

Jonathan Purkis and James Bowen

## Conclusion: how anarchism still matters

### Introduction

As possibly the most idealistic, complicated and contradictory political philosophy to have emerged from the Enlightenment, anarchism occupies a unique and under-acknowledged place in the history of ideas. The chapters in this volume have engaged with and critiqued much of what is taken by mainstream academics and commentators to *be anarchism*. In the era that we have called that of ‘global anarchism’, the classical anarchist canon has come under attack from a variety of perspectives which have posited different interpretations of history and the use of power based on narratives of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, environment, technology, social psychology and anthropocentrism. The consolidation of these critiques – all of which have long histories – has reinvigorated anarchism and allowed a constructive dialogue with the classical-era theories of Bakunin, Proudhon, Godwin and Kropotkin *et al.* At the beginning of the twenty-first century, anarchism is extremely theoretically diverse, with considerable fragmentation based on different philosophical premises, each attempting to formulate strategy utilising enduring anarchist principles such as the need for consistency of means and ends and opposition to hierarchy. It is these parallel versions of anarchism that have led to calls for the term *anarchisms* to be employed instead, or indeed to re-embrace the word anarchy as an idea which many groups work towards but which holds no central organising premise. There is considerable evidence to suggest that, although this may defy consensus, as a description of the practical manifestations of libertarian and antiauthoritarian projects it is hard to fault.

Anarchism has been arguably most recently visible at the many economic and political summits hosted by the rulers of the richest countries and corporate bodies, from Seattle, November 1999, onwards. However, the evidence from this book suggests that we cannot limit our concerns to this particular strand of global anarchism and all of its cross-cultural and cross-continental networks. The variety of anarchist projects on education, media, community activism, ecology, art and literature or sexual liberation is extensive, and these are far from limited to isolated pockets of the West, although there is considerable work still

to be done, for instance, in putting African anarchism 'on the map'. Yet in order to maximise the influence of anarchism so as to impact more meaningfully on the destructive economic and political agendas of the powerful, some reflection as to the constituency of anarchist process and its relationship with the non-anarchist world is needed.

The following discussion considers how we might begin to theorise this relationship, the opportunities for influence and the difficult question about consistency of means and ends of actions. We suggest that the possibilities for resistance to power and the construction of what Dennis Hardy (1979) has called 'practical utopias' are actually increasing in the wake of the post-11 September 2001 clampdowns and repression, despite anecdotal evidence to the contrary. This is particularly the case with contemporary debates about the future of 'democracy', given the emergence of new political forces in the developing world, declining electoral participation in the West and the increasing intervention that unaccountable corporate bodies such as the World Trade Organisation are having on everyday life. The spaces that open up as a result of the contradictions and complexities of social life are also important in realising the potential that can be actualised through considering popular culture as an area where anarchism matters. To fully appreciate these possibilities, along with many other areas of likely intervention and influence, we suggest that the kind of anarchism (or even anarchisms) that is required for the future should be a non-dogmatic, flexible, inclusive one. This must be based upon an adaptability at seeing anarchist theory and practice as something that engages with as many areas of society and culture as is practically possible, rather than existing only as a marginalised and somewhat élitist political force.

In order to arrive at this conclusion, we review the different ways that anarchism can be seen in terms of its often under-acknowledged role in political change. In particular, we suggest that anarchism can serve as a 'conscience' to many non-anarchist or marginally anarchist milieus in terms of the influence of its central ideas. Moreover, the idea that contemporary anarchism is extremely flexible in its impact and manifestations can also be supported by the anti-dualistic philosophical positions adopted by each of the contributors. Such a situation allows much more theoretical, and therefore practical, leeway.

### **Anarchism as the 'conscience of politics'**

One of the key themes that run through anarchist literature is the existence of an alternative account of historical change, based on everyday acts of co-operation, voluntarism and spontaneity. The so-called naturalness of these actions has underpinned many anarchist arguments over the best part of two centuries from Kropotkin to Bookchin, just as Bakunin argued for the 'naturalness' of rebellion in his book *God and the state* (1985). There is, according to all of the writers in *Changing anarchism*, a sense that the potential for anarchist action lies barely

beneath the surface of everyday life, if indeed it is not overtly taking place in many contexts on a daily basis. This is an important methodological point that allows us to move away from traditional histories of anarchism that concentrate on key events such as the Paris Commune of 1871, the Haymarket martyrs of 1886, the Russian and Spanish Revolutions through to 'May 68' in France and beyond. It also needs to be acknowledged that the *idea of anarchism* has an appeal that extends far beyond the radical political milieus of this world, many of which are outlined in this collection. We would suggest that especially, but not exclusively, in the last four decades, anarchism has enjoyed a close relationship with a number of political movements that are not openly anarchist, yet maintain many characteristics associated with anarchism. This is particularly the case with the new social movements discussed in the chapters by Morland and Purkis (chapters 1 and 2), the structures and critiques of which have been linked to anarchism (Cahill, 1992; Welsh, 1997, 2000). These processes have intensified with the huge networks known as the 'alternative globalisation movement' (Chesters, 2003). It is in these contexts that anarchism acts as a cultural resource and as a form of 'political conscience', irrespective of whether or not the organisations in question formally acknowledge this.

