



SIMULATING EVENTS AS THEY HAPPEN: SPECTACLE, IDEOLOGY, AND READYMADE BOOGEYMEN - THE 2011 AUGUST RIOTS AND THE MEDIA

CHRISTIAN GARLAND

INSTITUT FÜR KRITISCHE THEORIE DEPARTMENT, FREE UNIVERSITY BERLIN

Abstract

The 2011 August riots that combusted with the police shooting of Mark Duggan in Tottenham, North London, (Laville, 2011; Vasagar, 2011) spread literally like wildfire to cities and towns across England in the space of a matter of hours. At the time, much was written about the supposedly ‘nihilistic’ and ‘opportunistic’ nature of the events, and how, unlike previous urban rebellions, they could not be considered to have any ‘political’ dimension, although there were some notable exceptions to such blanket dismissals, which were offered en bloc from even ‘radical’ quarters, not say media and academic ones. The article seeks to offer an analysis and critique of the media narrative of the events in English cities that August, with the aim of contributing to their demystification and better understanding, more than three years on. The article is written from a Marxist perspective, heavily drawing on Critical Theory and using content analysis and an ideological critique of the media to develop its argument. In the three years since the riots of 2011, the production of literature on those events has been fairly continuous, but largely oblivious to their significance, or just why they received such blanket and unequivocal condemnation. This article, in keeping with its origins as one of ‘the notable exceptions’ at the time makes an interrogative critique of the media’s part in ‘simulating events as they happen’.

Keywords

riots; rebellions; media; ideology

Corresponding author:

Christian Garland, Email: christiangarland@hotmail.com

The August riots of 2011 which began in London after the death of another black man at the hands of police combusted on the night of Saturday 6th August, and swept across London and the rest of England over the course of the next four nights; and from the time of the first explosion of accumulated rage in Tottenham that Saturday night, the media relayed its own version of events, complete with a ‘factual’ narrative of key actors, good guys (‘ordinary people’), bad guys (‘mindless thugs’ and ‘criminal gangs’), and readymade ‘real-time’ coverage of events ‘as they happened’.

The BBC and all other television news offered the voice of liberal ‘impartiality’ (Berry, 2013), the first and last line of defence against any serious critique both of the selective presentation of events, and the reasons for this presentation - itself a version of events, skewed and spun in more or less explicit ideological terms. Meanwhile the right-wing tabloid press, openly reactionary in their hysterical denunciation of the riots, really got into their stride as events unfolded, over the Monday and Tuesday evenings, rushing to relay the most knee-jerk law and order clichés they could, all the time encouraging talk of maximum repression, which sure enough the state was on hand to provide.

As the riots spread across London on Sunday 7th August, in at least 40+ areas of the city, then across England, the favoured media maxim kicked into play: ‘fear, fear, fear’, and the division of the country into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ came into its own: those burning and looting were an underclass of ‘feral youths’ in ‘lawless gangs’, completely out of control, taking everything they could, and laughing at all that ‘decent law-abiding citizens’ held in high regard. This paper seeks to offer an analysis and critique of the media narrative of the events in English cities that August, with the aim of contributing to their demystification and better understanding, more than three years on. As will become quickly apparent, the article is written from a Marxist perspective, heavily drawing on Critical Theory and using content analysis and an ideological critique of the media to develop its argument.

The events themselves completely overtook analysis, the media being left behind, as *social media* facilitated an immediacy between participants and observers alike previously unheard of and not really comprehended until many months later. However, whilst social media had the communicative immediacy mentioned, it is important to understand that as with the UK riots of July 1981 - almost thirty years ago to the month - when CB radio was half-heartedly found to be the ‘cause’ of the rapid spread and ‘coordination’ of events, (History is Made at Night, 2011; Aufheben, 2012) it was not the catalyst anymore than it could be seen as facilitating ‘organisation’ of what were essentially spontaneous events. The fact that participants in London, Birmingham, Manchester, and many other places used BlackBerry Messenger to keep in touch with each other, much as they do day-to-day, as with SMS texts, says nothing at all about BBM or mobile phones being the ‘catalyst’, or ‘key to organisation’ for the collective endeavour made by those sending such communications to each other. On the Tuesday of the 9th however, *The Independent’s* tabloid-size version *i* offered, “Rioters kept in contact with each other planning their attacks, on BlackBerry Messenger. BlackBerry is in talks with police about how to combat the way the encrypted service is being misused” (*i*, 2011).

At the time, unsurprisingly perhaps, the riots’ more nihilistic excesses - were, and to some extent still are all this time later - the major focus for television and the press: all news reports including the more ‘serious’, ‘weightier’ news channels and programmes such as BBC News 24, Newsnight, and Channel 4 News, were sure to emphasise the ‘extreme violence’ displayed in London, and other cities, seemingly unprovoked. Similarly, the broadsheet ‘quality’ press were, in the immediate aftermath, quick to provide formulaic answers to their speculative questions on what could possibly be up with our society, whilst an army of op-ed columnists were on hand

to provide readymade solutions, along with tame academics to provide ‘expert’ insight for the bewildered public. Again, in the very first fallout there appeared government plans for those convicted to ‘lose their benefits’ - neatly seized on by the media, television and radio especially - and relayed with the subtext being that this offered evidence that those involved in the events were all unemployed - and unemployable - benefit claimants, another favourite group targeted as a social ‘other’ by politicians and journalists. This was further richly confectioned with threats to serve eviction notices on those in local authority-owned housing; a disingenuous way of trying to isolate those involved in the riots as the ‘other’, an ‘enemy within’ for the ‘decent law-abiding majority’ to scapegoat, even though such fantasy boogeymen do not actually exist. Once again, the media faithfully went to work in helping fabricate this mythological social beast, even as a quite different and far more complex picture of British society emerged in the courts.

