No Flowers

Performative Interventions "at the Moment of" Margaret Thatcher's Passing

Sophie Bush and Morgan Daniels

Even Though We Know It's Not Right

We will laugh the day that Thatcher dies
Even though we know it's not right
We will dance and sing all night

—Hefner, "The Day That Thatcher Dies" (2000)

It is with this sense of improperness or inappropriateness that we would like to begin—that yearning to celebrate the passing of, say, Margaret Thatcher, all the while being eaten away by vague notions having something to do with "respect for the dead." Tony Blair, speaking to Stephen Nolan on BBC Radio 5 Live the day after Thatcher died, laid out the moral code when asked about the previous night's street parties in, among other places, London, Sheffield, and Glasgow: "I think that's pretty poor taste. You've got to, even if you disagree with someone very strongly—particularly at the moment of their passing show some respect" (*BBC News* 2013b). Why, exactly? Perhaps this critical question propelled the performative interventions on and around 8 April 2013 (the day of Thatcher's death) and 17 April 2013 (the day of her funeral). What Blair identifies as "the moment of [...] passing" is a vital space for meaning-making, a funny stasis in which, because death's taboos are stressed, things like street parties, the burning of effigies, and mock funerals and trials become all the more important precisely because of their flagrancy. They represent attempts to short-circuit narratives motored by "respect," "manners," and "decency"—the sort exemplified by etiquette expert Jean Broke-Smith: "[I]f people are politically anti-[Thatcher] I hope they will be kind enough to say they didn't agree with her, but they respect what she did. Now is not the time to churn up silliness or bring up bad points—it's good etiquette to let her rest and focus on her good points" (*BBC News* 2013a). Why, exactly?

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We take this "at-the-momentness" of death and offer as an antidote the "at-the-momentness" of performance. If death is a moment that shuts down and closes off a multiplicity of potential meanings by establishing certain narratives, performance is a moment that opens up myriad potential meanings and narratives. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff describe the performance of ritual as "a site and a means of experimental practice, of subversive poetics, of creative tensions and transformative action"; from such actions "individual and collective aspirations weave a thread of imaginative possibilities from which may emerge [...] new signs and meaning, conventions and intentions" (1993:xxix). Similarly, secular performance has long-held associations with protest and transgression, too numerous to cite. This history stems, in part, from the protective transience of performance; a blink-and-you-miss-it piece of agitprop theatre, such as those staged by troupes affiliated with the KPD (German Communist Party) in 1930s Berlin, being a safer way to transmit ideas of resistance to the rise of Nazism than distributing a bag full of pamphlets, for example (see Bodek 1997). But in 2013, the year Thatcher died, clandestine transience could hardly explain the potency and popularity of performance as protest. In fact, it is precisely the openness and the liveness of performative protests in the wake of Thatcher's death that has attracted the media's scrutiny and thereby publicized and preserved them for a world audience. We suggest these enduring, locally produced but globally witnessed performances gain their power by opening the possibility for something akin to ritual communitas and multivocal meaning-making.

Authority

Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death.

—Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller" ([1936] 1999:93)

Benjamin's famous words have ramifications in various directions when it comes to Margaret Thatcher, her death, and, much more broadly speaking, career politics. The first point has to do with death as narratological tool for the state. One might highlight, for example, Lyndon B. Johnson's use of John F. Kennedy's assassination to full political advantage, pushing through his "plans and programs [...] because they are right" (Johnson 1964). Michael Taussig puts it like this:

> The dead are a great source of magical élan, grace, and power. This has been present in many cultures since the first burial. Indeed Georges Bataille [...] argued from archaeological evidence and physical anthropology that the corpse is the origin of taboos, respect for the dead being what separates the human from the animal [...] Just imagine, then, the power that can accrue to the modern state, that great machine of death and war!" (in Strauss 2005)

Taussig points to the fictive quality of American foreign policy under George W. Bush, policy that seemed so plausible thanks to the emotional capital accrued by the 3,000 dead of 9/11 (Taussig 2006:6).

