

appeal to ethnomusicologists and to academics with an interest in popular culture of the Mediterranean.

Evangelos Chrysagis

University of Edinburgh, UK

## Reference

Rosaldo, R. 1989. *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston, Beacon Press)

**Mark E. Smith and The Fall: Art, Music and Politics. Edited by Michael Goddard and Benjamin Halligan. Farnham: Ashgate, 2010. 204 pp. ISBN 978-0754668671**  
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In May 2008 a group of academics and semi-academics, with a crowd allegedly infiltrated by the 'spies' of Mark E. Smith, gathered in the King's Head pub in Salford for a one-day conference on The Fall. The varied papers presented on this mythic occasion are now re-worked into articles and published in book form. It is a book I pick up with great expectations, having enjoyed the music of The Fall for a quarter of a century and waiting to see some proper academic work on the band for the past two decades. What new insights can these 15-odd articles provide to cast new light on 25 years of listening enjoyment and wonder? What contributions do they make to the study of popular music through their investigations of this exceptional case?

Editors Michael Goddard and Benjamin Halligan from the Salford University Media Studies department have done a first-class job in ensuring a well compiled and orderly presentation of quite diverse, at times openly conflicting, contributions. Their introduction is not only well informed and highly engaging, it also – quite remarkably for an academic text – evokes an atmosphere most suitable for the subject at hand. The reader is confidently and concisely introduced to a rich and complex field spanning 30 years and nearly as many full-length albums, while being duly prepared for the different approaches represented by the various chapters. The disposition of the material does demand some comment, but let me first concentrate on the contributions in this exciting book that for me has provided new and relevant insight into the wonderful and frightening world of The Fall.

In this sense, Robert Walker's piece "'Dictaphonics": Acoustics and Primitive Recording in the Music of The Fall' is in a class of its own, simply because it discusses the most fundamental characteristic of the matter at hand: Mark E. Smith's voice. By focussing on Smith's orchestration of various voice qualities in his recordings and performances, and without stumbling into secondary and tertiary speculations, Walker successfully demonstrates the strategies and effects of fragmentation most central to The Fall's work. Riding on the airstream of the performing voice, he is spared struggling with lyric fragments amputated from their musical context and fighting ensuing windmills of 'artistic paradox'. The ideal match to Walker's text is Paul Wilson's contribution 'Language Scraps: Mark E. Smith's Handwriting and the Typography of The Fall'. The accounts of graphics and dictaphonics are mutually illuminating in a manner rarely seen in academic anthologies. Add to this Robin Purves' excellent (if somewhat contextually isolated) musical analysis of the song *Iceland*, which enables him to successfully arrest musically indifferent contributors

in the same volume for grave misquoting and misinterpretation, and the book has already paid its price. 'Don't improvise for God's sake' is probably the volume's single most repeated Smith quote, yet Purves successfully puts its most common interpretation in doubt. Also most rewarding reading is Richard Osborne's account of The Fall on vinyl 1978–1983, which also expands the discussion of artwork made by Wilson. Paul Long adds a well structured and illuminating piece on the relationship between The Fall and BBC's John Peel, and Chris Atton gives a much-needed glimpse into Fall fandom with his article on the fanzine *The Biggest Library Yet*.

The articles mentioned thus far are more or less randomly spread across Parts 2, 3 and 4 of the book. Organising the material is always a difficult task in releasing a volume of this kind. Ashgate deserve much praise for the courage and vision displayed in publishing this book, but there remains some sense in listening to able authors and editors rather than superimposing titles on their works. Surely, a book on a band and their songwriter should be sub-titled 'Music, Art and Politics'? The mistake is not improved by the book being divided not into three, but four parts, where the first deals with place, the second with the somewhat vague concepts of 'techniques and tactics', the third with aesthetics, and the fourth with media and cultural politics.

More worryingly, the title as it stands provides undeserved shelter for popular music studies without music. Of course there is nothing wrong with fairly and explicitly choosing to approach aspects of The Fall other than the strictly musical. It becomes a problem only insofar as the researcher, with the proclaimed intention of getting to the core of Mark E. Smith's work, completely disregards the songs and musical performances of The Fall and compares the musician-apple exclusively with the pears of prose-fiction authors. It matters little how much Smith has been inspired by prose fiction if the different medium in which his inspiration finds creative output is not examined. This problem seems to linger stubbornly to the familiar disciplinary crossroads where the trucks of literary studies are forever occupied with overrunning musical bicycles.

