

Do you like travelling?

"I wouldn't go [to Brazil] again. It broke my heart. You're having breakfast in the hotel, bacon and eggs. You look out of the window, and there's five kids, black kids, all different colours, one's got one arm, one's got one leg, and they're all crying, looking at you eating your eggs and bacon. I said to the tour manager, 'I want to get out of here, quick.' But the weirdest thing was, on the plane there were all these hippy types with corduroys on going, 'I really like Brazil, because...'. In Brazil, for five pounds... All these hippy types were going to Brazil to help the people in the shacks. It's like India, same racket: for five pounds fifty, you can live with a guy, shag his wife, get all the drugs you want, but think you're helping them out. It's imperialism, but you feel good about it because you're helping them out."

I tell Mark that I used to believe The Fall would make no sense unless you grew up in the mid- to late 70s in some Godforsaken corner of Central Lancashire. Except it emerges that there are all these far-flung outposts of Fall fanatics, in Arizona, Texas, New Zealand, Brazil. What does he think they get out of his music?

"You'd be surprised, Tony. The people in Texas, they're a bit more on the ball than the people you meet in Manchester. There are 16 year old lads in Texas who know things it would take a music journalist 20 years to find out. You get girls with buck teeth who have been living on farms, they know exactly where I'm from. They understand every word I say. Here, it's all: 'Incomprehensible lyrics.' There are Mexicans in Santa Fe: they know exactly what I'm saying. Mexicans who can hardly speak English, and Belgians who know my lyrics backwards, they know them better than I do. There are guys from Preston who know lyrics I've forgot. I talk to Jon Savage or [Loaded's] James Brown, and it's: 'What's this? Can't quite understand this.' *Go away.*"

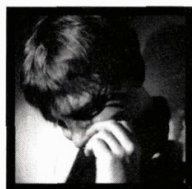
But it was never meant to be about them.

"No, I don't think rock 'n' roll, or music, was ever meant to be about people with specs on or bald heads. I don't think it was meant to be about that."

"I was having an argument last night with the group," says Mark: the group which once again includes Brix Smith, his (notoriously) ex-wife, but not Craig Scanlon, the guitarist who was a part of The Fall for over 15 years and who Mark once referred to as being "more indispensable than me in a way". "And I said, 'Remember Brazil?' They had a poll: we are the most popular group in Brazil. Their equivalent of *The Sun* had a poll and The Fall are number one. Number two was their *Take That*. Number three was like a jazz drummer. Number four was Brazilia 68, or something. Number 29 was U2. Number like 59 was New Order. Number fucking 110 was whoever was big here. You get me? We played Brazil, and this place had like 10,000 people there, but they locked The Fall fans, 5000 of them, in a cage at the back, with machine gun guards. In the middle of the hall were all the journalists, guys with specs on, *NME*-types. At the front — it was just like a caste — all these guys with grandee beards, and their families, and they're all dining with bodyguards. I was talking to some guys outside, and a ticket for the gig was like two months' wages for a clerk or a bus conductor. And these are the people who are in the cage, and it's got chains on it and everything. But on the second night they broke the fucking cage down and came pouring down for the encore. They weren't being violent. They went right through the journalists, so they cleared off, and they ran right through all the grandees, not bad guys, but rich, you know, old Spanish, sitting at the front, with their wives, with these Spanish bonnets, they ran right through them. It was so great. That was about two years back."

But you haven't been back since?

"No, I don't think they want us back."



Vignette # 3

He was negotiating the chiselling geography of the North Manchester streets when some scrawny kids spotted his apparent perplexity, ran towards him, pointing, yelling: 'You don't know where you are, do you? You don't know where you're going, do you?' He grabs onto my arm as we walk through the municipal car park, and laughs, uncontrollable, as he recalls this

encounter. 'You don't know where you are, do you?' he repeats. 'You don't know where you're going, do you?' □ The Light User Syndrome is out now on *Jet* (through Trojan)

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Steve Naïve *It's Raining Somewhere contemplative jazz*



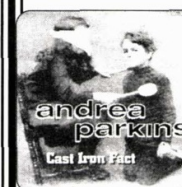
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