### The invisible hand of anarchism

Firstly, it is worth extending the aforementioned point about the wider influence of anarchist ideas, to note how easily such aspects of 'social movement culture' can be overlooked in popular and academic accounts. The full ramifications of this cannot be discussed here, but the crucial point to note is that it is the less visible dimension of political movements, rather than their explicit protest intentions which are frequently the location for the transmission and diffusion of ideas. We have seen how in chapters by Heckert, Goaman, and Szerszynski and Tomalin (chapters 5, 9 and 11), protest camps and actions frequently constitute transformatory experiences leading to the creation of new forms of political identity. Moreover, these cultural practices are occurring not in isolated movements but as part of a wider set of networks and social relations. The Dutch sociologist Bert Klandermans (1993) calls this 'the multi-organisational field', a space where political cultures interact, exchange members, form alliances and share resources. Our argument is that this is actually the norm rather than the exception within much of politics, and that within these fields anarchism has a greater influence than is often acknowledged, whether the networks concerned are officially anarchist or just implicitly so. Yet, from both a theoretical and practical point of view, these incidents of cultural cross-fertilisation are particularly difficult to research, a situation which is often made more difficult by the fact that the ideological outlook of individuals comprising supposedly clearly differentiated groups is actually closer than is often imagined. One now well-established case in point is the impact that the radical environmental Earth First! network has had on their more established environmental counterparts.

As Derek Wall documents (2000), the reaction to the emergence of the UK Earth First! network in the early 1990s from groups such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace was one of initial distrust if not hostility, partly on account of the drift towards ‘respectability’ and increasing bureaucratisation of these once-pioneering organisations. Such attitudes were to a certain extent reproduced on a micro-sociological level, yet in some political cultures, such as those of large northern English cities, issues of tactics, joint participation in actions and the sharing of resources were much more complex (Purkis, 2001). This relationship of dialogue between different movement cultures – one anarchist, the other not – eventually resulted in the decentralist direct action politics of Earth First! and other radical environmental networks actually beginning to influence the direction of their more moderate counterparts. By the late 1990s, both Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth had begun to examine their own structures and strategies. The former’s high-profile campaign of direct action against genetically modified crops in the United Kingdom during this time appeared to signal a keenness to encourage wider participation in such actions from its members (many of whom had tended to be little more than fundraisers in the past). Whilst one would be hard-pressed to elicit a response from a major non-governmental organisation that mentioned anarchist praxis in a favourable light, the repositioning of moderate organisations in reaction to their more marginal radical counterparts is certainly not a new phenomenon (see Scarce, 1990).

In terms of its impact on a wider political consciousness, it is important to note that the anarchist politics of the early twenty-first century implicit in the chapters in this book is frequently alliance-based, involving networks of co-operatives, umbrella or popular front campaigns on specific issues, sometimes across countries and continents. Whether organising around education, sexuality, environmental destruction, development issues, narcotics, conflict resolution or bearing witness, the question of influence and diffusion becomes highly pertinent in terms of what *form of anarchism* is being advocated. We regard it as significant that each of the contributions here addresses the deconstruction of particular conceptual dualisms, which can assist in the development of a much more theoretically and practically flexible notion of anarchism. With this in mind, it is vital that this project acknowledge the gradual dissolution of one of the most insidious dualisms to have dogged radical politics, that of ‘reform’ versus ‘revolution’.

### Reform or revolution?

In the nineteenth-century political world, the forces of oppression were much more visible and more obviously manifested than in the era of global anarchism. Society was more polarised, opposition was more clear-cut, and the political choice of ‘reform or revolution’ seemed a realistic and pertinent one. However, with twenty-first century eyes, the dualism is both deterministic and mechanistic regarding what political change actually *is* and *who* carries it out. The sub-

tleties of political influence and the fact that anarchism is a process not an event is noted in the chapters by Heckert and Bowen (chapters 5 and 6) and the theoretical possibilities offered by poststructuralism and complexity are discussed by Morland and Purkis respectively (chapters 1 and 2). Gribble's documentation (chapter 10) of libertarian education further invalidates this dualism, given the incredibly precarious institutional 'grey areas' within which the projects described are frequently located, as does Craig's depiction (chapter 7) of the complex decisions involved in making an anarchist position on narcotics. As Todd May has argued:

The distinction between reform and revolution should not be the tired one of 'mere reform' vs. 'real revolution.' It should instead be an issue of how much and how deep of a change is going on. In fact, I think the term is often used as a banner, a mark of one's radicalism, and an unconsidered way of marking out one's distinction from liberalism. As such, it hides the question, which we should be asking: what needs to be changed and how does it need to be changed? (2000: 3)

