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## UNITED KINGDOM! (PART ONE) Radical Television Drama Before and During Thatcher

Without doubt the finest British television drama has usually emerged from those writers seeking to challenge the prevailing establishment view, explore the inequalities within society or push at the boundaries of morality and taste – the so called “radical” dramatists.

This season examines the changes in “Radical” drama as renowned writers and producers reacted to the Thatcherite revolution and explored the divisions underpinning British society since the 1960s – a timely way to mark the 30th anniversary of Margaret Thatcher coming to power.

Beginning in the 1960s, *United Kingdom!* looks at the roots of the radical TV drama movement, its consolidation in the 70s and examines the challenge of responding to Margaret Thatcher’s prevailing right wing orthodoxy.

From *Up the Junction* to *United Kingdom*, Part One of the season, which runs throughout November, offers a chance to see the very best in radical drama across three decades before and during the Thatcher years, and to assess the impact the Thatcher government had on television drama.

November highlights include a focus on some of the early productions of the 60s by **Ken Loach**, **Tony Garnett**, and **Dennis Potter**, finishing in the mid 80s with works by **Stephen Poliakoff** and **Alan Bleasdale** and culminating in the debate *TV Sold to the Highest Bidder - Thatcher’s Television Revolution*, a panel discussion focusing on how Thatcher changed the television industry and the consequences for radical TV drama. On the panel will be **Michael Grade**, **Tony Garnett**, **David Rose** and **Alasdair Milne**, all of whom experienced at first hand the changes the Thatcher government imposed on broadcasters, particularly with regards to perceived hostility to the BBC and the restructure of the ITV franchises.

There will also be an illustrated lecture in November, with film and television historian John Hill considering how television drama responded to the industrial conflicts of the late 1960s and early 1970s – through an examination of *The Big Flame* and *Leeds United!*

The season continues in December (*United Kingdom! Part 2: Radical TV Drama, Thatcher and Beyond*) by looking at Thatcher’s legacy and the way television drama responded to Britain at war (*The Falklands Play* and *Tumbledown*). It moves on to examine the mistrust and cynicism engendered by the reaction to New Labour and the sense of betrayal as evidenced in *The Deal* and *The Government Inspector*. One of the highlights of December will be *After Thatcher: The New*

**Radical Drama**, a panel discussion examining the response of radical dramatists to the rise of New Labour and the changing definition of what it means to be a “radical” TV dramatist now. On the panel will be writer **Paul Abbott**, director **Peter Kosminsky**, Head of Drama Channel 4 **Liza Marshall**, Producer **Kenith Trodd**, and the writer/creator of **Skins**, **Brian Elsley**.

Many screenings will include talks by writers, producers and directors such as **Ken Trodd**, **Colin Welland**, **Peter Flannery** and **Margaret Matheson**.

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**PROGRAMME**

**Events**

**Panel Discussion & Q&A: TV Sold to the Highest Bidder - Thatcher's Television Revolution.** 75 min  
In the 80s the BBC was accused of left wing bias and the licence fee itself was questioned, whilst ITV saw its whole franchise system change. An eminent panel working in broadcasting at that critical time – **Michael Grade**, Exec Chairman ITV; **Alasdair Milne**, Former DG BBC TV; **Tony Garnett**, Producer; **David Rose**, former Head of Drama BBC Birmingham – examine the impact of Thatcherism on the TV industry and radical drama in particular. Chairperson **Raymond Snoddy**.  
**Wed 18 Nov 20:45 NFT1**

**John Hill: From *The Big Flame* to *Leeds United!***

In this illustrated lecture, film and television historian John Hill (from Royal Holloway, University of London) will consider how television drama responded to the industrial conflicts of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Drawing on programme clips, Hill will discuss how these two productions promoted a radical political perspective, provoked controversy and proved a headache for the establishment.

**Thu 19 Nov 18:30 Studio**

This lecture will be followed by a repeat screening of *The Big Flame* at 20:45 NFT2

**Screenings**

Double Bill:

***Diary of a Young Man* Ep 1. *Survival or they came to a City*, BBC 1964**

Director Ken Loach. With Victor Henry, Richard Moore, Nerys Hughes. 42 min

A Brechtian style fable of two lads who arrive to seek their fortune in London. Stylistically advanced - using a mix of stills, dream sequences and freeze frames - this script by Troy Kennedy Martin & John McGrath exploits humour to get its message across, proving “radical” can also be funny.

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***The Wednesday Play: Up the Junction* BBC 1965.**

Dir Ken Loach. With Geraldine Sherman, Carol White, Michael Standing. 75 min.

A warm, human but controversial drama about the grim realities facing young people living near Clapham Junction station in South West London, and one of the few plays from the period written by a woman, Nell Dunn.

**Wed 4 Nov 18:20 NFT2**

***The Wednesday Play: The Big Flame* BBC 1969.**

Dir Ken Loach. With Norman Rossington, Godfrey Quigley, Peter Kerrigan. 85 min.

This gripping drama follows striking dockers as they take on their bosses, their union and the government to stage a worker takeover of the Liverpool docks. Filmed on location in a drama-

documentary style, this is one of the definitive collaborations between Loach, producer Tony Garnett and writer Jim Allen.

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On stage & Q&A with producer **Tony Garnett**.