Margaret Thatcher, meanwhile, was among the least popular British premiers of all time, according to Gallup polls, prior to the fortuitous Argentinian invasion of the Falkland Islands on 2 April 1982 (in King 1985:113). (We recall the Liberal MP and temperance campaigner Sir Wilfrid Lawson: "It may be laid down as a rule that all wars are popular in England" [1909:138].) After Taussig, is it possible, in this instance, to make a connection between war and political currency, precisely because of the immanent storytelling potential of brave (read: dead) soldiers? This question was broached, obliquely, on 5 April, by Peter Allen, at the end of a short interview with the Prime Minister:

> THATCHER: I believe the British people are fully behind us in retaking those islands and sending the biggest fleet that's ever been mounted in peacetime, with the most marvelous professionally trained brave courageous soldiers and marines in order to

re-establish British sovereignty on those islands and to see that the islanders once again live under British rule.

ALLEN: Just as a final question, modern war is a very destructive business, do you think you'll retain that kind of support in the country if people start dying in large numbers, because that's really what we're confronting?

THATCHER: The test is not how many people are with you when you start out, but the test of resolve is whether you can stick to it, until the task be well and truly finished. I shall keep my resolve, the government will keep its resolve, I believe parliament will keep its resolve and I believe the British people will stick to that resolve firmly. (Margaret Thatcher Foundation 1982a)

This neat focus on resolve over effect was a classic Thatcher trick: "Crime is crime is crime," was her response to republican hunger-strikers at Maze Prison in Northern Ireland in 1981, 10 of whom died—adding, "it is not political" (see, for example, Hennessy 1997:261). Referring to the Falklands later in 1982 in a speech at the Institute of Electrical Engineers, Thatcher declared that "our generation has reason to be thankful that those noble and brave acts which brought fame and renown to Britain's name are matched by deeds of courage and valour in our time. And we saw that over the Falklands story" (Margaret Thatcher Foundation 1982b). Note "story."

A near-death experience is a great boon for the storyteller too. For example, the IRA's 1984 bombing of the Conservative Party conference at the Grand Hotel, Brighton, which Margaret Thatcher, unlike five of the conference-goers, survived. "Our first thoughts must at once be for those who died and for those who are now in hospital recovering from their injuries" insisted the Prime Minister the day after the attack, continuing:

> But the bomb attack clearly signified more than this. It was an attempt not only to disrupt and terminate our Conference; it was an attempt to cripple Her Majesty's democratically elected Government. That is the scale of the outrage in which we have all shared, and the fact that we are gathered here now—shocked, but composed and determined—is a sign not only that this attack has failed but that all attempts to destroy democracy by terrorism will fail. (Margaret Thatcher Foundation 1984)

"And now it must be business as usual" Thatcher announced a few moments later. Such "business" included criticism of the "outmoded Marxist doctrine about class warfare" and "the emergence of an organized revolutionary minority who are prepared to exploit industrial disputes, but whose real aim is the breakdown of law and order and the destruction of democratic parliamentary government." Thus Thatcher paired, with (near-) death's sanction, trade union action and mainland Irish Republican terrorist activity. It is a convincing story, one told by the left no less than the right: something called Democracy was under attack from all sides, and there was an "inevitability" about the emergence of a premier with "conviction." The last words of Thatcher's speech are: "Democracy will prevail" (Margaret Thatcher Foundation 1984). Business as usual.

Sympathy

So, when Conan Doyle, with most engaging disingenuousness, though with doubtful piety, invites the world to listen to his talks with his dead boy, we may only say "Sympathy stifles criticism," and pass on to cases where a deep and sacred emotion is not involved.

—*James M. Gillis,* False Prophets *(1925:69)*

One way the storytellers got to work in the days after 8 April 2013 was to invoke Thatcher's latter-day struggles—her battle with dementia and the death of her husband in 2003. Ed Miliband, for example, managed to cover both of those in one go in his mostly limp speech,

typical of the day, to the House of Commons on 10 April 2013 during the special "debate" on the "motion" (loosely defined), "That this House has considered the matter of tributes to the Rt Hon Baroness Thatcher of Kesteven LG OM": "And as a person, nothing became her so much as the manner of her final years. The loss of her beloved husband, Denis, and her struggle with illness. She bore both with the utmost dignity and courage" (*Hansard* 2013:col. 1617). The effect is that the moment of Thatcher's passing becomes all about the moment of Thatcher's passing, meaning it becomes all about the death of someone in her late 80s who was *only human after all*.