In a sense, the fluidity and flexibility of political movements and their strategies have always been more complex than many with vested interests on the anarchist or Marxist Left have been willing to admit. Social-psychological approaches to political movements have sometimes emphasised the highly contingent nature of individual political participation (see Klandermans, 1997), and this can also be applied to movement tactics. A useful illustration of this is Szerszynski's concept of 'dual-legitimacy' (2002), whereby a movement pursues more than one strategy at the same time: one course of action may be aiming to influence the general public, whilst another is couched in terms appropriate to fellow activists or even the media. So, on the one hand it might *appear* to be the case, if, for instance, a campaign emerges in opposition to a particular piece of legislation, that this is a 'reformist movement'. However, the consequences of such a mobilisation are, as we have indicated, multi-faceted, providing new skills, solidarity and what French sociologist Alain Touraine calls 'positive assertions of freedom' (2000: 297). That the actions might inadvertently lead to reform is merely one particular outcome of many possible ones.

So far we have suggested that anarchism frequently *has* an influence that is sometimes under-acknowledged. This builds on David Graeber's (2002) point that anarchism is the heart beating at the centre of the alternative globalisation networks, a notion that has been picked up by several of our contributors. However, whilst it is possible to argue that anarchism does act as the conscience of *some* political formations, with relevant 'monitoring' of 'hierarchical drift', the complexities of these contemporary alliances do also pose a number of problems for anarchists.

This position tends to assume a form of ideological unity which, in such a diverse milieu, is unlikely. Whilst there are always anarchist enclaves within these wider networks who adhere to 'pure' anarchist principles, alliance politics are a much messier affair. The experienced activist knows that one has to accept

limited rather than absolute victories, to campaign on issues which one knows in the short term may be unsuccessful yet, in time, will be of lasting importance. Thus self-identified anarchists may find themselves in protest situations whereby they might not be acting completely in ways consistent with the principles of classical anarchism. For example, the aforementioned ‘dual (or multi)-legitimacy’ strategies of network cultures might sometimes necessitate an occasional dipping of the ideological standards in exchange for meaningful alliances. This is a trade-off that many of the contributors to this book appear to be sympathetic to and has no doubt been reproduced on many occasions throughout ‘revolutionary’ history. Heckert’s argument (chapter 5), that it is better to take affirmative action in support of ‘positive’ projects than needlessly opposing authority without an outcome gain, is a case in point. Perhaps more important is the need to acknowledge the influence of anarchism in unexpected areas of society and why developing alternative forms of socialisation such as those described by Gore and Gribble (chapters 8 and 10) is a crucial, if slightly unglamorous, process. Yet, in terms of the ethical agonies about taking action in more ‘mainstream’ political contexts, one should not ignore the fact that the kinds of models of power that have begun to replace the ones from the era of classical anarchism do not necessarily invalidate action of this kind.

### **Anarchism as communication**

The preceding argument can be seen less as an abandonment of anarchist praxis and more as an attempt to avoid reproducing the mechanistic and potentially exclusionary strategies of the era of mass anarchist movements. Instead there is a real need to theorise in a manner appropriate to the era of globalisation and complex configurations of power, yet also where intervention and influence are possible and beneficial. To accomplish this, it is useful to revisit the notion of contemporary anarchist subjectivity, outlined in highly different ways by Moore, Morland, Heckert, Szerszynski and Tomalin, Millett and Gore. The reason for this is twofold: firstly, there needs to be a re-evaluation and deconstruction of the classic dualism of individual and collective; and secondly, that the impact which power has on the individual may influence subsequent strategy. We suggest that an understanding of these aspects of anarchist identity becomes a prerequisite for communication and building what we have called ‘discursive bridges’ between anarchist and non-anarchist spheres of action.

### **New interpretations on old dualisms**

The individual and collective dualism is central to all political theory, but is more starkly realised in anarchist thought because of its antiauthoritarian sensibilities. It is also a problem which many theorists have tried to find ways ‘around’ or reinvent for the purposes of a more constructive anarchist praxis. One such

author is L. Susan Brown. In *The politics of individualism* (1993) she posits something of a conceptual bridge by differentiating between ‘instrumental individualism’ (whereby individual liberty can be ‘achieved’ even if it entails using people for gain) and ‘existential individualism’ (whereby individual freedom must not be achieved at other people’s expense). Thus ‘existential individualism’ – similar to Paul Lichterman’s concept of ‘personalism’ which opposes materialism as a way of self-actualising (1996: 6) – utilises the anarchist ethic of equating the means of an action with its ends. Whilst there are problems with Brown’s endorsement of existentialism (see Morland, 1997), her framing of the means and ends of actions in this way is useful. It is also commensurate with poststructuralist theories of identity, which reject the liberal construction of the autonomous free rational agent as ‘natural’ and look to the social construction of the subject by society. This critique is also central to Moore’s article on Max Stirner, which also offers a ‘way out’ of this particular dualism.