#### **Wed 4 Nov 20:40 NFT2**

Double Bill:

**The Wednesday Play: Vote, Vote, Vote for Nigel Barton** BBC 1965.

Dir Gareth Davies. With Keith Barron, Valerie Gearon, John Bailey. 75 min.

Dennis Potter's swinging attack on the party political system has his eponymous anti-hero stand as a Labour candidate in a parliamentary by-election in this follow up to *Stand Up, Nigel Barton*.

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**Play for Today: All Good Men**, BBC 1973

Director Michael Lindsay-Hogg. With Bill Fraser, Ronald Pickup, Jack Shepherd, Francis de la Tour. 63min

When a TV producer arrives at the home of a Labour Lord, old family wounds are opened and his own son betrays him. A blistering polemic on the left/right socialist struggle; only writer Trevor Griffiths could sustain the argument with such dramatic intensity.

#### **Sun 8 Nov 16:00 NFT2**

**Play for Today: Leeds – United!** BBC 1974.

Dir Roy Battersby. With Lynne Perrie, Elizabeth Spriggs, Bert Gaunt. 117 min.

This compelling drama charts the fight of women clothing workers in Leeds for better pay in 1970. Shot on location as a fine example of social realism, it portrays a strong community of women in a bitter struggle with their bosses and union leaders.

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On stage discussion & Q&A with producer **Kenith Trodd, writer Colin Welland and director Roy Battersby**.

#### **Wed 25 Nov 18:20 NFT2**

**Scum** BBC 1977

Director Alan Clarke. With Ray Winstone, David Threlfall, Phil Daniels, Martin Philips. 73min

A devastating critique of the borstal institution, involving scenes of male rape and extreme violence. The BBC banned the original transmission in 1977. Although it went on to be remade as a critically acclaimed film, this original TV version would not be screened on British television until some 14 years later. A truly groundbreaking production in its courageous refusal to compromise on the issues at stake.

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On stage discussion & Q&A with Producer **Margaret Matheson & Writer Roy Minton**

#### **Fri 13 Nov 18:20 NFT2**

**Play for Today: Bloody Kids** BBC/Blacklion Films 1980

Director Stephen Poliakoff. With Derrick O'Connor, Gary Holton, Richard Thomas, Peter Clark. 88min

When a dysfunctional child's fantasy, to fake being stabbed by his best friend, is put into action both kids are enveloped in a nightmare and things spin rapidly out of control. Poliakoff creates a disturbing world of disaffected youth prowling the night time streets where reality is skewed to heighten the psychological impact. A dreamlike state that permeates much of his work since and which was perfectly suited to the sense of alienation being expressed in the early 80s.

#### **Mon 16 Nov 20:40 NFT2**

**Play for Today: The Black Stuff** BBC 1980

Director Jim Goddard. With Bernard Hill, Michael Angelis, Tom Georgeson, Alan Igbon. 100min

Bleasdale's play graphically illustrated the reality for a group of men struggling to keep their head above water. Through their comradeship and humour we come to care about these characters and in Yossa, Bleasdale created an *Everyman* figure whose desire simply to make something of himself and "be noticed" is profoundly moving. The play was to spawn the hugely influential series *Boys from the Blackstuff*, that touched something deep in the collective psyche.

#### **Wed 18 Nov 18:20 NFT1**

**Play for Today: United Kingdom** BBC 1981.

Dir Roland Joffé. With Val McLane, Ricky Tomlinson, Peter Kerrigan, Colin Welland. 125 min.  
Prescient drama about a left-wing council being removed from office for overspending on public services and heading on a violent collision course with an authoritarian chief constable. Powerful central performances and a challenging script from self-confessed Trotskyite Jim Allen make for strong politics and gripping viewing.

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On stage discussion & Q&A with **producer Kenith Trodd**.

**Sun 29 Nov 16:00 NFT2**

Double Bill:

**Oi For England** Central TV 1982

Director Tony Smith. With Neil Pearson, Adam Kotz, Richard Platt, Ian Mercer. 54min  
Trevor Griffiths play tackles a disintegrating Britain, the opportunism of the BNP and the alienation felt by young white working class males. Four lads seek to escape their dead end lives through punk music, but when offered their first break by a mysterious man is the political price too high to pay?

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**Made In Britain** Central TV 1983

Director Alan Clarke. With Tim Roth, Terry Richards, Bill Stewart, Eric Richard (73min)  
This Prix Italia winning production, written by David Leyland, saw Tim Roth give a coruscating performance as Trevor, the disaffected skinhead for whom authority of any kind means nothing. Unnerving in its intensity, Roth charts Trevor's self destruction with an uncanny sense of reality.

**Thu 26 Nov 20:40 NFT2**

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

In **United Kingdom! Part Two – Radical Television Drama: Thatcher and Beyond**, we explore the changes that take place in radical drama as a new generation of writers emerges with less connection to the left wing ideology of the 60's and 70's and whose craft was more likely to have been honed on writing soaps than overtly political dramas. Part Two will run from **1-31 December**.

**Booking information**

The BFI Southbank is open to all. BFI members are entitled to a discount on all tickets. BFI Southbank Box Office tel: 020 7928 3232. Unless otherwise stated, tickets are £9.00, concs £7.60. Website [www.bfi.org.uk/southbank](http://www.bfi.org.uk/southbank)

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**\*\*\* PICTURE DESK \*\*\***

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