While it may be obvious, and perhaps may sound too much like Derrida, death can stymie analysis. Take Miliband, again by no means alone in providing a respectful "left" response to Margaret Thatcher's death, but useful to focus on due to his role as Leader of the Opposition: "Mr Speaker, debates about her and what she represented will continue for many years. This is a mark of her significance as a political leader. Someone with deep convictions, willing to act on them." Later he quotes Thatcher directly: "Politics is more when you have convictions than a matter of multiple manoeuvrings to get through the problems of the day." In a nutshell, here is what we might call the "Whatever one's view of her" response, as in (Miliband's words again) "Whatever one's view of her, Margaret Thatcher was a unique and towering figure. I disagree with much of what she did, but I respect what her death means to the many, many people who admired her, and I honour her personal achievements" (Hansard 2013: col 1617). This was the strongest trope in the moment of Margaret Thatcher's passing: to praise her "convictions"—whatever one's view of her.

There were as well numerous performative interventions. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the sole Member to make a speech on 10 April 2013 criticizing Margaret Thatcher, thereby ever so briefly derailing the real-time myth-making going on in the House, was the double Academy Award–winner, Glenda Jackson: "We were told that everything I had been taught to regard as a vice—and I still regard them as vices—was, in fact, under Thatcherism, a virtue: greed, selfishness, no care for the weaker, sharp elbows, sharp knees, all these were the way forward" (Hansard 2013:col. 1650). Tony Baldry's (Conservative MP for Banbury, Oxfordshire) point of order countered the criticism: "The conventions of the House in respect of those rare occasions on which the House chooses to make tributes to a person who has been deceased are well established. This is not, and has never been, a general debate on the memory of the person who has been deceased, but an opportunity for tributes" (col 1650). So the "debate," if ever there was any doubt, was a performance too, a sham, an exchange of stories on death's sanction. Who better to go off-script than an actor?

Even the Dead

Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead *will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.*

—Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" ([1940] 1999:247)

Our thumbnail sketch of what Tony Blair called "the moment of Margaret Thatcher's passing" is more like a negative-space drawing, concerned not with the "moment" at all, but with both the historical storytelling that made this a moment in the first place, and also the storytelling in the aftermath that sought to hush up history. The implications for historical meaning-making surrounding not speaking ill of the dead until it is too late are problematic, as Michel de Certeau made explicit: "writing places a population of the dead on stage [...] and speaks of the past only to inter it. Writing is a tomb that both honors and eliminates" (1988:99). Neither honoring nor eliminating, quite clearly, will suffice here.

Walter Benjamin, writing shortly before death by his own hand at Portbou on the French-Spanish border, said it is not the future that we are fighting for but the past, for the defeated

once-over and repeatedly. Implied here, surely, are two ideas: that the fight for the vanquished demands a mode of historical analysis that outperforms the performance of the ordinary; and that, fundamental to a reverse "victory," would be a sense that even the dead among the presently victorious are not safe either. Perhaps what is needed—contrary to Jean Broke-Smith's etiquette advice—is to churn up silliness and bring up bad points.

A number of performances created during the weeks of Thatcher's death and funeral—both in form and function—were acts of political resistance and attempts to establish or maintain a counter-narrative to that being established by the mainstream media and the government.

55 Funerals

The performance artist Tim Etchells, most famous for his work with Sheffield-based experimental theatre company Forced Entertainment, produced a text called *55 Funerals*, which he made available to download for free solely on 17 April 2013. The text is characteristic of Etchells's style—repetitive and list-like:

> COFFIN IN THE SHAPE OF THE FREE MARKET
> MOURNERS IN THE COLOUR OF TOXTETH
> MUSIC IN THE KEY OF SPITE
> NO FLOWERS
> THE ROUTE OF THE FUNERAL PROCESSION SPELLING OUT THE PHRASE
> "THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS SOCIETY"
> NO FLOWERS
> COFFIN IN THE SHAPE OF THE MINIMUM WAGE
> MOURNERS IN THE COLOUR OF PORT STANLEY
> MUSIC IN THE STYLE OF INDIFFERENCE
> NO FLOWERS
> THE ROUTE OF THE FUNERAL PROCESSION SPELLING OUT THE PHRASE
> "I OWE NOTHING TO WOMEN'S LIB"
> NO FLOWERS (Etchells 2013:2–5)

