Salford Drift: a psychogeography of The Fall

“Music...if it were pursued one-sidedly and without connexion with other field of form, thought, and culture, seemed...a stunting specialization, humanly speaking” (Doctor Faustus)

“The occult is not in Egypt, but in the pubs of the East End- on your doorstep basically” (Mark E Smith)

What is psychogeography and why use psychogeography to talk about The Fall? The answer to these questions lies in this essay. Or does it? Attempts at clarifying, in any definitive way, precise meanings of psychogeography always dismally fail, as do attempts at classifying what The Fall and Mark E Smith are ‘all about’. This is anyway how it should be. The journey one takes (which will here indeed often be ‘psychogeographical’) is the point of the exercise; the search for an ‘end result’ is useless and disappointing. In reading this book of essays on The Fall you could skip this chapter as it may not, by the end of it, leave you much ‘clearer’ about psychogeography or of The Fall. If you want to experience ‘something’ along the way though, you may be pleasantly surprised, as I was, constantly, in investigating, psychogeographically, the work of The Fall, Mark E Smith, and the writers and artists that inspired them and especially him.

I wish here to suggest that a experimental approach, obfuscating any clear borders, whilst celebrating an eclecticism (the use of parallel processes etc.) can be fruitful. The Lettrist theory of metagraphy or post-writing, for example can be related to The Fall. Indeed, the psychogeographical practice of using writing to visualize a location, to render a place in text is in effect a metagraphic expression. This approach is being applied in another aspect of my work in the study of films.

In this essay I will begin with a psychogeographical account of the personality of Mark E Smith before moving on to the more interesting analysis of the words and music of his group. The quotations placed above demonstrate that it is not sufficient to talk about music simply as sound, and that it is not necessary to have a degree in English literature or philosophy to understand the magic beyond the boredom of the everyday.

Any ‘analysis’ of a subject should take the reader off into other areas of discovery, like a dog sniffing a trail. Theory for the sake of theory comes unstuck with a subject as sprawling and rarefied as The Fall. The insect-like network of Fall obsessives won’t approve of such arch practices, but as they generally sneer and criticise from the safety of the fanzine/internet it doesn’t really matter. The point of the project is to look at The Fall afresh.

That is all.

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1 Thomas Mann, Doctor Faustus (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp.73.
2 Mark E Smith, Renegade (London, 2008), pp.80.
3 ‘The Wild Eye; experimental film studies’
Looking at the above picture of Mark E Smith (Fig.1) takes me back to when the LP it was taken from (‘Dragnet’) first came out, and I bought it. Smith peers inside a derelict (now renovated) greyhound track in Manchester. Smith looks like he is trying to locate the past (“the horror of the normal”), a past defined by the urban geographical surrounding of the area he stands in and expressed later through the songs of his group The Fall. To better understand The Fall- psychogeographically- we can begin with personality of the leader of the group Mark E Smith. This is the least fruitful area of exploration, because unless you know a person intimately it is all second-hand supposition. The first thing people want to know about an individual is a portrait, a psychoanalysis of their being (their psyche). So let’s get it out of the way.

It’s true that there are certainly aspects of the personality, habits and organisational strategies of Smith that are echoed in key practitioners of psychogeography, most notably Guy E Debord the leader of one of the groups that ‘utilised’ psychogeography (although NOT the leader of the group that first proclaimed its use) and this is covered in detail elsewhere in the collection. Debord’s superb

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4 Mark E Smith, *Renegade*, pp.79.
5 That was Isidore Isou, chief theorist of *Lettrism*
aphorisms neatly apply to the habits of Smith. My favourite is Debord’s appropriation of Baltasar Gracian: “There are those who have got drunk only once, but it has lasted a lifetime”. Debord’s admission, after Li Po, that: “For thirty years I have hidden my fame in taverns” seems also to apply to Smith (see ‘In My Area’ for a good selection of Smith’s aphorisms). Both writers devote chapters of their autobiographies to drinking. Yet this is not the most interesting aspect of linking those radical avant-garde groups with the work of Mark E Smith and The Fall. Generally, the use of Situationist International (SI) texts in discussing The Fall tends to focus on ‘negation’ of which the early Debord was a master theoretician and which Smith also arguably celebrates (his work does not reflect the ‘visionary tradition’ of psychogeography for example). But this tells only part of the story.

