

Editorial

Thatcherism and popular culture

Kari Kallioniemi and Rami Mähkä

This is the final draft version of the manuscript without the publisher's logo/layout.

'Four Men in a Car' (1998), an episode of the British comedy series *The Comic Strip Presents* (1982–2000, 2005–present), is a story of slightly yuppyish middle-of-the-road and (lower-) middle-class travelling salesmen driving to a Middle England sales conference, and having their petty jealousy and rivalry breaking out uncontrollably during their miserable journey. When stopping at the mini-market at the petrol station, one of them (played by Rik Mayall) finds – in a state of divine revelation – the CD collection *Sounds of the 80s*. The salesmen start to listen to one particular track from it, Spandau Ballet's 'Gold' (1983) – a pop anthem from the heyday of Thatcherite excesses in the 1980s – while enjoying themselves in their solarium-made sun-tans and Gordon Gekko-style braces and shirts. Eventually, the CD gets stuck in the stereo system, just annoyingly repeating one part of the song, while one of the passengers vomits in the car and the driver of a Range Rover that narrowly misses them rages at the poor salesmen.

The scenario turns from parody to horror and this scathing satire of the Thatcherite mentality, made in 1998, becomes an eerie reminder of the legacy of the Thatcher decade, the 1980s. This legacy is still with us – percolated through our neo-liberal society – and influencing the ways in which (everyday) culture is evaluated and produced in the contemporary climate of financial and cultural globalization. While the death of Thatcher in April 2013 made her divisive legacy ever more topical, at the same time mainstream films like *The Iron Lady* (Lloyd, 2011), starring Meryl Streep, emphasized Thatcher's vulnerability and humanity.

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This special issue of the *Journal of European Popular Culture* focuses on the ambiguous legacy and influence of Thatcher and Thatcherism in popular culture, especially in the 1980s, but also before and after her reign as the first British female prime minister (1979–91). The issue is the combined product of the transnational project, ‘Thatcherism, Popular Culture and the 1980s’ (2014–17), funded by the Finnish Kone Foundation and directed by Kari Kallioniemi (Cultural History, IIPC, University of Turku), and a session organized on Thatcherism and popular culture in the *EUPOP 2015* conference in Berlin. The project also organized several special sessions concerning this study in international conferences (*Capitalism and Culture*, University of Leeds, University of Helsinki), but this special issue is especially linked to the session held in Berlin in 2015, involving all but one writer in this issue. Basically, this issue is the final product of that fruitful session inside the walls of the prestigious Humboldt University in 2015.

Both the session and the project focused on Thatcherism and its relationship to, and influence on, popular culture. One of the main arguments in these was that there is a paradoxical mutual interdependence of contemporary popular culture and the Thatcherite/neo-liberalist tradition. For example, this interdependence was exemplified by the social/cultural historical idea that ‘the paradox of Thatcherism was that it promoted the “Victorian values” of moral restraint at the same time as it fostered consumer desire’ (Zuberi 2001: 41).

The project analysed a variety of source materials (film, television, pop music and written contemporary texts), and provided new perspectives on popular culture’s relationship to Thatcherism in the 1980s as well as its continuing legacy. All of this material has gradually formed a complex network of media texts interacting and intertwining with each other and debating, expressing, re-creating and opposing Thatcherite ideology. *Iron Lady* can be seen as one output of

this interaction, as much as 'Four Men in a Car' and to the opposite extreme Hillary Mantel's controversial novel *The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher* (2014), in which the author made a fictional story of her fantasy of the murder of Margaret Thatcher in the early 1980s real.

There are numerous other examples of this legacy, still emanating from the original experiences of Thatcherism in the 1980s, both in Britain and abroad. This collection of articles will aid in the evaluation of the controversial legacy of Thatcher herself and also ask what kind of cultural processes are engaged in these products, expressing, commenting or constructing the ideas of Thatcherism and its legacy.

Kari Kallioniemi (University of Turku) discusses in his article 'The sound of Thatcherism on vinyl: New pop, early neo-right aspirations and Spandau Ballet' the same band that caused the euphoria among the Thatcherite salesmen in 'Four Men in a Car'. He examines the ways in which Spandau Ballet embodied the ambiguous forms of Thatcherism and how this defined the idea of the band and their music.

Rami Mähkä, also from the University of Turku, writes in his essay about Basil Fawlty (John Cleese), the anti-hero of the British 1970s' sitcom *Fawlty Towers* (1975, 1979), as a 'Pre-Thatcherite' Conservative. Mähkä argues that the two contemporaries, Fawlty and Thatcher, shared a very similar view of Britain's problems in the 1970s, and analysing the series helps us in understanding the mentalities that made Thatcher's 1979 election win possible.

Martin Cloonan (University of Glasgow and University of Turku) discusses in his article 'Thatcherism and popular music' some key policies related to the popular music industries of Britain under the Thatcher administration. Cloonan shows that studying the legislation and policies

of the Thatcher governments reveals important evidence of how the policies actually affected the making and performing of popular music during the period.

Mark Baillie (University of Glasgow) continues on this subject in his piece ‘Where there is discord, may we bring harmony: Government policy and popular music in the UK in the 1980s’. He examines the relationship between independent popular music cultural production in the United Kingdom in the 1980s and the policies and political philosophy of Thatcherism, and shows how there was a significant compatibility between these, most notably in the influence of the Enterprise Allowance Scheme.

The third article concentrating on popular music during the Thatcher decade is by Neil Kirkham (University of the Arts, London). The article, ‘Polluting young minds? *Smash Hits* and “high Thatcherism”’, focuses on an interview given by Thatcher to *Smash Hits* in 1987. Kirkham shows the source value of a glossy ‘teen’ magazine in understanding the pop culture of the era as it visualized the youth movements more culturally valued music papers ignored.

Finally, Felipe Espinoza Garrido (University of Münster) examines the legacy of Thatcherism as dealt with in the British film *Doomsday* (Marshall, 2011). His argument is that while the film has often been dismissed as a collage of elements drawn from 1980s’ action films, with a 1980s’ pop soundtrack, the film’s frantic usage of the period’s cultural motifs testifies to the trauma that Thatcherism left on British culture.

Finally, the editors would like to thank the authors of this issue for the wonderful collaboration and excellent articles and reviews, and the editor of the *Journal of European Popular Culture*, Graeme Harper, for agreeing to this special issue project and for the very pleasant cooperation.

Turku, Finland, 5 October 2017

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Zuberi, Nabeel (2001), *Sounds English: Transnational Popular Music*, Michigan: University of Illinois Press.

Filmography

Lloyd, Phyllida (2011), *The Iron Lady*, UK.

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