The language used in news reports at the time is illustrative of what the mass media essentially are, and who they serve, put bluntly: vested interests of wealth and power. That the riots were the result of decades of collective misery in a class society based on market relations upheld and maintained by the state, cannot be ventured in even the mildest terms, and should it ever appear to be being made, must be discredited and rubbished at all costs. A case in point would be the BBC’s Fiona Armstrong and her disgraceful treatment of Darcus Howe¹ for having the temerity to suggest that these riots might involve a little more than ‘greed’ and ‘criminal gangs’ seeking to create chaos and exploit it for their own ends, something which hedge fund managers are of course used to doing, but whose creation of chaos and opportunist exploitation of it for their own ends remains legal, and thus beyond question, at least beyond calls for greater regulation and other hang-wringing liberal platitudes of ‘corrupt’ (financial) capitalism ‘out of control.’

The media narrative of the ‘normal’ conditions of everyday life being ‘under siege’, was told of course, using tabloid sensationalism but also via far more subtle, and in many ways even more disingenuous, ‘serious’ journalistic props. Further examples of what is meant by this would be *The Guardian*’s Sandra Laville, whose column on the 12th August, speculated “on how close the police came to firing plastic bullets” (Laville, *ibid.*) British police have always had the power to use plastic bullets, and do not need any ‘special authorization’ to do so from Parliament - much less David Cameron ‘giving the order to shoot’ (*ibid.*) The article calls on the evil twins of technical pedantry and ambiguity - on a permanent, and lucrative retainer with the media, PR and advertising industries - to create a story out of nothing: using the indefinite article it is careful to state, “In the operations room the acting Met Commissioner, Tim Godwin, and his management team knew every tactic had to be considered”, but this doesn’t appear until the sixth paragraph. (*ibid.*) It is very much a case of ‘could have, may have, might have been’, but the late and subtly glib disclaimer that ambiguity is in use, finds its obverse in the technical pedantry that the disclaimer is: the piece has served its purpose, that being to fuel “the addiction to fear and the securitarian obsession” in which the media are a primary actor in helping facilitate (Bauman, 2006).

The other example of media sophistries analysed here are comments from *The Guardian*’s editorial of Tuesday 9th August. Whilst making the standard editorial reflex of the events “still having to be understood, though not in any way excused or justified”, the leader comment also notes, “The riots are the product of the lives which the rioters choose or feel constrained to live” (*Guardian*, 2011) This comment which makes unexpected - and doubtless unintentional - critical use of a materialist analysis, returns to form however, with its own flatly contradictory recognition that any apparent causes for the events of August 2011 could not be attributed to any of the range of possible reasons cited, because it would “be too glib” (*ibid.*).

1 This ‘interview’ with Darcus Howe, a distinguished writer and broadcaster, is extraordinary in its reactionary vulgarity: Armstrong - who cannot even get his name right - uses the short non-dialogue as a propaganda exercise for the state, making clear the BBC’s own mandate as much as her own career ambitions within it.

‘Looting Things that they’ve Never Had, and Taking What they Can Never Afford’ (‘Social Meltdown’: 2011)

The sheer scale of the riots, and indeed the mass looting which took place - not something seriously seen in earlier, similar events in the UK in the 80s or 90s, and having the only and in many ways vastly different example of LA ’92 for comparison - was something the media could not have expected, even in their wildest fantasies of ‘apocalypse now’ scenarios. The speed with which events spread - literally like wildfire - left the media behind, as did the use of mobile communications, specifically BlackBerry messenger - ironically the ultimate tool of business executives - while social media sites such as YouTube provided alternative and in many cases, more accurate recording of events (‘Social Meltdown’, 2011; ‘London Riots’, 2011). First-hand street-level accounts have thrown light on the harsh reality that the riots in London and across the country were one response to the daily misery of life in this society, the daily reality for the majority: the misery of property relations, a non-life dictated by market forces and their perpetuation of the relentless struggle for material existence.

Initially, much was made of the rioters and looters being a ‘feral criminal underclass’, with both tabloid and broadsheet journalists warming to the task, but no sooner had the first editions been printed, and the first experts assembled on Channel 4 and BBC News, than it emerged that some of those first arrested, and charged, were actually things like teaching assistants, trainee social workers, and Olympic ambassadors (Rogers & Evans, 2011) at some of the first convictions included not only those employed, but those with ‘professional’ jobs, or in education, badly threw the media’s well-rehearsed script that it was simply about ‘gangs’² and a lumpen criminal underclass ‘outside society’, just as post-riots Britain had to be seen to be ‘fighting back against lawlessness’. This ‘fight back’ found a stage managed and depressingly predictable media event in ‘local residents’ showing their ‘community spirit’ sweeping up debris and wielding brooms for full folksy effect: photo opportunities for Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London, were many of course, and utilised to the fullest (Davies, Topping, Ball, & Sample, 2011).

Unlike in 1981 - well before the author’s time - no serious attempt could be made to racialize these events either³: in all the known disturbances, the rioters and looters were both black and white in nearly equal measure⁴. Nor was it feasibly possible to simply dismiss the rioters as kids - in Hackney in London, those pelting the police with bricks and bottles were 20, 30, and even 40 somethings too. They were/are not scared in the slightest, because they had (and have) literally nothing to lose. On Saturday 6th August, when Tottenham exploded after the police killing of Mark Duggan, news reports emphasised the ‘criminality’ of his past and made continual mention of his ‘character’, again deliberately overlooking the fact that whether he had been known to

2 In fact ‘gangs’ were proven later not to have been actors at all. Individual gang members did indeed participate in some of the events, but as individuals, not as part of the gang they were affiliated with, just as of those arrested and charged 87% nationally, and 81% in London, had no gang links at all. ‘UK riots analysis reveals gangs did not play pivotal role’, Travis, Alan. *The Guardian*, Monday 24th October 2011. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/oct/24/riots-analysis-gangs-no-pivotal-role> .