The ‘classic’ French psychogeographers of the 1950s, of course, carried out their experiments in and around the area of the French capital Paris. Paris was by then long renowned as a city of revolution, poetry and art. The ordering principles of the Haussmann re-design of Paris, incorporating the Grands Boulevards were seen by psychogeographers as the enemy of play, experimentation, freedom, instinct. Psychogeography is thus often associated with metropolitan excursions and practices (British psychogeography is advocated by a London-centric gaggle made up by the likes of writers Iain Sinclair and Will Self and filmmakers such as Chris Petit and Patrick Keiller). In my view though psychogeography can be practiced anywhere, certainly in a Salford that is real or imaginary. Many Fall songs reflect on Northern landscape and geography (In My Area, New Puritan, M5 etc.). Therefore in examining the work of The Fall, we must mentally as well as physically “leave the capital”.

A New Urbanism

What, then, would a psychogeography of The Fall look like?

Psychogeography, according to the SI, is: “the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment (whether consciously organized or not) on the emotions and behaviour of individuals”. “Dreams spring from reality and are realized in it” Ivan Chtcheglov observed in his psychogeographical masterpiece ‘Formulary for a New Urbanism’. Psychogeography has a “pleasing vagueness” and the bizarre array of uses of the term and its practices make it challenging and exciting while elusive to define. Chtcheglov’s text incorporates the phrase ‘The Hacienda Must be Built’. This of course makes links between the work of the SI, Manchester’s famous nightclub, and The Fall. This experiment with The Fall will incorporate real objects such as songs (‘Arms Control

6 Debord and Smith are characterized by sharing: a megalomaniacal desire to control their collaborators; a fondness for cultivating the company of ‘amateurs’; defined their work as a ‘game of war’; a delight in violent expulsions; had a fondness for alcohol abuse.
7 Guy Debord, Panegyric (London: 2004), pp.30
8 Ibid.
9 Andreotti, Libero and Costa, Xavier (eds), Theory of the Dérive and Other Situationist Writings on the City (Barcelona: 1996), pp.69.
11 Guy Debord, Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography in Andreotti and Costa, p.18
Poseur’, ‘Spectre vs. Rector’, ‘City Hobgoblins’), photographs, record sleeves and lyrics. From these I will project and create readings and interpretations that may become dream-like. The ‘drifts’ of songs, poetry, art can be magical and elusive, but are always inspired by concrete expression and real environments. Smith, like Chtcheglov was well read. The books and ideas that inspired the psychogeographers are those that inspired a shipping clerk from Salford.

The above psychogeographical approach (“the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment (whether consciously organized or not) on the emotions and behaviour of individuals”) allows for the free interpretation of elements within works and the journeying (‘dériving’) from particular texts to other sometimes extreme regions of expression. With a complex body of work like that of The Fall it is possible to draw out intriguing aspects that are historical, cultural, poetic, occult and experimental. I will certainly wish to raise some of the literary influences on the words of Mark E Smith especially writers Arthur Machen (incidentally also a pioneer of psychogeography) and Malcolm Lowry who are regularly acknowledged by Smith to be of major significance and yet are rarely discussed in analyses of The Fall’s songs (and who both were also interested in occult phenomena such as the cabala). Also significant is the way in which psychogeography can foreground a personal (psychic and spatial) response to works of art. Psychogeographical approaches allow the user to use a particular location as a point of departure for analysis, in this case the North Manchester area of Salford or a song by The Fall, and to ‘drift’ towards ever more eccentric locations and places, both real and imagined. It is an approach encouraging a comparatist/interdisciplinary/chemical/poetic method, one which eschews conventional borders and encourages eclecticism and the possibility of bringing ‘parallel processes’ into the study of cultural phenomena.