By analogy, an art historian analysing Dali's work solely on the basis of, say, Ravel's music, would raise loud protests. As should Mark Fisher's contribution to this book, which for all its advanced theoretical namedropping is suitably unable to make any conclusion. Janis Kearns and Dean Lockwood do far better, but their perspective is hampered by the usual reliance on detached debris of lyrics, which when the lyrics are fragmented to begin with, leads them to conclude that Mark E. Smith's songs are only 'fragments set out on a surface', stories without plot information. There is a profound difference between fiction or poetry storytelling and *ye olde English* tradition of the character song. Even the most loosely structured Fall song comes through as an entity, not as scraps and pieces. Disregarding Smith's performance and enactment, however multi-voiced and chaotic it may be, leaves the two authors with few options but to escape from promising observations into the shelter of their theoretical scaffolding: From Deleuze and Guattari to The Fall, then back again before it gets seriously weird.

When compared to the most outstandingly odd contribution to the volume, however, the withdrawal of Kearns and Lockwood appears admirable. One wonders whether Angus McDonald's text is the result of having fed 'The Fall' and 'Mark E. Smith' into the notorious postmodern generator, or whether it is a successful attempt to prove true all Smith's prejudice against academics. If it weren't for its pedestrian qualities it would have made a suitable exhibit of postmodernist failure.

Returning, finally, to Part 1: 'The Fall and the North', which the volume's Ashgate subtitle has left on its own, it is again demonstrated that the simple and straightforward approach is often the most successful. Katie Hannon's discussion 'The Fall: A Manchester Band?' is the least pretentious and most successful of the three pieces on place. It is a well-written account of the ambivalent relationship between The Fall and Manchester. The choice of opening piece, on the other hand, is rather puzzling: Richard Witts duly apologises for picking 'the worst reason for writing about The Fall'. He could be forgiven if that was indeed what he wrote about. Instead he chooses to spend his pages fuming, rightfully or not, about Factory Records' alleged quest to appropriate the musical history of Manchester. Observe how the first line of Hannon's piece neatly does away with the whole problem. The final piece of the first part, Mark Goodall's, is just very clever. Far too clever, it turns out, to provide any insight to speak of.

In sum, the first ever anthology of academic articles on The Fall has indeed extended and deepened my understanding of Mark E. Smith and his band – not always in the ways I expected, not always directly, sometimes excitingly, sometimes less so, and in some chapters seemingly despite itself. It holds a true multitude of approaches to a complex topic. In all its diversity lie both the importance and the true charm of the book. Like a recording by The Fall it is a balanced mixture of sheer ingenuity, mere intelligent observations, quirky twists, everyday blandness, provocative poses, rants, inexplicable detours, sharp wit, repetition, contradictions and glorious farce. Each reader will find his/her favourites. The answer to my second initial question is less clear. Even if its topic should have the potential of raising questions of principal relevance to the discipline of popular music studies, hoping for such an outcome might be demanding too much too soon. While the promising sparks are there, the main challenge evidently remains to bring music back into popular music studies, with methods and concepts tailored for approaching musicians as creators of music (not of some disabled literature). Nonetheless, it has been well worth waiting 20 years for this book to see the light of day. May further articles appear at the rate of Fall releases!

Yngvar B. Steinholt

Tromsø University, Norway

***Musical ImagiNation: U.S.-Colombian Identity and the Latin Music Boom.* By María Elena Cepeda. New York: New York University Press, 2010. 255 pages. ISBN 081471692X**

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The enigma of Shakira Isabel Mebarak Ripoll weaves throughout this richly detailed and tightly argued book, peering out as María Elena Cepeda provides a nuanced analysis of the representation of Colombian musicians within the US media, along with an insightful study of the cultural, economic and political circumstances of the Latin music 'boom' during the early years of this century. The book makes an important contribution to knowledge of the music industries, exploring the cultures of production through which Miami has become an important metropolitan hub from which new Latin musical identities have been creatively and commercially mediated throughout the US and then to increasingly international audiences.