

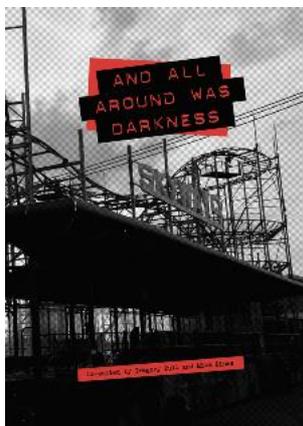
BOOK REVIEW

And All Around Was Darkness, Mike Dines and Greg Bull (eds.) (2017)

Itchy Monkey Press, 288 pp.

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Reviewed by Ian Hornsby, University of Chichester



What does it mean to be nostalgic, in 2018, for the nihilistic hedonism of the late 1970s and early 80s anarcho-punk sub-cultures? In a time when, if you couldn't politically change the world, die young in a blaze of glory, or create some kind of countercultural DIY art, you could at least have a hell of a good time trying to buck conformity. Gregory Bull and Mike Dines' *And All Around Was Darkness*, the third edited edition of their *Tales From the Punkside* series, addresses these issues while being acutely aware of the pitfalls in the nostalgic desire 'for an age yet to come'.

The book opens with Bulls' reflections on 'forming' the anarcho-punk band *Sedition*, in early 80s Northampton. This is a piece that touches a nerve for anyone who grew up during this era, in which the concerns and threats of Cold War nuclear annihilation, the destruction of the politically active working class, and the sheer alienation and mundanity of everyday life in Britain, were being challenged by groups of young men and women wielding second-hand guitars in towns and cities across the nation. Bull's piece is written in heartfelt prose that in certain ways resonates with our own contemporary situation and culture. Yet, what echoes most strongly at the conclusion of the piece is the suggestion that the joy of being young and free is what matters most, rather than the call to class war activism and systemic change. All of which suggests a larger problem linked to that youthful hedonism of the anarcho-punk movement of the 80's, that perhaps, in retrospect, it ushered in three decades of 'no futurism' and impassivity.

Lucy Robinson reflects upon aspects of Anarcho-Feminism and her own Greenham Common experience, and in recollection sees this time as bringing together her interests in feminist theory, DIY pop culture, grassroots anarcho-activism, non-violence, and performance. Looking back on these experiences after the patriarchal backlash against feminist activism in the 1980s, we begin to see her considerations on 'non-divisive difference', as being vital for much feminist activism today.

Viggo Mastad's chapter on *Punk in Norway* is a fascinating look at the different anarcho-punk scenes across the divide of the North Sea. Whilst examining the cross-pollination of these two European youth cultures, Mastad gives the reader an insight into his involvement with the Trondheim based band *Angor Wat* and the Norwegian anarcho-punk scene, as well as an outsider view of British culture during the 80's and 90s.

Neil Transpontine's informative piece on animal rights activism in Luton, and its close connection to the punk music scene reminds the reader of how energetic youth involvement in political issues was in the 1980s and how possible change through direct action felt at that time. Although hunt saboteurs and antivivisectionist groups were presented as criminals in the mainstream media, and the police operated on occasions as a military force; one is left to wonder at the States response today at such action by groups of young men and women. Is direct action even a tactic in a world with a homogenised right-wing media and 'democratically' sanctioned militarised police forces, who are ready to crush any form of political action with devastating violence.

The eclectic nature of *And All Around Was Darkness* is exemplified most clearly in the inclusion of a Robert E. Howard style short story written in a Lovecraftian manner. A work of *weird fiction* that documents, through journal entries made in the mid nineteen thirties, the acquisition of a decaying manuscript written in a forgotten language and telling of a once mighty race whose civilization existed long before the Egyptians. This story is *creepy as hell* and thoroughly engaging and I suggest getting a copy of Bull and Dines' book so that you can enjoy this tale of imperceptible twists and turns that take place on the periphery of ones' imagination in a playful prose style of hyperreal machinations. Russ Bestley's critical reflection upon the repetition and commercialisation of punk and its graphic styles illustrates just how the power and potential of any new aesthetic style is quickly diluted through overexposure. Any quality and political drive it might have once contained is all too quickly deleted and drawn back towards mere pastiche and all of its initial parodic and political dimension eradicated. What Bestley is subtly implying in this fascinating piece, is that what we can all see quite clearly in the graphic work of anarcho-punk aesthetics also stands for the repetition and nostalgia towards repeating and archiving the punk movement itself.

The book concludes with Mike Dines' interview with author, lead singer, and co-founder of the band *Flowers in the Dustbin*, Gerard Evans. This absorbing encounter between two *OG* punks gives us much to think about in terms of Evens working-class wisdom and honesty that avoids much of the nostalgic revisionism found in far too many historical reconstructions and narratives being written and documented today. Evans is not ashamed to admit that the anarcho scene had "admirable politics" but that "a lot of anarcho bands music was shit". He eschews the utopian notion of human perfectibility pursued in some anarchist communes. And he sees the lasting legacy of this historical period in the politics of the far-left, in animal rights activism, and in movements like CND. He sees

both punk and anarchism as separate and independent movements that work together as opposed to the simple combination of a homogenised anarcho-punk movement. This interview is a thought-provoking end to what is a fascinating eclectic mix of articles.

There's just so much to like and to contemplate between the covers of this diverse collection of essays and reflections, which includes several poems by TS Paviour, Graham Burnet's *Green Anarchist* comic book, Jonny R's *Amebix Art*, graphic reproductions of gig posters, album covers, pages from fanzines, as well as articles on Crass, Teen and Post-Teen punk. If you are reading this journal on Punk and Post Punk, then you should be reading this book too. I highly recommend this backstreet tour of an anarcho-punk scene which kept to the shadows and out of the light of social spectacle. Gregory Bull and Mike Dines' *And All Around Was Darkness* recalls the forgotten and the hidden aspects of the anarcho-punk scene while being mindful of the nihilism inherent in too much nostalgia.