Etchells's text is performative in a number of ways. First, we expect Etchells, as a theatre-maker, to produce texts that are intended as blueprints for performance. The text's rhythmic and repetitive qualities beg to be read aloud. Secondly, the way that Etchells made his text available was performative in itself. The availability of the text was advertised on the SCUDD (Standing Conference of University Drama Departments) digital mailing list, a forum that is somewhat legendary for the performances of egos, advertisements, debates, and arguments that occur on it on an almost daily basis. Posting a message to the list carries aspects of performativity in that it is highly public, and doing so carries, for many, the same degree of trepidation, stage fright, or performance-related anxiety that is normally associated with a more conventional, stage performance. Others seem to use the list to deliberately cultivate certain personas; and although it is primarily used to advertise, recruit, research, and debate, upon occasion, we witness more explicitly performative uses, such as artist David Hughes's provocative skits in response to, for example, some unusual calls for papers. Yet what was noticeable about this forum of provocative, exhibitionist, politically engaged people, in the moment of Thatcher's passing, was their near-total silence on the matter. Etchells's text, the link to which was posted by his colleague Andrew Quick at the University of Lancaster, was the first related message, and it did not appear until 17 April 2013. Furthermore, though the inspiration behind Etchells's text is patently obvious, notably, Quick made no explicit mention of Thatcher in his email, which simply stated: "You might be interested in the following new text produced by Tim Etchells,

made available for download just for today." Also notable were the lack of public/on-list responses to Quick's email or to Etchells's work. In fact, there was just ours:

> Many thanks to Tim (and Andrew) for sharing his piece. I would be equally interested in hearing from any other artists and theatre-makers who marked yesterday by creating, participating in, or witnessing any texts, performances, rituals, commemorations, celebrations, or otherwise "theatrical" events. (Bush 2013)

There was just one in-public/on-list response to this, cynically but subtly probing the prevalent tone of respect for the elderly lady, who many argued should just be seen as someone's mother or grandmother: "Thank you Sophie for this intervention. In terms of sensitivity, I will miss a very dear aunt" (Ramsay 2013). The reluctance of the vast majority of the usually vocal SCUDD community to engage in any online debate, "performance," or "audience participation" around the event of Thatcher's death and funeral, despite the performative potential provided by Etchells's provocative text, is an interesting and unexplained phenomenon. Contrastingly, outside the academic community, there was a considerably more vocal response.

The Mock Trial

The Riverside Pub in Sheffield's industrial Don Valley is owned by the Point Blank theatre company. A highly successful venture, the pub helps to fund some of the company's activities and serves as a venue for a range of performances, from traditional theatre pieces to music, stand-up comedy, and spoken-word events. On the evening of 17 April 2013, the downstairs bar hosted a special event organized by Deborah Egan, a veteran of the Sheffield arts scene and manager of her own performance venue, the Blue Shed. Members of the audience, comprising invited guests and those who just happened to be drinking there that night, were asked to testify "for" or "against" Thatcher.[1] Egan acted as judge and was dressed accordingly. A notable testimony came from freelance creative producer Andrew Loretto, who cited cuts to the arts and losing the eyesight in one eye after a homophobic beating, which he blames on Section 28,[2] in his list of Thatcher's crimes. There were musical numbers, poems, and straightforward diatribes. After Thatcher was found guilty, we moved into the pub garden where a dummy, clad in Conservative Party blue as Thatcher often was, hung from a tree. We beat the Thatcher piñata with a baseball bat until it released its hoard: not candy, but coals. We then returned inside for a rousing performance of "Margaret Thatcher's Dead" from local band Don Valley and the Rotherhides.

This event invited participation from a range of different people, although it was organized by theatre-makers to take place in a venue used for and associated with performance. The event was further inscribed with a range of semiotic markers of performance: the judge's costume; a microphone for participants to speak or sing into; and the carefully constructed "prop" of the Thatcher piñata that carried with it not only a first order of meaning as a "Guy," or hated effigy, upon which anger could be vented, but the deeper, more considered symbolism of the coals inside: the lost spoils of the industry Thatcher decimated.[3]

1. Sophie Bush was there as an invited guest.

2. In the UK, Section 28 of the Local Government Act of 1988 was a homophobic ruling that prohibited local councils in England and Wales from "promoting" homosexuality, contributing towards continued confusion and ignorance about these matters and resulting in inadequate provision of LGBT services.