As indicated in our introduction, Stirner’s controversial place in intellectual history has recently been revised, as poststructuralist theorists have seized on his rejection of universal truth and ‘fixed ideas’, and associated his ideas with contemporary notions of contingency, plurality and dynamism (Koch, 1997: 105). As Moore’s chapter (chapter 2) demonstrates, it is this constant uncertainty and absolute rejection of any imposition on Stirner’s notion of the self (‘ownness’) which has led to his arguments being wrongly perceived as completely rejecting any form of collectivism. By implication, this reading of Stirner suggests that a ‘union of egos’ *can* provide a meaningful (rather than impossible) dialogue between the individual and collective. Thus, even in the most collaborative of circumstances, the unique signature of the individual – ownness – is not lost. This is the true intersection of the egoist and the union of egos: the individual needs the support of the ‘affinity of egos’, yet the collective cannot exist without acknowledging the unique creativeness of the individual ownnesses that drive it. Such ordinary processes are part of the hard work that is required in all areas of human interaction and which is in need of further theorisation.

### Power, subjectivity, principles

The logic of both Brown’s and Stirner’s arguments is that extreme individualism is not incompatible with either collective action or advocating a consistency of means and ends of actions. This is an important point for the kind of alliance politics and networks comprising contemporary anarchism. When there is the need for cross-cultural co-operation, the different emphases and assumptions placed on individuality and collectivism may well require maximum flexibility. In such circumstances, an awareness of the different forms of power that have shaped individual expectations is also a crucial ingredient for meaningful change on a collective level.

The chapters in this book offer a wide range of observations and analyses of the impact of power on the individual, some of which evoke deeper processes

than the often-observable injustices of political economy. Here it is important to note the development of the psychological dimension to anarchism through analyses of the history of civilisation and human relationships with technology and the environment. The critiques underpinning the chapters by Goaman, Millett and Moore are challenging in terms of the alienation that they bestow on the contemporary psyche. Not unexpectedly then, strategies for ‘re-enchanting’ the world (as Szerszynski and Tomalin put it) or ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’ (Moore) are to be encouraged. However, there is the need to acknowledge the difficulties which the re-instatement of concepts such as ‘totality’ or ‘complexity’ into an anarchist critique pose for the organisation of strategic thinking and communicating between the different anarchist ‘subjectivities’. This is most clearly evident in terms of the need to re-assess founding anarchist principles in the light of such diversity.

Earlier we made the point that sometimes a temporary ‘dipping’ of anarchist standards might be acceptable for the sake of particular network politics. However, we would suggest that on an individual level, a sureness of anarchist principles is necessary, both for the purposes of ‘ontological security’ and to inform and monitor any collective actions that drift too far away from anarchism. In this respect it is useful to note the criteria suggested by Benjamin Franks (2003) that set anarchism apart from socialist and Marxist politics (a distinction that, given the frequent presence of such groups in alliance politics, is no bad thing). He argues that anarchist actions should always be ‘pre-figurative’ with the means being equivalent to the ends; they should never attempt to represent other groups (even oppressed ones) in a paternalistic manner; all forms of power are to be opposed but none prioritised; and actions should be carried out non-hierarchically.

### Discursive bridges I – cultural resources

Franks’s criteria, whilst obvious to many, are worth reiterating simply because our concerns in this section are to explore the different strategies that might be involved in influencing ‘non-anarchist’ areas of society. Whilst we accept the value of tactical positioning on the margins (as well as anarchism’s own influence there!), anarchism’s direct impact on global issues remains marginal, and as a result other courses of action are worth pursuing. The aforementioned awkwardness about consistency of principles within alliance politics is equally of relevance when dealing with the suggestion of anarchist strategies and analyses in ‘everyday life’.

Initially, we would suggest that there are a number of cultural resources upon which anarchists can draw in terms of engaging with ‘non-anarchist’ spheres. Firstly, there are the arguments for the ‘natural’ co-operative (yet also antiauthoritarian) dimension to human nature, which classical anarchist theorists emphasised and which continue to be important. Clearly, these are essentialist and inflexible concepts, as poststructural anarchists like Koch (1997) have rightly

pointed out, but as a resource, debates about which societies have tended towards co-operative rather than egoistic (in the despotic rather than Stirnerian sense) organisation are useful.

Secondly, it is important to emphasise the question of prefiguration in terms of the things that are *already in place* or are currently being developed in communities around the world as part of a resistance to the economic, climatic and epidemiological contradictions of the current global order. This has been particularly true of agriculture and food production and how local circumstances quickly generate all kinds of associated political movements. New forms of food production, distribution and activism reveal the reaction of the 'global local'. In the UK, small-scale 'farmers' markets' have politicised networks isolated by agribusiness, which, as Goaman notes (chapter 9), is also a facet of the politics of Indian farming communities. Where national economies have collapsed, such as in Argentina in 2001, extensive networks of local assemblies as well as distribution networks have erupted, proving that even in a highly divided society many things are possible (Klein, 2003). One of the significant points about these incidents is that they tap into many people's existing disenchantment with the global economic and political order and show how ordinary people change the world.