3 The reactionary ‘post-political’ popular historian, David Starkey tried his best to do just that, but in an especially invidious - and class conscious - way, claiming on BBC’s *Newsnight*, “The whites have become black”, taking examples of dialogue from participants in the riots spoken in Multicultural London English (MLE), the authentic urban dialect of working class youth that is richly inflected with slang, and in particular Jamaican Patois, to ‘prove’ his point; the unwanted intervention leading to a storm of complaints to the BBC. Quinn, Ben. *The Guardian* 13th August 2011 <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/aug/13/david-starkey-claims-whites-black>.

4 (IPPC: Deaths in or following custody: An examination of the cases 1998/99 - 2008/09) http://www.ipcc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Documents/research_stats/Deaths_In_Custody_Report_0811.pdf.

the police, or had been a nurse, teacher, or social worker, that makes no difference at all: he was shot dead by police; and “applying labels to people is quite fatuous,” (BBC News 24, 2011) as a community voice noted at the time, but it was and is the standard policy of the media’s news agenda.

In the unfolding five days of rioting, ‘factual’ content of news reporting could be seen for the simulated reality it was in the selective presentation of information surrounding Duggan’s death: it was not at all clear at this stage, whether he had had a gun himself, let alone fired at police, let alone fired first, yet all news reports were careful to edit this together to make it *seem* that it was clear he had died because the police were in fear of their own lives, and opened fire merely to defend themselves, after he had opened fire first, thus putting together a selective presentation of known facts in a very specific order. The viewer or reader being left to ‘join-the-dots’ in making their ‘own’ conclusion: he of course had a gun, it was loaded, and he was shooting at police, and anyway he had a criminal record.

In January 2014 the jury in the case of Duggan’s death came to the very contradictory verdict that Duggan had indeed been unarmed at the time he was shot dead by police but had also been ‘lawfully killed’. Indeed, as was noted at the time of this strange verdict:

To paraphrase the philosopher Brian Massumi, the pre-emptive doctrine utilized by state sponsored manhunts works because the non-existence of what has not actually happened, but *might* one day happen becomes more real than reality due to the *affective nature of fear*. The felt reality of threat legitimates pre-emptive action, once and for all. “Any action taken to pre-empt a threat from emerging into a clear and present danger is legitimated by the affective fact of fear, actual facts aside” (54, 2010). This is what Massumi has dubbed the “politics of everyday fear”, the way in which fear is harnessed in order to create docile subjects who are willing to surrender sovereignty and control. (Faramelli, 2014)

Later that month, the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPPC) issued a belated response on the fact that it had at the time claimed Duggan had ‘shot first’ and the police returned fire, noting - almost two and a half years later - “A member of our staff wrongly led the media to believe that he had fired at police officers” (BBC News 24, 2014). Not that long after in March, it emerged that a photo of Mark Duggan that had been in wide circulation at the time of the riots, was revealed to have in fact been ‘cropped’ in August 2011. The ‘original’ photo was far from the tampered version in circulation at the time:

Why does he look like a moody gangster in so many photos? A signature picture of his sullen scowl is endlessly reprinted in the press, but this ubiquitous image has been artfully cropped; the original shows him standing in a cemetery holding a heart-shaped memorial plaque to the stillborn child he and Simone lost, which casts his expression in an altogether different light. “But they never show that, do they?”
(Duggan, 2014)

The use of such simulated reality is intentional, and has the aim of distracting and diverting attention away from the actual facts and any critical awareness of them as they stand and more importantly, *why* they are the way they are. The refracted media optic of ‘live’ events makes use of this (very) selective presentation of information in order to give an *image* that supposedly (re)

presents ‘how things are’, and that of course begs the question: why, for what purpose, and to serve whose interests? Indeed, in critically analysing the media’s coverage of the riots, it is possible to once more see the evil twins of technical pedantry and ambiguity hard at work: making something sound either much better or much worse than it actually is through straightforward ambiguity, but underwritten by the contextual fallacy of selective presentation, and indeed the ‘small print’ of technical pedantry.

The media can be said to make use of specific social problems as ‘headlines’ reduced to fragmentary, de-contextualised sound bites: the riots were the result of ‘ethnic tensions’, though it is not at all clear who such tensions were between exactly, and despite the fact - as has been noted already - that the rioters were close to being roughly black and white in equal number, so that particular explanation was ditched relatively early on, as clearly just being too obviously unfeasible, and as such, the riots being an expression of ‘criminal opportunism’ rapidly became the favoured explanation. The real question of why between 1998 and 2011 there have been at least 333 deaths at the hands of police, and no convictions⁵ is never of course broached; any more than can the question of why another black man died at the hands of those forces of the state, or those same forces appear to have seemingly got away with it - again.

To be sure, in reviewing the activities of the operatives of the state under ‘exceptional conditions’ such as these, the shocking total number of deaths at the hands of the police is also not in fact ‘exceptional’. The very fact that in each and every case, there have been found apparently ‘exceptional’ reasons for exoneration, makes those exceptions the rule. The police can, and frequently do, use absolute force with absolute impunity crushing dissent at all costs, this is after all, the major reason they exist. The hundreds, who have died at their hands, are a reminder of the *structural* violence of capitalism, which day-to-day may not be immediately visible, but is always most assuredly present. As such, it is worth remembering that the state is, and always has been, hand in glove with capital, hence the fevered rush to uphold the sanctity of private property and re-emphasise ‘the rule of law’ at all costs in times of ‘civil disorder’, that is, the rule of property relations which the police are the first and last line of defence in protecting.