The most exciting psychogeographical projects are concerned with the idea that “dreams spring from reality and are realised in it” (Chtcheglov). I believe that the work of The Fall is ideal for this mode of inquiry. The dark humour of The Fall is often absent from any critique and this also can be also brought to bear with psychogeographical methodologies. So rather than Debord, it is the work of other figures in the pre-SI psychogeographical movement that will be of primary interest, especially the writings of Ivan Chtcheglov, together with other key literary influences on the world of Mark E Smith which I will now outline.

**Lunar Caustic**

An important influence on the expressions of Mark E Smith is the British writer Malcolm Lowry. Lowry is a neglected figure, but one who will no doubt rise again upon the centenary of his birth. Smith has noted his lack of esteem, and once acclaimed Lowry as “one of the best bloody writers, he wrote the best books”. Lowry’s work has to be read several times in order to gain the full power of its expression; the text is bursting with

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12 There are precedents for the dèrive such as Baudelaire’s Spleen de Paris and Aragon’s Paris Peasant.
13 Both Machen and Lowry were influenced by Edgar Allen Poe, another favourite of MES.
14 See also the author’s ‘Wild Eye’ project run in conjunction with De Montfort University.
15 In particular Chtcheglov’s 1953 text ‘Formulary for a new Urbanism’
16 A Malcolm Lowry tribute will be held in Liverpool in the autumn of 2009. This complements a conference in Vancouver, Canada, the acknowledged centre for the study of Lowry’s writing.
rich language, poetic diversions, streams of consciousness, symbolism, experimental modes. Lowry’s work rewards re-reading. In the same way the songs of The Fall have to be listened to several times over in order to obtain the fullest experience of the way the words and sounds correspond or clash. The obtuse manner of the phrasing and wording is not always ‘obvious’. This partly explains I think the negative reviews, particularly of the early Fall singles.  

Lowry was a keen exponent of the occult and was fascinated, like Smith, with the writings of P.D. Ouspensky. Ouspensky was a Russian-born mystical philosopher who devised a ‘system’ of higher logic. He devised four forms of the manifestations of consciousness. The fourth form could be achieved by “men of cosmic consciousness”, capable of obtaining “conscious automatism” I believe that most of the writers that Smith enjoys- including Lowry- were obsessed with this anaesthetic state. Ouspensky also quotes from Dostoyevsky, one of Lowry’s key influences. Intriguingly, Ouspensky, who was as uninterested in materialism as both Lowry and Smith, died in the same year (1947) that ‘Under the Volcano’ and ‘Doctor Faustus’ were published (the work of Thomas Mann is also acknowledged by Smith).

The Fall makes reference to Lowry in a number of ways. One of Lowry’s best stories is a short one called ‘Lunar Caustic’. This tale of an alcoholic’s spell in a mental institution is harrowing, bleak and ominous. The theme of course echoes Lowry’s greatest work ‘Under the Volcano’. The titling of a Fall LP as ‘Cerebral Caustic’ is surely a nod to Lowry. Lowry’s own theories about what makes the best writing echoes The Fall: “a satisfactory work of art...is full of affects and dissonances...the best kind of novel was something that is bald and winnowed like Sibelius, and that makes an odd and splendid din, like Beiderbecke”. Lowry’s obsessions with booze relate to one of Smith’s key pastimes. Like many of his heroes drinking is important to Lowry (see Debord, Poe etc.). “Drinking is for him (the Consul) a religion, each drink an act of devoted worship” (McCaffrey). The main character in Under the Volcano’, Geoffrey Firmin, known as The Consul has alcoholic psychosis causing horrific insect visions. We find this echoed in the fiends of ‘City Hobgoblins’ where the infestation means that “we cannot walk the floor at night in peace”.