A third area that can act as a resource is the area of popular culture, which might seem strange given the many criticisms from anarchists in recent years about the so-called 'turn to culture'. Yet, as Jude Davies has argued (1997), ignoring such a huge part of everyday life is to overlook the possibilities of anarchist intervention and mobilisation; indeed, considerable opportunities exist alongside, and inform rather than replace, critiques of political economy and other forms of power. Engaging with, rather than rejecting, aspects of popular culture can provide space for those who have been both extremely compromised by, or alienated from, it. Another reason for doing so, is that the appeal of anarchism in the contemporary alternative globalisation movement and related milieus has sometimes come *from* popular culture. In the United Kingdom, for instance, a familiarity with hi-profile radical folk/punk bands such as Chumbawamba, The Levellers and Rage Against the Machine has been evident, all of whom have campaigned against legislation such as the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994 and the Terrorism Act of 2000. As Allan Antliff has recently noted (2003), anarchist street art, video work and comics such as *World War 3* have, in various North American settings, managed to blur some of the existing boundaries between 'culture' as passive and culture as politically proactive. Such forms can, if allowed to flourish, revisit the kind of radicalism of 'community arts' that Gore discusses in her contribution to the book (chapter 7) and connects to points made about revolutionary form made here (and elsewhere) by Moore (1998).

Equally crucial in terms of the idea of 'discursive bridges' and culture is the matter of communication between different generations, and here it is important to pick up issues raised by Bowen, Gore and Gribble (chapters 6, 8 and 10) concerning the centrality that education has in determining anarchist praxis. It is interesting to note how a number of the contributors to the volume *Anarchism*

*today* (Apter and Joll, 1971) argue that the apparent lack of theoretical sophistication of the late 1960s counter culture was on the grounds that it was too pre-occupied with youth concerns and hedonism. In this respect, the arguments made by Gore about the importance of the revolutionary imagination and overcoming particularly stultified views of reality, including the importance of play, speak volumes about the relevance of this area for future work.

### Discursive bridges II – communication

Anarchists may be able to draw upon a range of cultural resources to facilitate better communication, but *how* that communication takes places is of primary importance. Moreover, communication strategies need to be considered both in terms of the political language used and the way in which particular protest actions communicate to non-participants. As Heckert comments in his chapter (chapter 5), the issue of means and ends becomes pertinent here. He notes how the rhetorical strategies adopted by some campaigners can be extremely violent, raising an uncomfortable issue about alienation; those who are trying to do the persuading are equally ‘damaged’ by the system. This calls for sensitive strategies, and here we would suggest that the building of discursive bridges between different social spheres and political realities ought to begin with couching notions of resistance in terms of ‘common sense’.

Here we deliberately utilise the term as developed by Antonio Gramsci (1971) to mean the consensual worldview secured by the dominant classes as represented in language and culture. However, this is only a starting-point, since the models of power offered by Gramsci are largely inappropriate for the contexts within which the contributors to this book are working. This is particularly the case with respect to the relationship between language and ideology. From a poststructuralist perspective, language is extremely differentiated, context dependent and, importantly, not so determined by monolithic power interests. The flexibility of language, we would suggest, provides opportunities for establishing ‘bridge points’ within particular discourses between anarchist communicators and listeners. ‘Bridge points’ might be a facet of debate that is controversial in nature, but not a direct threat to the act of communication or the interaction itself. Once established, it becomes feasible to introduce newer ideas. In a sense this is an interpersonal version of the model of political ‘dual legitimacy’ outlined above, and, as with political tactics, requires appropriate and non-alienating forms of behaviour (not least, good listening skills).

To take an example: as both Millett and Goaman have documented (chapter 4 and 9), one of the most controversial and complex issues within contemporary anarchist thought is the oppressive nature of technology, and the extent to which it is ‘neutral’ or inextricably connected to relations of power. Trying to construct a ‘bridge point’ on this issue is difficult, and a more useful conversational strategy than the matter of the ‘neutrality of technology’ might be *psychological dependency* on technology. This is partly because the existing research on the

addictive properties of entertainment and communications technologies, combined with established positions on the impact of workplace and transport technologies on health, are so readily available within the public domain that as a 'resource' they offer considerable potential. Thus an identification with concepts such as unsustainability or obsolescence would comprise a useful starting-point, not least because, as argued by German sociologist Klaus Eder (1996), environmental politics have become a significant framework within which much political debate now takes place. Basing a discursive bridge upon the newly developed frameworks of ecological policy (whatever the actual limitations) is consistent with 'common sense'. From this point on, the potentially oppressive impact of technological systems, gene, seed and DNA patenting, control of seed and so forth, could be introduced into dialogue. Dealing with such issues as *technique*, the biological versus technology dualisms raised in the discussions by Craig (narcotics), Heckert (sexuality) and the contradictions of using mobile phone and internet technologies to plan the actions discussed by Goaman, would come, along with all of the other questions one might raise, later.