3. It is a common British custom to burn an effigy or "Guy" on a bonfire on 5 November, or Bonfire Night. This tradition stems from the public humiliation and execution of Guy Fawkes and associated conspirators after their failed attempt to blow up the Houses of Parliament in what became known as the Gunpowder Plot of 1605.

The Mock Funeral

In a similar vein, although more publicized, was the mock funeral held in the ex-mining town of Goldthorpe, also on 17 April 2013. An effigy of Thatcher in a prop coffin was paraded through the streets on a horse-drawn "hearse." It was burned on a pyre, alongside floral wreathes of the kind that usually spell out "DAD" or "NAN" but here spelled "SCAB." Thousands gathered to watch, cheer, and chant: "Maggie, Maggie, Maggie—Burn, Burn, Burn!" Then there were fireworks. Though not orchestrated by theatre professionals like the mock trial in Sheffield, the Goldthorpe funeral was overtly theatrical. Martin Smith reported in the *Sheffield Star*:

> With an atmosphere somewhere between a championship play-off final and a political rally the old "Here We Go, Here We Go, Here We Go" anthem of those long summer-of-'84 picket line battles rang out again. [...] "It wants some coal on it," shouts one man to gales of laughter as the landlord of the Rusty Dudley pub tries to light the mock funeral pyre. (2013:8)

Both this event and the Sheffield mock trial bear many of the hallmarks of what Mikhail Bakhtin calls the carnivalesque: a subversion of the official, sanctioned performance of Thatcher's actual funeral, taking place at the very same time on the streets of London, through the use of humor and chaos; a burlesque of the "serious ritual" of Thatcher's real cremation (1984:5). Much of the discussion surrounding the Thatcher death celebrations has centered on debates about "bad taste" and "etiquette," ignoring the fact that, as Bakhtin states, the "basis of laughter which gives form to all carnival rituals frees them completely from all religious and ecclesiastical dogmatism, from all mysticism and piety" (7). Furthermore, the very function of the carnival is to overturn restrictive structures such as etiquette in order to make way for the eccentric and the sacrilegious, and to allow voices and energies that are normally suppressed to be heard. The "mundo reverso" or "world upside-down" created by carnival or the carnivalesque is a space that permits ideas and received "truths" to be examined and contested on equal terms, and for their "gay relativity" to be exposed (11). The carnival, Bakhtin asserts,

> celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed. (10)

Furthermore, Bakhtin suggests that in previous societies, such as the early Roman state, the "funeral ritual was also composed of lamenting (glorifying) and deriding the deceased," and that both these responses "were equally sacred, equally 'official.'" Thus, an "official" funeral was multivocal and served as a cathartic event on a number of levels, and for a number of different "stakeholders." "But," Bakhtin continues, "in the definitely consolidated state and class structure" of the modern West, "such an equality of the two aspects became impossible" (6). In other words, in Britain in April 2013, while one "prevailing truth" was being established, an image of Thatcher's career "immortalized and completed," for those who opposed or objected to Thatcher's politics, there was no official or sanctioned channel through which to express such feelings. Rather, in places such as Goldthorpe and Sheffield, "unsanctioned" (and heavily criticized) carnivalesque performances provided a much needed outlet for those who felt deeply estranged from the narratives of respect, admiration, and sympathy that were being established by all the official organs of the state as the correct response to the moment of Thatcher's passing. One participant at the Goldthorpe "funeral," Carol Ward, reflected on her reasons for attending the event:

> The strike days were tough times and we'll never forget. I decided I wanted to come and be part of it again. It's all bad memories apart from the togetherness but when the pits shut it took the heart out of the place. I'm not an aggressive person or confrontational but it made my blood boil remembering the strike. You can talk to people who

> went through it and it makes the hair on your neck stand up. The government just abandoned us. They didn't live in the North and they didn't care about those who did. (in Smith 2013:8)

A number of points are crucial here. First: events such as the miners' strikes, for those who lived through them, are still a very tangible reality. Note Ward's language: "made my blood boil"; "makes the hair on your neck stand up." This is not, as it may be for young scholars or London politicians, an oblique political issue, but, like performance, a lived, felt experience. Howard Brenton refers to those who celebrated Thatcher's resignation in 1990 as "excited survivors" (1995:73). This term is important; no one questions the etiquette of "survivors" celebrating the death or downfall of a figure responsible for their suffering; think Hitler, Saddam Hussein, Colonel Gaddafi. To apply the term "survivor" to those who suffered under Thatcher is controversial; these people weren't tortured or gassed, but who decides what degree of suffering is worthy of the term? The people of communities like Goldthorpe undoubtedly suffered under Thatcher; why should they not be thought of as survivors?