Like Smith, Lowry was obsessed by chance, coincidence, the occult (see for example his letter to Jonathan Cape listing coincidental links between his life and the novel). Lowry once admitted that ‘Under the Volcano’ was, like mescal, “difficult to get down”. Yet his texts rewards re-readings and, like Smith, Lowry was criticised for “eccentric word-spinning and too much stream-of-consciousness stuff” Lowry’s obsessions with the way in which “relationship is everything” manifest itself in a belief in the symbolism of the Jewish Cabbala: Under the Volcano is made up of twelve chapters structured mythically. Lowry and Smith are influenced by the Faust legend, the idea that one sells one’s soul to devil in order to endure genius. The gothic visions of Goethe’s version of the myth would have influenced Smith. Marlowe’s use of ‘blank verse’ for his reading of the legend, echoes Smith’s play with words and poetics.

In the song ‘Arms Control Poseur’, from the LP ‘Extricate’, the spirit of Malcolm Lowry is evoked when Smith speaks some words from Lowry’ diaries (“Death of a sense of humour/N death of sense/How do you recover from this?”).

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Holy Terrors
Another writer important to Mark E Smith, but rarely investigated, is the Welsh writer and journalist Arthur Machen. It is interesting and probably significant to note that Machen was a pioneer of psychogeography especially interested in the interconnection between landscape and the mind. Through his strange wanderings he was also interested in what lies beneath the surface: “the eternal beauty hidden beneath the crust of common and yet commonplace things.” Machen’s 1929 story ‘The Cosy Room’ mines this field of the commonplace occult. The story centres around strange occurrences in a quite London street as the principal character, having committed an murder, flees to a “thoroughly pleasant room” in order to escape detection. His guilt and paranoia gradually close in around him and expose him to suspicion. In the end his ‘cosy room’ becomes a “condemned cell”. Machen was acutely aware of the terror lurking in the capital and the irony that in a metropolis one can feel both free to move around unknown while at the same time be pursued by fear, much as Smith was (“When I’m in London I feel how a madman would feel. Like there’s people whispering behind me back all the time”).

An encounter with Machen’s earlier story ‘The Happy Children’ (1925) also yields interesting psychogeographical phenomena. The story concerns the visit of journalist to the town during the First World War and the supernatural phenomena he witnesses one night in the town, experiences that link the sinking of the Lusitania with the Abbey perched high on the banks of the coast. The story is based on Machen’s trip to the town to cover a story relating to the war. I had no idea initially that the story was about Whitby. But as I read through I realised that the “North-Eastern district” was indeed that location. I then located another copy of the story in a booklet entitled ‘Town of a Magic Dream: Arthur Machen in Whitby’. This was unearthed in the dusty and parochial surroundings of Whitby Museum. Whitby is of course famous for the setting of part of Bram Stoker’s ‘Dracula’ novel and the town is twice a year host to a ‘Goth Weekend’. The first thing that is noticeable is the startling cover illustrated by Nick Blinko who happens also to be the singer and guitarist of ‘Rudimentary Peni’ (Fig.2).

21 Arthur Machen, The London Adventure of the Art of Wandering, quoted in Coverley, Psychogeography, pp.48
22 Arthur Machen, Holy Terrors (Harmondsworth: 1946), pp.104
23 Simon Ford, Hip Priest, pp.93
24 Mark Valentine, Town of a Magic Dream: Arthur Machen in Whitby (Southampton: 1987)
Whilst Mark E Smith’s interest in the gothic is well known, The Fall are clearly not a ‘goth’ band. There seems little to link The Fall with the seaside town. However, as a former paid-up member of the Friends of Arthur Machen (FOAM), Mark E Smith once attended an Arthur Machen AGM meeting in Whitby, staying at the dark, atmospheric hotel called The White Horse & Griffin and drinking in the Angel hotel where Machen stayed. One of the FOAM organisers told me:

“The main thing I remember is an impromptu folk-guitar jam session by society members in the bar of the White Horse and Griffin in which Mark E Smith was "treated" to renditions of Velvet Underground classics and ‘Old Shep Is Dead’. He didn't himself join in but looked suitably sardonic. Alas I cannot recall any commentary on Machen as such”.