Many of the matters raised above can be seen to apply to the communication that takes place during public protest. As noted by Heckert and Goaman, the opportunities which the symbolic and practical occupation of public spaces provide are considerable, yet there is always the danger of creating hierarchies between protesters and 'ordinary people' through non-inclusive forms of action. Here it is interesting to note the rediscovery by some alternative globalisation protestors of Jacques Camatte's essay 'On organisation' (1995), which argues against the dominance of political 'gangs' who monopolise political protest culture and create more barriers between themselves (as experts) and the general public. In this respect, the communicative and liberatory possibilities offered by art and aesthetics raised by Goaman and Gore on protest tactics and socialisation respectively are all the more important, as is the legacy of the Situationist International.

The fluidity of communication, the indeterminacy of influence in such circumstances, these and other factors further support the above refutation of the 'reform and revolution' dualism. As with consensus decision-making, the ideal praxis of direct action, anarchist and alternative globalisation cultures, these processes take time, patience and understanding. How one extrapolates this into global terms is something that also requires consideration.

### **Towards a global anarchist *realpolitik***

In a famous television debate in 1980, Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault argued about the extent to which international laws on human rights or the United Nations were forms of moral and political advancement. Whilst the respective opinions are interesting – Chomsky thought this was a form of progress, Foucault did not – the reasons for positioning oneself, as an anarchist,

on matters of international governance and legislation, would appear to be a strange and largely irrelevant one. However, just as we have suggested that the ‘reform versus revolution’ debate is unhelpful, we would extend this to requiring that there is a need for a globally relevant anarchist *realpolitik* that amounts to more than the theory and practice of ‘we told you so’. This is a controversial but necessary step in terms of arguing the usefulness of anarchism on stages that its European founders could not possibly have envisaged.

### Through African eyes

In the time since the aforementioned Chomsky versus Foucault debate, ‘democracy’ as the political cornerstone of the West has begun to lose its legitimacy, and why this has happened needs to be understood. The reason for exploring this political avenue is because the debates around its usefulness provide a significant political opportunity, as well as a warning to those who would adopt isolationist forms of anarchism. The challenges have come from a number of quarters. Firstly, the corporate onslaught on local government decision-making and the public sector, especially in Europe (see Monbiot, 2000), has weakened the processes of accountability of decision-making as well as letting corporations have free rein over the planning of urban life and communities. These processes are also occurring at an international economic policy level, as the World Trade Organisation passes legislation that can challenge social and environmental policies of a nation state, on the grounds that they interfere with free trade. In poorer parts of the world, such as sub-Saharan Africa, politics has increasingly played second fiddle to the neoliberal economic agenda, with the International Monetary Fund insisting that health and public service cuts are necessary to encourage economic growth and loan repayments.

In this respect, a secondary attack on democracy, by Western social movements with much more participatory agenda, requires consideration from the point of view of those countries that have had to endure post-colonial dictatorships or structural adjustment policies as their ‘public spheres’. Such a quick dismissal of the viability of a political system that has, in the West to a very limited degree, provided some protection from the ravages of capitalism needs contextualising. So, when we talk about the crises of representative democracy (Mulgan, 1994), we need to remember this point, as well as the fact that, as Bowen notes in his chapter (chapter 6), one simply cannot ‘graft’ on to certain political cultures a set of ideas that are assumed to be universally relevant. There is a danger, as the neoliberal hegemony unravels, that the proposed solutions to its contradictions will simply adopt Western political models. To follow this might well be to reprise the mistakes that radical feminist groups in the 1970s and 1980s did, in terms of trying to universalise the experience of women without always being as culturally sensitive as they might have been. Anarchism, like democracy, under such circumstances, may simply be another form of imperialism.

With this in mind, the North–South alliances discussed in Goaman’s chapter (chapter 9) become crucial to try and facilitate an understanding of differing political perspectives. To some extent these things are occurring through the alternative globalisation movement, as well as other fora that attempt to facilitate relationships outside of the ‘scramble for Africa’ actions of development and aid charities who sometimes actually hinder conditions. The absence of a Zapatista-type of struggle around which Western anarchists can mobilise and express solidarity might be a contributing factor to the lack of visibility of ‘African anarchism’.

If useful relationships with African networks need to be made, why is it that anarchists have often (both politically and personally) supported the boycotts of ‘problem countries’ such as South Africa in the 1980s, Nigeria from the mid-1990s and currently Zimbabwe? Here the observation made by Craig (chapter 7) in relation to narcotics and the tactical support by Left-wing people for State-approved actions, is a useful reference-point. Surely, from an anarchist point of view, forging individual and informal networked relations is more meaningful and a lot more direct in impact than blindly following a State, political party or union-derived decree. A classical anarchist position has been to organise regardless of what institutional forces are doing; perhaps this is an opportunity to develop a consistent yet unpopular anarchist *realpolitik*.