‘Property relations’ mean the sum total of social relations in a society based on the accumulation of capital, and the rich and super-rich (the capitalist, employer/shareholder class) furthering and perpetuating such an arrangement of exploitation for profit. This is the reality behind such apparently unfortunate facts as unemployment, cuts, and indeed, all ‘austerity’ measures: in order that a minority with much to lose, can keep all of it and accumulate yet more, the majority with nothing to lose must be made to suffer further; this is capitalism. What is meant here, is that this form of society is a winner-loser system in which a majority of the population must always be made to accept that they are the losers - even if this is not described as such, and very likely it won’t be - and questions of the amount of ‘opportunity’ available (always a favourite media discourse) are substituted for questions as to why this system even exists. In the capitalist media - frequently its ‘free press’- there are sometimes ventured debates by different commentators on ‘equality of opportunity’: an equal chance of being unequal basically, though this and all other capitalist societies fall very far short even by that low standard. Such a bland ideological confection as this completely contradicts itself anyway: in such a society, under such a system, it does not matter how ‘equal’ opportunity is, because there must always be the material

5 ‘Statistical bulletin on the public disorder of 6th-9th August 2011’ “Comparisons of the data collected on self-defined ethnicity (where ethnicity was recorded) show that 41 per cent of those brought before the courts identified themselves as being from the white ethnic group, 39 per cent from the black ethnic group, 12 per cent from the mixed ethnic group, seven per cent from the Asian ethnic group, and two per cent from the Chinese or other ethnic group.” Ministry of Justice, (2012) <https://www.justice.gov.uk/statistics/criminal-justice/public-disorder-august-11>.

struggle for existence of each-against-all, there must always be the capital-labour relation.

For it needs to be repeated, as part of the critique of the media's florid reaction to the events of August 2011, and its 'Broken Britain' account of criminal opportunism cut off from mainstream society that for those 'included' in that questionable definition, in spite of a lifetime of debt-indentured slavery offered as the illusion of 'owning your own home', and credit to offer 'purchase power' to buy the trinkets and baubles of hi-tech capitalism, few have any real control over any aspect of their lives, and exist merely from paycheck to paycheck, or have the joys of the punitive benefits system to look forward to. The majority do not have capital, they have no reserves or real assets, they do not command the labour of others, their own is commanded - so far as it is needed at all - and it can be dispensed with in the blink of an eye. Such is the sordid truth of our society, and one that must be kept as a bad secret in the public arenas of press, TV, and radio. Labour only exists so far as it can be exploited by capital, and as soon as it becomes surplus to this requirement it ceases to materially exist. This cannot however, be even hinted at in the media, much less made explicit, so instead there are 'common sense' homilies such as the BBC's Huw Edwards offered in August 2011, noting with the sociological rigour of a pub bore, "Some people are determined to lead a criminal lifestyle" (BBC News 24, 2011).

What can also never be raised, amidst the moralising rhetoric of 'lack of discipline' and the 'breakdown of authority' at school and in the home, along with so many other supposed explanations, is that the riots were an explosion of the daily misery of life in this society, specifically for those excluded from taking part in it.⁶ Indeed, in a society based on the accumulation of capital, there is very much more surplus labour than that which can be exploited for profit, and many of those who threw projectiles at police and burned down freshly looted shops are those at the absolute bottom, and who under 'normal' conditions are seen as social detritus. Indeed, such outbreaks of 'disorder' in a late capitalist society such as the UK can be seen as indicative of a situation in which a more and more significant section of the population is materially excluded, and by this is meant, that its labour is not required because it cannot be usefully exploited, and so the means for reproducing the material conditions of existence itself are made out of reach. However, the products of consumerism remain mockingly ever-present to all, even as the bad conscience of actual material poverty and social deprivation reminds late capitalist society that it never went away. Indeed, as Marx was well-aware:

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. (Marx, K.,1867/2005)

As such, the inchoate recognition that the trinkets and baubles of capitalism which are put beyond the reach of the majority, and indeed the section of it which day-to-day is effectively rendered invisible, returned as the repressed for four nights in England at the beginning of August 2011. One of the best comments on those events, was made by the German group Wildcat, offering neither condemnation nor straightforward cheerleading:

6 An important critical counterpoint to the rhetoric of 'Broken Britain' is McKenzie, L. (2013) Fox-Trotting the Riot: Slow Rioting in Britain's Inner Cities', in *Sociological Research Online*, 18 (4) 10 <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/18/4/10.html>.

Comment on subjective factors should be left exclusively to the subjects in question, although this right has already been usurped by countless social ventriloquists. The most it's possible to say here is that some members of a class subjected to intensive and invasive management refused at specific times and in various ways to be managed or manageable. (Wildcat, 2011)

The riots of August 2011 now made better sense of with greater supporting empirical evidence more than three years later⁷, are certainly confirmed as indeed an explosion of accumulated social misery and not simply the 'opportunistic' activities of a 'criminal underclass' or in any way 'gang-related'. In the intervening three years since and following major studies into the disturbances, the overriding reasons for involvement from participants have been anger at their experience of social deprivation and exclusion, poverty, and police repression. At the time, the events were dismissed as nihilistic looting and "not political," but the accounts of many of those involved give a different perspective on what happened. These voices, of the ignored and the invisible, also warn of "more to come" in the years ahead (Lewis, Newburn, Ball, & Taylor, *The Guardian*, 2011). There are also of course, the unpalatable facts that criminalization, unemployment and surplus labour, ghettoization and securitization all go together - not something that will be highlighted by the media or indeed in any other domain of the public sphere. Against the media narrative of inexplicable 'exceptional' events threatening 'normality' and the very existence of 'law abiding people', there is the critique of that ideology and the society from which it comes:

