsche in *Ecce Homo*. One of Bely's poems foretells the nuclear bomb and Adams, who in *The Education* compares the mind to "an explosive," writes in a letter of 1862, "some day science may have the existence of mankind in its power and the human race commit suicide by blowing up the world."⁴¹ The anarchist sublime, like the Kantian sublime, resides not within the external world but within our minds; the ultimately mental character of the bomb is crucial. In *Petersburg*, the son assigned to blow up his bureaucrat father comes to a realization: "Nikolai Apollonovich understood that he himself was a bomb. And he burst with a boom."⁴² "Dynamite is not only our best tool," says an anarchist in Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*. "It is our best symbol. It is as perfect a symbol of us as incense of the prayers of the Christians. It expands; it only destroys because it broadens. A man's brain is a bomb."⁴³

Among the avant-garde, the bomb-throwing anarchist is replaced by the artist, and the bomb is transformed into its effect.⁴⁴ "I know of no other bomb than a book," writes Mallarmé. "I do not think that one can use a more effective weapon than literature."⁴⁵ Dadaist and Surrealist 'manifestations' and the premiere of *Le Sacre du Printemps* affect their audiences like explosives. Anarchist propaganda by the deed becomes the avant-garde aesthetic

34 Robert A. Maguire and John E. Malmsted, "Introduction" to *Petersburg*, by Andrei Bely, p. xiii.

35 Mirsky: *A History of Russian Literature*, p. 449.

36 Prince Mirsky notes: "the ascendancy of Ivanov over the modernist circles of Petersburg became unquestioned and lasted for six or seven years." (Ibid., p. 449.)

37 Bely: *Petersburg*, p. 5.

38 Derrida: *The Truth in Painting*, p. 133.

39 Quoted in Goldman: "The Psychology of Political Violence," p. 96.

40 Ibid., p. 96.

41 Quoted in Marx: *The Machine in the Garden*, p. 350.

42 Bely: *Petersburg*, 168.

43 Chesterton: *The Man Who Was Thursday*, p. 38.

44 Shattuck writes that "anarchism served not only to unsettle the political smugness of the Third Republic, but also to challenge any formulated aesthetic ... the atmosphere of permanent explosion in artistic activities is evidence not only of anarchistic tendencies but also of the fierceness of its experiments." Shattuck: *The Banquet Years*, pp. 22–23.

45 Quoted in Sonn: *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin-de-Siècle France*, p. 255.

of shock. Breton famously proclaims that the ultimate surrealist act is to fire a gun at random into a crowd. Cocteau's poet Orpheus sums up his aesthetic in a sentence: "il faut jeter une bombe."⁴⁶ Artaud's "Heliogabalus" is subtitled "The Anarchist Crowned" and includes the observation: "what was anarchic from the Roman point of view was for Heliogabalus fidelity to an order."⁴⁷ The attraction to anarchism among members of the avant-garde is explicit as well as figural. Man Ray identified himself as an anarchist, as did the much more politically committed Erich Mühsam. Marinetti praised "the Destructive Arm of the Anarchist" and Carras painted "The Funeral of the Anarchist Galli." Critics responding to Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* described it as an anarchist bomb.⁴⁸ Hugo Ball, the Dadaist who wrote an unpublished manuscript about Bakunin, gave a talk on Kandinsky in the Galerie Dada in Zürich in 1917, in which he, quoting the painter, made explicit connections between the aesthetic and the political ideal of anarchy, defined according to anarchist theory:

The idea of freedom is quite marked in Kandinsky, carried over into the domain of art. What he says about anarchy is reminiscent of sentences in Bakunin and Kropotkin, only that he applies the concept of freedom very spiritually to the aesthetic. On the question of form he writes in *The Blue Rider*: "Many call the current condition of painting anarchy. The same word is used here and there in descriptions of the current state of music. One falsely understands thereby a planless overthrow and disorder. Anarchy, however, is method and order established not by an external and ultimately forbidding power but by the feeling of goodness."⁴⁹

Theodor Adorno articulates yet another rationale for artistic 'anarchy.' What I call 'the anarchist sublime' is a version of what Adorno describes as the phenomenon of 'explosion' in modern art. "If one looks closely," he writes, "one notices that even works of art with a seemingly tranquil exterior exhibit an explosive quality, not so much in terms of emotions pent up in the artist as in relation to the antagonistic forces behind those emotions. Their resultant or equilibrium is anything but true harmony; their antimonies, just like those of cognition, are irreconcilable in an antagonistic world. At the moment when they congeal into an image externalizing their inner substance, the outer shell that surrounds this internal substance gets blown away ... What appears in the work of art is its inner time, and it is the continuity of this inner time

46 Cocteau: *Orphée*, p. 30. Orpheus continues: "Il faut obtenir un scandale. Il faut un de ces orages qui rafraîchissent l'air."

47 Artaud: *Selected Writings*, p. 319.

48 Leighton: *Re-Ordering the Universe*, p. 89.

49 Ball: *Der Künstler und die Zeitkrankheit*, p. 45. My translation.

which gets blown up in the explosion of appearance."⁵⁰ The modernist artwork, as critics at the turn of the century recognized, is itself a bomb. Rather than merely encoding a reactionary politics or functioning as a supposedly neutral refuge from the political, the aesthetics of modernism and the avant-garde were charged with revolutionary potential.

50 Adorno: *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 126.