Second: Ward's comments make it clear that the people of these communities felt "abandoned" and ostracized by their nation at large, but that at an otherwise terrible time, the one positive memory was the "togetherness" that was created among themselves, a togetherness, no doubt, emphasized by their political exclusion. Finally, she asserts that celebrating Thatcher's death provided an opportunity to rekindle that togetherness; to be, in Ward's words "part of *it* again" (emphasis added). In other words, these performances provided not only the carnivalesque opportunity for the transgression and contestation of prominent narratives, but also for something akin to the communitas of ritual performance, as explored by anthropologists and theorists such as Victor Turner and Richard Schechner. That is, a state in which participants "feel at one with their comrades; personal and social differences are set aside. People are uplifted, swept away, taken over" (Schechner 2013:70). Of course, the Goldthorpe mock funeral cannot be considered pure ritual, but it does sit on the continuum described by Schechner in his chapter "From Ritual to Theatre and Back," and fits into his description of ritualistic, avant-garde performance:

> These experiments, still relatively scattered and tentative, and always being pressed back by a hostile establishment [...] address themselves to the audience not as sticks of money-paying individual strangers, or as forced participants in a show of solidarity (as in mass rallies, parades, or coercive church-going), but as a community, even a congregation. The goal of such performances is to entertain, to have fun, and to create what Victor Turner calls "spontaneous communitas," the dissolution of boundaries shutting people off from each other. The resulting experience is of collective celebration. ([1977] 2003:156)

Conclusions

To many, the celebratory and/or critical performances that marked Thatcher's death will always look ugly: performances of petulant and impotent hate. But what many of these critics failed to understand is that those who participated in them were not celebrating an individual human death, but marking something with a far deeper, symbolic, almost mythical value. Nor were these participants blind to the fact that Thatcher's death was not, in itself, a tangible victory, but rather a chance to re-enact the previous partial victory of Thatcher's resignation. When Thatcher resigned, in November 1990, London was hit by "an air of disbelief and celebration" (*Bryan Times* 1990:3), coming not only from "jubilant leftists" (West 1990), but, more surprisingly, from the city's financial district: "We've had two days of partying in the office. A lot of it is 'ding-dong the witch is dead' sort of stuff," reported Julia Meehan, an analyst in a consulting firm (in *Bryan Times* 1990:3). It is interesting to note then that even the use of this song, originally from the 1939 film musical *The Wizard of Oz*, which reached number two in the UK

singles chart during the week of Thatcher's death, was a reenactment, echoing a time when it was used to celebrate not Thatcher's actual death, but the symbolic death of her resignation.

Like those who celebrated in April 2013, the November 1990 partiers were fully aware that Thatcher's departure from office was only a nominal victory. Howard Brenton describes "a small celebration [...] before we all got stuck in again [...] as if the curse had been lifted, if only for a day" (1995:73). But, also like those in 2013, the celebrations surrounding the resignation fulfilled a need for communitas. "An eminent theatre director," remembers Brenton, "a very level-headed man—rang me laughing with joy. 'I've just been down to Downing Street,' he said, 'to see her off the premises. It seemed the only place to be'" (73). For these people, the news that Thatcher was gone was not enough; they were compelled to be physically present, to participate in the performance of her resignation in the same physical space in which it was taking place. The need to go to a specific place to mark an occasion alongside other people doing the same is a crucial feature of both ritual and performance.

Viewed in this light, the celebrations held upon Thatcher's death cannot be read simply as a response to her actual physical death. Rather, through their use of the semiotics of performance, they served as an opportunity to invoke and reenact the earlier partial victory of her resignation. This is particularly clear in the reports of the street party held in Brixton on the day of Thatcher's death, which cite a "man brandishing an original newspaper billboard from 1990 announcing Thatcher's resignation" (*Jamaica Observer* 2013). These reenactments allowed their participants to come together as a community around the fire (so to speak); to teach their children why to fear old dragons; to acknowledge where the new ones lie; to consider how best to conquer them; and to steel themselves for the next fight. In short, they allowed participants to create their own narratives that challenge the authority of death.

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