As an aside it is worth noting that there was an Arthur Machen tribute at the inaugural (and final) Caedmon Literary Festival held in Whitby when a talk on Machen was delivered by Gwilym Games, a secretary of the FOAM.  

Furthermore, I discovered that the organiser of the festival, Alan Whitworth, lived 100 yards from my house in the locality. A further odd link was discovered when it was revealed that when Machen’s story ‘The Shining Pyramid’ was made by HTV in 1980 it starred Edward Petherbridge who was born in Bradford (where I work). Petherbridge also acted in the ‘Lord Peter

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Wimsey’ TV series and took over from Ian Carmichael. Carmichael lives also in the Whitby area. Incidentally, the TV version of The Shining Pyramid was once scheduled during 1976 FA Cup Final- Man U v Southampton; here there are football links. Camus of course played football and some have tried to link The Fall with ‘the beautiful game’ (see Smith on his management of the group in David Simpson’s book:”It’s a bit like a football team…every so often you have to get rid of the centre-forward”).

Machen also wrote ‘The Novel of The White Powder’, a story that clearly influenced another Smith favourite Howard Philips Lovecraft. Machen’s style of writing horror and the supernatural into everyday occurrences, especially urban metropolitan settings, is echoed in The Fall’s urban gothic. The horror is located under the surface of things, on observation Ford makes about Smith’s writing. The Fall’s concerns with what Thomas Mann expresses as the ‘weirdnesses of nature’ are laid bare for all to see and hear. Even Smith’s invention of the alter ego Roman Totale XVII, a figure that “fled from Lancashire and settled in the Welsh mountains” owes its character to Machen (the ‘Welsh hills’ also occur in the text on the back of the single ‘Fiery Jack’ which Ford also describes as “Lovecraft-influenced”). The supernatural can be located across the LP ‘Dragnet’ where psychic phenomena are expressed and conjured. Numerous Fall songs relating the experience of drugs are drawn not just from the personal habits of the group but by the supernatural obsession with the transference offered by substance abuse particularly Machen’s ‘Novel of the White Powder’ which Smith described as “a great drug story”.

‘City Hobgoblins’: A Brief Case Study

“We’ll stick punk rock up your fucking arse. Right, here’s a good one- it’s a bit of fucking culture for you. Right, Hobgoblins! Davies! Hit the fucking cowbell quick!”

(Intro to ‘City Hobgoblins’, Friday 13th June 1980, Eindhoven, The Netherlands)

In 1980 The Fall released a single called ‘How I Wrote Elastic Man’. The b-side of this single, ‘City Hobgoblins’, expresses beautifully the range of influences on The Fall. The song celebrates the absurd, drawing on favourite writers such as Camus, Sartre and especially Alfred Jarry whose ‘Ubu Roi’ was a key Fall/Smith text. The music is a clattering fast-paced romp structured around a rising riff that slides up the scale. These aspects, of course, can be ‘psychogeographically’ explained. In linking Chtcheglov’s text with Smith’s we can better understand how art and poetry of the occult can express ongoing truths about the world. A psychogeography of a song like ‘City Hobgoblins’ can possibly act as a blueprint for future investigations into the ‘wonderful and frightening world of The Fall’.

