Part I

Thinking

One of the principal reasons for the endurance of anarchism is the fact that regardless of context it asks challenging questions about the nature of power. This collection premises itself on the idea that anarchist concepts of power are changing to reflect the extensive and varied shifts that are taking place in political culture, and on increasingly larger stages. The anarchist critique, as will be argued in this first section of the book, has deepened in terms of its willingness to consider power as having multiple and interconnected determinants, rather than single sources exercised by the State or the economy. In the opening chapter of this section, Dave Morland outlines the philosophical shifts that have occurred within anarchism and shows how different political voices have emerged to mobilise around an increasing plurality of injustices. Whilst anarchism has always, in theory, contested power wherever it appears, Morland argues that what we are witnessing in the era of poststructural anarchism are new concepts of ‘totality’ where power is constructed and resisted in all manner of social and cultural contexts (in this instance, the anti-capitalist movement). In such circumstances, the notion of a single anarchist subjectivity or human nature becomes problematic, with significant implications for the forms of political action that one might take.

This is one of the principal themes of John Moore’s piece in terms of his analysis of how power imprints itself on the anarchist ‘subject’ in some of the first moments of life (and even before). Moore poses questions about power that explore the interface between form and content, time and space, history and memory in ways that stretch the imagination. His formulation of the ‘anarcho-psychological critique’, as an alternative to the principal narrative of modernity, which is driven by authority, scientific progress and mediated experience, is an important approach to thinking about anarchism and ontology.

Alternative perspectives on modernity are also provided in the chapters by Steve Millett and Jonathan Purkis, albeit from considerably different standpoints. Millett’s comprehensive study of the *Fifth Estate* publishing project documents the emergence of the now highly influential anti-technological and anti-civilisational strand in anarchist thought. This offers something of a challenge to anarchism as

a political philosophy of the Enlightenment, as well as to other contemporary versions of ecological anarchism and, to some extent, anarcho-communism. Millett, like Moore, identifies a psychological and psychoanalytic dimension to understanding authority, alienation and history, which is a powerful and still under-acknowledged aspect of contemporary anarchism. Purkis addresses similar issues in his chapter, but from the perspective of the sociologist trying to understand the authoritarian and ecologically damaging premises behind sociological theory. He argues the case for an anarchist sociology which pays much more attention to how social experience is researched, theorised and represented. Like Morland, he finds poststructuralist literature a potentially useful tool for understanding power, particularly when theorising contemporary social movements.

The difficulties of doing anarchist theory is not lost on any of these authors, particularly when their starting points are sometimes challenging. The diversity of the contributions which follow are, however, indicative of some of the ways that anarchist theory is responding to a more globally conscious and 'complex' period of history.