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INTRODUCTION

Simon Critchley

The contributions that make up this book are derived from papers presented at a conference called 'The Anarchist Turn', which took place at the New School for Social Research in New York on May 5–6, 2011. The three editors of this book – myself, Jacob Blumenfeld and Chiara Bottici – were also the conference organizers. I have left this Introduction in almost exactly the form in which it was initially composed because the multiplicity of events that we could summarize with the word OCCUPY that erupted in the autumn of 2011 would have required separate and sustained analysis and revision. Let's just say that some of the hope that Jacob, Chiara and the other contributors to 'The Anarchist Turn' expressed in their talks, which the reader will find in the chapters of this book, found unanticipated and glorious expression in events later in the year. And that was only the beginning.

I would like to begin with a text co-written by the three people who collaborated on the organization of 'The Anarchist Turn'. Collaboration, or working together, is the key here. It is the very ethos of the anarchism that we intend to both discuss and try to enact with this conference. The three of us have worked together closely over the past year in order to make something happen that might simply be interesting, maybe even worthwhile. But we do not know what is going to happen. This could be rubbish. This could be a disaster. We hope not, but you never know.

For a long time, the word 'anarchist' has been used as an insult. This is because, at least since Hobbes and maybe for a lot longer, the concept of anarchy has been extended from its etymological meaning (absence of centralized government) to that of pure disorder – the idea being that, without a sovereign, with a sovereign state, the life of individuals can only be miserable, brutish and short. This shift in the meaning of anarchy was certainly useful in the ideological discourse of justification of