Various literary references are associated with the group: ‘Bend Sinister’ is a Nabokov novel (1947); the group is named after Albert Camus’ ‘The Fall’ (1956) (the

26 Dave Simpson, Excuse me weren’t you in The Fall? (London: 2006)
27 Simon Ford, Hip Priest, pp.13
28 Thomas Mann, Doctor Faustus, pp.25
29 Simon Ford, Hip Priest, pp.40
30 Ibid., pp.77
31 Mark E Smith, Renegade, pp.79
32 http://www.culturewars.org.uk/index.php/site/article/dead_hands/
group was originally going to be called The Outsiders). Smith has expressed approval of Luke Rheinhart’s infamous novel ‘The Dice Man’ and Thomas Pynchon (his essay “Is it OK to be a Luddite?” will strike a chord with fans of The Fall). Moreover, for all his love of pop/pulp writings it is clear that a substantial range of European modernist literary texts have been devoured or at least scoured for inspiration by Smith. Literary tropes such as collage, cut-ups, word-play and temporal experiments are clear in the lyrics. As Charles Neal notes:

“Smith’s lyrics often bear no rational symmetry to the actual music, and at times he becomes a storyteller addressing things obliquely rather than directly. These allegories are often best consumed through album covers and sleeves” 33

It’s interesting that in Smith’s live introduction above he links the song with a statement against the derivative, stupid nature of what punk rock had become. It defines ‘City Hobgoblins’ and the songs of The Fall, The Fall ‘project’, as operating outside and against any generic codes. For me the song acts as a good example of The Fall as form of (unconscious?) avant-garde.

Another thing to notice is that in ‘City Hobgoblins’ we find a parallel interest with Lettrist/SI writings in the weirdness of locations, epically those of the urban sphere. ‘Formulary for a New Urbanism’ contains a list of strange locations identified via Parisian street locations. Chtcheglov undertakes a series of word plays to emphasise the strangeness of the Parisian habit of naming shops after the street name:

Showerbath of the Patriarchs
Meat Cutting Machines
Notre Dame Zoo
Sports Pharmacy
Martyrs Provisions
Translucent Concrete
Golden Touch Sawmill
Center for Functional Recuperation
Saint Anne Ambulance
Café Fifth Avenue
Prolonged Volunteers Street
Family Boarding House in the Garden
Hotel of Strangers
Wild Street

Looking at this text it strikes me that lists like this appear in Fall songs (sometimes as chants e.g. Ludd Gang). Smith, like Chtcheglov, is curious how the mundane can be altered (using drink, drugs or other altered states) and is searching for something beyond. The modernist landscape is a veneer, masking both decay and surprise (“a past merely overlaid with presentness”34). This can often manifest itself, as it did for Chtcheglov in terms of the mystical or the occult. Both Chtcheglov and Smith write celebrations of run-

33 Charles Neal, Tape Delay (Harrow: 1987), pp.94
34 Thomas Mann, Doctor Faustus, pp. 39
down areas. Both wrote of mental institutes: Chtcheglov ‘Saint Anne’s’ is a famous Parisian asylum while Smith: “sang about mental hospitals and paranoia.”\(^\text{35}\) This is evident in both the 1977 song ‘Repetition’ (“Oh mental hospitals/They put electrodes in your brain”) and is also evident in proclaiming “the madness in my area” (Ivan Chtcheglov ended his days incarcerated in a mental institution). The locations that lie at the heart of the group’s formation echoes the kinds of spectral sites that Chtcheglov wanted to transform in Paris (for example Mick Middles describes Oozits Club in Shude Hill as “lost deep in a maze of intimidating streets, flanked with long thin evil shadows and grimly beckoning pubs” with a “down-at-heel ambience, or beauty”.\(^\text{36}\) Chtcheglov speaks of a “fragmentary vision…that must be sought in the magical locales of fairy tales and surrealist writings…forgotten bars…casino mirrors”.\(^\text{37}\) His notion of the “Sinister Quarter” existing as a space ideal for evil happenings is reflected in many fall songs. The LP Dragnet is scrawled with text from Smith. One of these phrases- “the streets are full of mercenary eyes”- appears to express the horror of the everyday. Smith claimed that “writing about Prestwich is just as valid as Dante writing about his inferno”.\(^\text{38}\) This ‘everyday horror’ echoes another of Smith favourite writers H.P. Lovecraft. In particular Lovecraft’s short story ‘Cool Air’ opens with a statement relaying this mode: “It is a mistake to fancy that horror is associated inextricably with darkness, silence and solitude. I found it in the glare of mid-afternoon.”\(^\text{39}\) There is nightmarish unearthly sensation of the song, the expression of a zone of fear. This defines it as an example of what the SI, in defining the psychogeographical derive as a “science-fiction of urbanism”, an account of the brutalizing effect of the modern world.\(^\text{40}\)