### For social ecology

The preceding remarks about non-Western perspectives are a crucial part of a future anarchist praxis, yet this should not obviate considering the possibilities for a *realpolitik* that engages with the possibilities of transforming existing democratic structures within Europe, North America, the Antipodes and parts of the Pacific Rim. Although anarchists might not want to formally campaign for devolution of political power, proportional representation, regional assemblies and other current alternatives to centralised party politics, they should have something to say about these things. Given the increasing calls for these institutions, we feel that it is time to reclaim aspects of Murray Bookchin’s work that are tangible to these debates. Locked into sectarian exchanges about mysticism, primitivism, postmodernism, technology or individualism, Bookchin and his detractors have, to the point of tedium, often overlooked the communicative possibilities that the philosophy of social ecology offers for anarchism.

Bookchin has for decades been an advocate of town meetings, municipalism, urban communities and the practicalities of encouraging libertarian dialogue within some of the existing structures (Bookchin, 1992). Contemporary debates within the field of social ecology include explorations of the different decision-making ‘powers’ that autonomous communities might have, the different types of delegation that may be required to effectively co-ordinate the relative interests of say a collectivised workplace and wider community participation. These kinds of decisions are pivotal to any anarchist community and in this respect,

whilst clearly problematic in completely idealistic terms, they provide an engagement with political questions that can be ‘discursively bridged’ without too much difficulty. As Gribble notes in his chapter (chapter 10), ‘democratic’ has been an ugly word for anarchists, but if, in the context of libertarian education, it has to be used as part of a survival strategy, so be it. Given some of the academic material beginning to emerge on notions of ‘discursive’ and ‘deliberative’ democracy’ (Dryzek, 2002), the potential for intervention in these debates is significant.

In a similar vein, within the debates about alternative or ecological economics, whether the LETS (local exchange and trading) systems that are in operation in many Western countries, the advocacy of the ‘participatory economics’ (Albert, 2002) or through the existing co-operative movement, there are the opportunities for the discursive bridges outlined above. Equally, there are less progressive events that force us to take a stance and to try and forge alliances, bridges and to take the victories that we can.

### Bearing witness again: from 9/11 to 15/2

Many words have already been written on these events by anarchists (see, for example, Gemie *et al.*, 2002) and it is not our intention to revisit debates about terrorism, conspiracy or why the United States has made enemies. Our interest primarily is in the implications of these events for political mobilisation and the need to ‘bear witness’ to the crimes that are committed ‘in our name’.

If anything has really come out of the events in America, Afghanistan and beyond during the autumn of 2001, it is that the mechanisms of power have suddenly become much more visible. This is whether we are speaking of Western foreign policy and all of its unholy alliances or the new domestic clampdowns on civil liberties and increased levels of surveillance that the populations of the developed and developing worlds have been subjected to. As both Goaman and Craig have pointed out (chapters 7 and 9), the consequences of these developments do not make for an optimistic vision of change. The asymmetrical wars of metaphor that have replaced Cold War logic have successfully targeted all kinds of opposition to the neoliberal economic hegemony, not just those elements which might choose to employ ‘terrorist actions’. There are, however, a number of hopeful possibilities. Firstly, as the Western media attempted to forge some kind of consensus on the imminent American and British invasion of Iraq in February 2003, millions of school children walked out of lessons to occupy city centres in countless cities and towns across the globe. What was surprising to their parents’ generation was the energy and inventiveness with which these actions were carried out. Secondly, the political literacy of this generation suggests that the hasty attempts by Western governments to concoct paranoid and repressive pieces of legislation, will, like on so many occasions in the recent past, fail to deter people from resisting.<sup>1</sup> As noted in different ways by both Gribble and Gore (chapters 10 and 8 respectively), the politicisation of young people has

proved to be particularly powerful on many occasions. In the post '9/11' climate of fear and repression, the mobilisations on the 15 February 2003 might be considered to be a massive call for more accountable political systems and an end to the new era of oil-company-sponsored problem-solving through force.

There are always possibilities for change, cracks in the system, news stories that suddenly spur a previously cynical person on a personal quest to challenge a pharmaceutical company, or to be a witness in the Occupied Territories with the International Solidarity Movement or to give up their car.

During the writing of this book, one of our contributors noted how their 80-year-old ultra-conservative father had begun to ask the kinds of questions that the contributor had long believed impossible, about vested interests and the impact of the war in Afghanistan on the environment and Western consciousness. Mainstream television reports of the protests on '15/2' seemed to relish the fact that they were interviewing people who 'had never been on a protest in their life'.