Now, the youth dem have had enough, so what's happening now, is everybody's losing the actual picture, and just looking at looting, whatever, people are out there looting things that they've never had and taking what they can never afford. What people really should be addressing is the cause of the problem which is politicians and the police. Now, the youth dem have come in force, and they're letting them know: no more, enough is enough, this is not just about looting, it's about people making a point, and they can't handle it, because there's more youths out there than police, and they're a lot smarter than people give them credit for. (Youtube: 'London riots: Social meltdown in Fulham')

A week after the events, Cameron and the Conservative-led coalition government salivated at the prospect of leading a moral crusade to overcome the 'slow motion moral collapse' of British society, and instilling 'the right values' in young people, and though it remained and remains unclear what 'the right values' are, it is safe to assume they include respect for the rich and powerful and acceptance of one's lot in the pecking order. So in advance of this instillation of social renewal, in the immediate aftermath of the events of August 2011, the state did as it was bid and the repression began: 3,000+ arrests, dawn raids, all-night court sittings, fast-track convictions, and 'show sentencing' far beyond any usual severity.

As has already been contended, much was made at the time, and in the aftermath of the events, of these being merely an outbreak of nihilistic excess, in which mass looting and destruction without purpose prevailed. Similarly, as has been said, at the time, there was a widespread media myth that the riots 'were not political', and that they displayed 'simple criminality', as politicians

⁷ 'Reading the Riots: Investigating England's Summer of disorder' The Guardian in partnership with the London School of Economics, supported by the Joseph Rowntree and Open Society Foundations. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/series/reading-the-riots>.

and the beleaguered Home Secretary in particular, promised the severest repercussions, in what was in every sense meant as a show of strength by the state: this is what you get when you step out of line. Although there were indeed incidents of anti-social dog-eat-dog behaviour, not so very different from the behaviour which is encouraged by modern capitalist society albeit in a less obviously crude form, the spontaneous nature of the disturbances themselves and the combustion of so much alienation and social misery was the real shock for many. Once again, one of the best explanations of events was street-level and could be heard on social media, in this case YouTube:

This is about youths, not having a future. Not having any kind of possibility of having a future. A lot of these people are unemployed, a lot of these people have their youth centre closed down for years, and they've basically seen the normal things: the bankers getting away with what they're getting away with making this country...losing money how it does - let's be honest about this - the police being paid money to do things underhanded to get stories from newspapers - nothing really happened to them, the government being done for what they do, what they've done with their expenses the majority of them have been doing it for years.

This is the youths actually saying to themselves 'Guess what, these people can get away with that, then why can't we tell people how we feel?' Look at what you're seeing today, you're not seeing it in one area you're seeing it right over London. There's a message here for the government. They don't care; they ain't even talking about it. They're talking about 'these thugs this, these thugs that'. They're not addressing the real problem that the society has: there's no hope for them, and this is their way of reacting. This is a reaction for what the government has done...not just the Conservative party now, but the Labour party that was in power before. They're all in this.

The guy who got shot, they didn't even go and see the family: nothing got said and that told everyone in this environment that we're nobody. The youngsters have got nothing to lose. That's a sad indictment on the society we live in at the moment. That's a sad indictment on Cameron, Clegg, the other one that runs the Labour party - every one of them pay a price for that: This is what they've created. This is a movement of the youth. It'll escalate and go out of London and happen in other areas: it's happening in Birmingham now, it's gonna happen in Liverpool, Manchester...What have we done to our society now? We've taken the actual foundations of everything that makes these people real. This is people saying they've had enough. You can't live like that, you can't. (Youtube: 'London Riots: 2011 Interview in Hackney')

Instead of a Conclusion: A “foretaste of the Future”⁸?

We might conclude with two further examples of what has been the specific subject of this paper, from the events of that year, and a year later, both from the ‘serious’ media. On Wednesday 10th August, as disorder spread far and wide to English cities⁹ and several smaller places¹⁰, The

8 “The summer riots of ‘81 were the foretaste of the future for us. One day sooner or later the roof is going to blow off the UK. Faced with an assertion like this most people in pubs, streets, supermarkets or at work tend to nod their heads. The old phlegmatic reassurance that “it can’t happen here” has finally gone - let it be forever.” Smith, W. Speed, Tucker and June (1982) *Like a Summer with a Thousand Julys...and Other Seasons* (London: BM Bloob) and Garland, C. (2014) *Circumscribed by conditions they did not create: the English riots of August 2011, Part 3: The Response of the Dispossessed* pps.267-278 in *The End of the World As We Know It? Crisis, Resistance, and the Age of Austerity* Ed. Shannon, D. (AK Press: Edinburgh & Oakland)

9 By the Sunday and Monday Nights, (8th and 9th August) the riots had spread across the entire Greater London urban and suburban sprawl, and at the same time, and over the course of the following two nights (Tuesday 10th and Wednesday 11th) - the former date seeing London saturated by a police presence numbering 16,000 - to at least eight other big English cities: Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Nottingham, Manchester, and Salford, while Leicester combusted on the Wednesday night. Smaller - but sizable - places to which rioting also spread included: West Bromwich and Wolverhampton in the West Midlands. Coventry and Derby, small cities in their own right, also saw notable disturbances but were not mentioned at the time, the reason no doubt being, an informal editorial policy of ‘blackout’ so as not to ‘feedback’ the rapid and spontaneous nature of events to potential rioters elsewhere. The riots also spread to a number of far smaller places: Banbury, Basildon, Birkenhead, Cambridge, Canvey Island, Gloucester, High Wycombe, Huddersfield, Milton Keynes, Northampton, Oxford, Reading, the Medway towns of Chatham and Gillingham, and Waltham Cross in Hertfordshire. In total by the final night of the riots, 25 separate cities and towns of varying size had experienced disorder, in addition to at least 40 areas of Greater London. That figure of 40 doesn’t include areas of the Capital, where rumours or police intelligence claimed disturbances of varying scale, ‘happened’ or were ‘contained’. The places listed here are verified according to available sources: national media reports where available, and in the case of some smaller places, regional press sources recording disturbances involving vandalism, ‘looting’, arson, and clashes with police. ‘Reading the Riots: Investigating England’s Summer of disorder’, The Guardian in partnership with the London School of Economics, supported by the Joseph Rowntree and Open Society Foundations, (2011) <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/series/reading-the-riots>, BBC News, ‘England riots: Maps and timeline’, 15th August 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14436499>, ‘The August riots in England Understanding the involvement of young people’ (2011), NatCen, National Centre for Social Research, Morrrell, G. Scott, S. McNeish, D. Webster, S. prepared for the Cabinet Office. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/60531/The_20August_20Riots_20in_20England_20_pdf__201mb_.pdf.