So much for words. Chtcheglov’s unforgettable line was that “dreams spring from reality and are realized in it”.\(^\text{41}\) His work was an experiment in the avant-garde; his technique echoes the improvisation that is evident in the working methods of The Fall (see, for example, Spectre Vs. Rector). The art Chtcheglov imagined here was both textual (Poe) and visual (the paintings of Claude Lorrain). His text has a wonderful lyrical quality to it (I suggest that this is what made most critics suspicious of it and more favourable towards the more ‘political’ writings of the groups that superseded lettrism).

Clearly songs by The Fall though have an audio-musical aspect that cannot be dismissed. Smith, like Isou with his metagraphic expressions (grunts, shouts, word-play) uses the spoken word to great effect. The sound of ‘City Hobgoblins’, beginning with the ‘pagan’ clang of the cowbell, recalls the sound of the group’s key musical influences, in particular the ‘garage’ sound of groups such as The Monks (The Fall covered two songs by this group for ‘Extricate’); the avant-rock of German group Can (where again the notion of “made-up words” of their singer Damo Suzuki comes into play). Although The Fall were always keen to distance themselves from any movement and in particular the


\(^{36}\) Ibid.

\(^{37}\) Ivan Chtcheglov, *Formulary for a New Urbanism*, pp. 15

\(^{38}\) Mark E Smith, *Renegade*, pp.86


\(^{40}\) “Psychogeography, the study of the laws and precise effects of a consciously or unconsciously elaborated geographical environment acting directly on affective behaviour, subsumes itself...as the science fiction of urbanism”. Khatib in Andreotti and Costa

\(^{41}\) Ivan Chtcheglov, *Formulary for a New Urbanism*, pp. 15
punk movement, there can be discerned elements drawn from a group such as Rudimentary Peni, notably that group’s emphasis on noise, use of drones and choice of subject matter (see for example ‘Macabre Heritage’ on the LP ‘Cacophony’ a tribute album to H.P. Lovecraft, which repeats the names of decadent writers such as Poe, Huysmans, Machen and M.R. James). In other works by The Fall of course musical/sound elements are experimented with: in ‘Muzorewi’s Daughter’ a tribal sound is used; on ‘Spectre V’s Rector’ a frightening drone expresses the group’s attempt at “writing out of the song”.

As Smith noted recently:

“If you are going to play it out of tune, then lay it out of tune properly”.

In conclusion, there are obvious limitations in trying to write an experimental essay on The Fall within the strictures of an academic publication. The project started in this essay must now be taken forward in new and interesting ways and in other contexts. In that sense this paper, as was predicted in the opening paragraph, has been something of a failure. One key lesson can be derived from it though. If you want to go on any kind of dérive, make sure that you take the best artists with you.

Therefore, in searching for a that statement encapsulates the philosophy of Mark E Smith and The Fall, I have been unable to find a better summation of the radical work of this group and especially its leader than the following. Significantly, it is by one of Smith’s favourite authors:

“He…sought for something more than respectability…He journeyed on a strange adventure; he sought for a nobler chalice than the cup in which non-alcoholic beverages are contained” (Arthur Machen)

Mark Goodall
December 2008

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42 Mark E Smith, Renegade, pp.84
43 Ibid.
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