In Britain during the last decade, the Blair Government has successfully transformed the language of communitarianism into something consistent with its endorsement of the free market, utilising phrases such as 'citizenship', 'responsibility' and 'participation'. Whilst this has all the hallmarks of the 'political contract' between State and subjects, as theorised by Enlightenment liberals, a more useful formulation for anarchist *realpolitik* is to begin with the 'duty' of *individuals* to act in their own long-term best interests. This includes everything from unmasking the powerful, challenging attempts to dismantle the limited avenues for expression and participation that exist, to taking control of their own localities with a keen eye on the predatory global forces. If 'bearing witness' is something that has tended to be applied to being present to observe *excessive* uses of power (usually force), we would suggest that an anarchist appropriation of the idea is one that monitors *any use of power whatsoever*.

### The view from the sports hall

On many Friday evenings over the last decade, the editors of this book have played five-a-side football at a local village sports hall. The team is made up of an assortment of builders, plumbers, social workers, lecturers, teachers, council workers, computer programmers and even poets, all over 30 years old, some nearer 50. Based on nothing more than a 'block booking' made sometime in the late 1980s and word of mouth, this venture has led to many friendships and provided the space for modestly talented people to stay a lot fitter than they otherwise might have done. There is no referee and the rules have adapted with the wishes of those playing rather than what is seen on Match of the Day. It is fast and furious, but if somebody oversteps the mark and plays dangerously they are told so, just as anyone who feels entitled to a 'free kick' for a foul is allowed one. Prior to this year, any injuries incurred were mostly accidental and when particular grievances were felt (such as who should represent the 'team' in occasional

tournaments) meetings were actually convened to discuss them (once with an outside facilitator!). Such an environment might seem a strange forum for the implementation of libertarian practices, but as an example of how difficult 'doing anarchism' can be, it provides some useful closing thoughts.

In early 2003, a player was deliberately punched and was hospitalised with a broken nose. The perpetrator and his closest associate (who appeared to claim that the victim had deserved the action) were banned. Everyone was shocked by the events, but also thrown into huge dilemmas as to future courses of action, particularly since no one had ever been banned before. There was the additional problem that the two players in question had been at the heart of every difficult incident over the previous year or so. For many people it was felt that in the long run it was for the good of everyone that they did not play.

Meetings and phone calls ensued, letters were sent to the banned players and the possible cancellation of the 'block booking' loomed large owing to the connections one of the banned players had with the relevant committee. A range of philosophical issues reared their heads. What was the best course of action for the majority? Would it be better to stay principled and lose the block booking rather than reinstate the players if the committee (who would be over-stretching their powers) decided to expel us if we didn't? Did the fact that the perpetrator's associate was well known for alienating other local football teams prejudice the outcome? Was it simply a question of 'cultures clashing' and that attitudes to playing football competitively were so different that it was a waste of everybody's time trying to resolve the situation at all?

Whilst the number of possible solutions to this problem was limited, the implications of any of the courses of action were more extensive, particularly in terms of the exercising of power. Who actually had the right to make the decision to ban the players and for an indefinite period of time? To what extent should the decision be arrived at 'democratically' and did the fact that some players absolved themselves of responsibility for taking part in any decision mean that attempts at a consensus were impossible? Should a meeting be held to air all grievances and under what circumstances could it take place? Did the fact that no one really advocated a meeting mean that the intensive discussions and collective letter writing was just a smoke screen for the fact that, in some people's eyes, the end (keeping the football going) justified the means (expelling the two players indefinitely)?

Although in material terms there were clearly winners and losers in this example, from the point of view of libertarian practice, it felt as though everybody had lost, since the implications of the actions weighed heavy on people's consciences. Acting in fair, principled, anarchist ways *is* difficult, and whilst compromise and consensus can be sought on every occasion, the end results are seldom ideal. There are presumably thousands of small town ventures and community groups who have similar stories to tell. The point is that the effort *is* made at precisely this interpersonal level and better practice consequently evolves from it.

What we have tried to do in this book is to provide a flavour of many of the existing projects that are changing anarchism in different ways, whether adding to the complexities of existing critiques or providing an inspirational moment around which people can mobilise. We have noted the need for flexibility and non-sectarian positions, which do their level-best to build bridges in everyday as well as extraordinary settings. We have suggested that anarchism has an influence in many areas of everyday life that is often largely unrecognised and that it is important not to take dogmatic stances about the 'right' sort of anarchism and to reinvent nineteenth-century dualistic thinking about revolution versus reform. The complexity of global society requires resistance in ways appropriate to dealing with the specific problems in question and we must be careful about exporting our concepts if they do not fit. Nevertheless, evidence from our contributors suggests that there are many 'practical utopias' in existence across the world and the distances between them are becoming smaller all the time.

The view from the sports hall is not entirely beautiful, but to date the anarchist football continues and the editors try not to kick each other too much.

## Notes

- 1 The reaction in Britain to the extremely draconian 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill is a case in point (McKay 1998).