10 ‘Riots erupt in Birmingham: Police make 130 arrests’ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-14455844>, ‘Shops and cars damaged in Bristol disorder’, BBC News, 9th August 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-14454726>, ‘Chapeltown shooting: police tackle pockets of disorder’, BBC News, 9th August 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-14454726>, ‘Riots: violence flares in Liverpool for up to 5 hours’, BBC News, 9th August 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-14454726>, ‘Nottingham police station firebombed as violence hits more UK cities’, The Guardian, 10th August 2011, Wainwright, Martin. Clifton, Helen. Beal, James. and Shepherd, Jessica, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/aug/10/nottingham-police-station-firebomb-arrests>, ‘Police ‘overwhelmed’ by riots in Manchester and Salford’, BBC News, 10th August 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-14467588>, ‘Youths attack shops in Leicester city centre’ BBC News, 10th August 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-14470914>, ‘West Midlands: Riot police on streets after more unrest’, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-14465014>, ‘Wolverhampton riots: a timeline of unrest following Birmingham trouble’, Metro, 10th August 2011, <http://metro.co.uk/2011/08/10/wolverhampton-riots-a-timeline-of-unrest-after-riots-in-birmingham-110228/>, ‘Masked rioters threw petrol bombs at cars in Coventry’, Dimmer, Sam. Coventry Telegraph, 16th May 2012, <http://www.coventrytelegraph.net/news/coventry-news/masked-rioters-threw-petrol-bombs-3024966>, ‘Riots: 6 arrested in Derby after cars damaged’ BBC News, 11th August 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-derbyshire-14496203>, ‘Copy cat riot fizzles out as police arrive’, Banbury Cake, 17th August 2011 http://www.banburycake.co.uk/news/banbury/9198832.Copycat_riot_fizzles_out_as_police_arrive/, ‘Updated: disorder hits south Essex’, Marsden, Gina. Echo 10th August 2011 http://www.echo-news.co.uk/news/local_news/9186630.Updated__Disorder_hits_south_Essex/?action=complain&cid=9578872, ‘Merseyside sees second night of rioting’, BBC News 10th August 2011, ‘Clash in Cambridge as riot violence spreads’, Bajkowski, Simon. The Tab, 10th August 2011, <http://cambridge.tab.co.uk/2011/08/10/clashes-in-cambridge-as-riot-violence-spreads/>, The Guardian, 10th August 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/aug/10/uk-riots-gloucester-disorder>, ‘Huddersfield

i The Independent's shorter tabloid-size daily 'briefing', carried the headline, 'Cameron gives the order to shoot' on a picture of a police officer in riot gear, holding a 'riot gun' for firing baton rounds, the photo being 'from library pictures', though there was felt no need to state that in even a small print disclaimer: the image served its purpose well, that being as Zygmunt Bauman would have it, "From one 'safety panic' to another, each panic no less if not more frightening than the one before" (Bauman, *ibid*) Actually reading the news story however, it became clear that no such 'order' had been given, since that authorization has always existed, and "a senior Whitehall source" simply offered "All options will have to be considered if all else fails" (*i, ibid*). "Would have, could have: double conditional" to borrow from Massumi quoted again in the same article in *Critical Legal Thinking*.

Not to be outdone, on the 6th August 2012, the BBC carried the headline on its news website 'England riots one year on: Culprits jailed for 1,800 years'. This is at first glance too ridiculous to not think it something from *The Sun* or *Daily Mail*, but it is the impartial and balanced voice of reason of the public broadcaster trusted to speak the truth at all times. The total number of years for all those who received prison sentences, is indeed a laughably high figure, but in making use of such a cynically salacious, eye-grabbing headline, it makes only passing mention of the fact that 'Riots and looting began in Tottenham, north London, on 7th August 2011 after police shot Mark Duggan.' And, as has been noted elsewhere:

It is the first anniversary of the riots that caused havoc across Britain." The BBC omitted to mention anything about Mark Duggan or the disgraceful fact that one year on the police officers involved in the shooting are still refusing to be interviewed by the IPCC. Does it take another night of cocktails to wake up the establishment, the police and the media? (Defend the right to Protest, 2012)

The BBC instead offered this:

In an interview with BBC London to mark a year since the riots, the Crown Prosecution Service's chief prosecutor Alison Saunders backed the swift and tough justice meted out to culprits. She said: "One thing we also learned in the disorder is that if we can get people in court fast and get them sentenced it acts as a deterrent - it made people think twice. I do think the criminal justice response was particularly important. People could see there were consequences. (BBC News, 2012)

disturbances: full reaction, reports, and round-up', Huddersfield Examiner, The Huddersfield Daily Examiner, 11th August 2011, 'UK Riots: disbelief as looting and violence spreads to Gloucester', Lewis, Paul. and Khalili, Mustafa, <http://www.examiner.co.uk/news/west-yorkshire-news/huddersfield-disturbances-full-reports-reaction-4969690>, 'As it happened: England riots -days 1-3, BBC News, Browning, Anna. Pankhurst, Nigel. and Bailey, Fiona. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14481315>, 'UPDATE 10.15: fears fanned rioting flames', Milton Keynes Citizen, 9th August 2011, <http://www.miltonkeynes.co.uk/news/local/update-10-15pm-fears-fanned-rioting-flames-1-2947629>, 'Northampton police issue warning after stones thrown at police and false riot rumours spread', Harrison, John. Northampton Chronicle & Echo, <http://www.northamptonchron.co.uk/news/crime/northamptonshire-police-issue-warnings-after-stones-thrown-at-police-and-false-riot-rumours-spread-1-2948102>, 'Police deny withholding Reading Makro looting details', BBC News, Berkshire 17th August 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-berkshire-14632804>, 'Oxford sees violence as London disorder spreads', BBC News 9th August 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-14460959>, 'Cars set alight during disturbances in Medway towns'. BBC News 9th August 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-14455844>, 'Arrests after Waltham Cross riots', Gardner, Gemma. Hertfordshire Mercury, 8th August 2011, <http://www.hertfordshiremercury.co.uk/Cheshunt-and-Waltham/Police-monitor-situation-in-Waltham-Cross-07082011.htm>.

However, paraphrasing Marx, it might be contended that those involved in the disturbances of August 2011, remain *circumscribed by conditions they did not create*¹¹ and in the ‘now hidden now open fight’ the state does its level best to plan in advance attempts at heading off something that will be for it and capitalist society, far, far worse, but which remain merely, ‘vainglorious efforts of an imagined victory’.

References

- Anon. ‘London Riots Interview in Hackney 2011, on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zmo8DG1gno4> , last accessed 10th November 2014
- Anon. ‘London riots: Social meltdown Fulham interview: 2011’, YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ak2WD6TOiFU> , last accessed 10th November 2014
- Anon. ‘Intakes: Communities, commodities and class in the August 2011’ in *Aufheben* #12 (2012) <http://libcom.org/library/intakes-communities-commodities-class-august-2011-riots-aufheben> , last accessed 6th July 2014
- BBC News 24 (August 2011), Armstrong, F. ‘Interview’ with Darcus Howe <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-x8MDS2F-> , last accessed 6th July 2014
- BBC News (2011) ‘London Mayor Boris Johnson carries riot clean up brush’ BBC News, 9th August <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14462001> , last accessed 6th July 2014
- BBC News (2011) ‘Riots erupt in Birmingham: Police make 130 arrests’, 9th August <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-14452468>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- BBC News (2011) ‘Shops and cars damaged in Bristol disorder’, 9th August 2011 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-14454726>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- BBC News (2011) ‘Chapelton shooting: police tackle pockets of disorder’, 9th August <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-14449656> , last accessed 6th July 2014
- BBC News (2011) ‘Riots: violence flares in Liverpool for up to 5 hours’, 9th August <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-14455814>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- BBC News (2011) ‘Police ‘overwhelmed’ by riots in Manchester and Salford’, 10th August <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-14467588> , 6th July 2014
- BBC News (2011) ‘Youths attack shops in Leicester city centre’, 10th August <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-14470914>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- BBC News (2012) ‘England riots one year on: Culprits jailed for 1,800 years’ Davey, Ed, 6th August <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-19111720>
- BBC News 24 (2011), Edwards, H. Quoted on 11th August
- BBC News (2011) ‘Merseyside sees second night of rioting’, 10th August <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-14461363>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- BBC News (2011) ‘Riots: 6 arrested in Derby after cars damaged’ 11th August <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-derbyshire-14496203>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- BBC News (2011) ‘England riots: Maps and timeline’, 15th August <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14436499>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- BBC News Berkshire (2011) ‘Police deny

11 This is a paraphrase of Marx: “The productive forces are the result of man’s practical energy, but that energy is in turn circumscribed by the conditions in which man is placed by the productive forces already acquired, by the form of society which exists before him, which he does not create, which is the product of the preceding generation.” Marx, 1846 Letter to Annenkov (1846), http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1846/letters/46_12_28.htm.

- withholding Reading Makro looting details', 17th August <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-berkshire-14632804>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- BBC News (2011) 'Oxford sees violence as London disorder spreads', 9th August <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-14460959>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- BBC News (2011) 'Cars set alight during disturbances in Medway towns', 9th August <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-14455844>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- BBC News (2011) 'West Midlands: Riot police on streets after more unrest', 10th August <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-14465014>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Banbury Cake (2011) 'Copy cat riot fizzles out as police arrive', 17th August http://www.banburycake.co.uk/news/9198832.Copycat_riot_fizzles_out_as_police_arrive/, last accessed 6th July 2014
- BBC News (2014) 'Mark Duggan case: IPCC apologises for 'wrong' shooting details', 17th January 2014 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-25776826>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Bajkowski, S. (2011) 'Clash in Cambridge as riot violence spreads', *The Tab*, 10th August <http://cambridge.tab.co.uk/2011/08/10/clashes-in-cambridge-as-riot-violence-spreads/>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Bauman, Z. (2006) *Liquid Fear*, Cambridge: Polity
- Berry, M. (2013) 'Hard Evidence: how biased is the BBC?' in *The Conversation*, 23rd August 2013 <https://theconversation.com/hard-evidence-how-biased-is-the-bbc-17028>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Davies, L. Topping, A. Ball, J. & Sample, I. (2011) 'London riots: Hundreds answer appeal to clean up streets', *The Guardian*, 9th August 2011 <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/aug/09/london-riots-cleanup-appeal>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Dimmer, S. (2012) 'Masked rioters threw petrol bombs at cars in Coventry', *Coventry Telegraph*, 16th May <http://www.coventrytelegraph.net/news/coventry-news/masked-rioters-threw-petrol-bombs-3024966>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Faramelli, A. (2014) 'What the Duggan Inquest Teaches us about Fear and Sovereignty', *Critical Legal Thinking - Law and the political* - <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2014/01/15/duggan-inquest-fear-sovereignty/>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Gardner, G. (2011) 'Arrests after Waltham Cross riots', *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 8th August <http://www.hertfordshiremercury.co.uk/Cheshunt-and-Waltham/Police-monitor-situation-in-Waltham-Cross-07082011.htm>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Garland, C. (2011) 'Simulating events as they happen: media spectacle, ideology, and readymade boogeymen', 'Hot Analysis - The Streets of London; Theme 3: Language and the media; presentation for discussion, UCL, London, 16th August 2011
- Garland, C. (2012) 'Simulating events as they happen: spectacle, ideology, and readymade boogeymen - the 2011 August Riots and the media', 'Politics, Consumption or Nihilism: Disorder and Protest, the UK and Beyond' 13-14th September 2012, at Sheffield Hallam University
- Garland, C. (2014) 'Circumscribed by conditions they did not create: the English riots of August 2011', in Shannon, D. *The End of the World As We Know It? Crisis, Resistance, and the Age of Austerity* Ed. Shannon, D. Edinburgh & Oakland: AK Press
- Harrison, J. (2011) 'Northampton police issue warning after stones thrown at police and false riot rumours spread', *Northampton Chronicle & Echo*, 10th August <http://www.northamptonchron.co.uk/news/crime/northamptonshire-police-issue-warnings-after-stones-thrown-at-police-and-false-riot-rumours-spread-1-2948102>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Huddersfield Examiner (2011) 'Huddersfield Disturbances: Full Reports, Reaction and Round-UP', *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 11th August <http://www.examiner.co.uk/news/west-yorkshire-news/huddersfield-disturbances-full-reports-reaction-4969690>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- The Guardian*/London School of Economics (2011) *Reading the Riots: Investigating England's Summer of disorder* <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/series/reading-the-riots>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Lewis, P. and Khalili, M. 'UK Riots: disbelief as looting and violence spreads to Gloucester', *The Guardian*, 10th August 2011 <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/aug/10/uk-riots-gloucester-disorder>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- IPPC (2010) 'Deaths in or following custody: An examination of the cases 1998/99 - 2008/09,

- London: Independent Police Complaints Commission http://www.ipcc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Documents/research_stats/Deaths_In_Custody_Report_0811.pdf, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Laville, S. (2011) 'Man shot dead by police in north London during attempted arrest', *The Guardian*, 5th August 2011 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/aug/05/man-shot-police-london-arrest>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Marsden, G. (2011) 'Updated: disorder hits south Essex', *Echo*, 10th August. http://www.echo-news.co.uk/news/local_news/9186630. Updated *_Disorder_hits_south_Essex*, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Marx, K. (1846) *Letter to Annenkov* http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1846/letters/46_12_28.htm, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Marx, K. (1848) *Manifesto of the Communist Party, Chapter I. Bourgeois and Proletarians Communist Manifesto* (Chapter 1) http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1846/letters/46_12_28.htm, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Marx, K. (1867/2005) *The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof, Section 4 of Capital Vol 1* Marx, K. (1867/2005) *The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof, Section 4 of Capital Vol.1* <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm#S4>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- McKenzie, L. (2013) 'Fox-Trotting the Riot: Slow Rioting in Britain's Inner Cities', in *Sociological Research Online*, 18 (4) 10 <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/18/4/10.html>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Metro (2011) 'Wolverhampton riots: a timeline of unrest following Birmingham trouble', *Metro*, 10th August <http://metro.co.uk/2011/08/10/wolverhampton-riots-a-timeline-of-unrest-after-riots-in-birmingham-110228/>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Montgomery, F. & Whitelaw, W. (1981) *Toxteth (Use of CS Gas)* HC Deb 19th October 1981vol 10 cc30-2W http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1981/oct/19/toxteth-use-of-cs-gas, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Milton Keynes Citizen (2011) 'UPDATE 10.15: fears fanned rioting flames', 9th August 2011, <http://www.miltonkeynes.co.uk/news/local/update-10-15pm-fears-fanned-rioting-flames-1-2947629>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Ministry of Justice (2012) *Statistical bulletin on the public disorder of 6th-9th August 2011*, <https://www.justice.gov.uk/statistics/criminal-justice/public-disorder-august-11>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Morrrell, G. Scott, S. McNeish, D. and Webster, S. (2011) *The August riots in England Understanding the involvement of young people*, NatCen, National Centre for Social Research, prepared for the Cabinet Office https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/60531/The_20August_20Riots_20in_20England_20pdf_201mb_.pdf, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Rogers, S. and Evans, L. (2011) 'UK Riots: the demographics of magistrates cases and convictions', *The Guardian*, 18th August. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/aug/11/uk-riots-magistrates-courtlist>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Smith, W, Speed, Tucker, and June (1982) *Like a summer with a thousand Julys...and other seasons*, (London: BM Blob) <http://libcom.org/library/summer-thousand-julys-other-seasons>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Travis, A. *The Guardian*, Monday 24th October 2011 <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/oct/24/riots-analysis-gangs-no-pivotal-role>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Vasagar, J. (2011) 'Mark Duggan did not shoot at the Police say IPCC', *The Guardian*, 9th August <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/aug/09/mark-duggan-police-ipcc>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Wainwright, M. Clifton, H. Beal, J. and Shepherd, J. (2011) 'Nottingham police station firebombed as violence hits more UK cities', *The Guardian*, 10th August 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/aug/10/nottingham-police-station-firebomb-arrests>, last accessed 6th July 2014
- Wildcat (Germany) (2011) 'Detest and survive: Self-deregulation and asset reallocation in the UK', August <http://libcom.org/library/detest-survive-self-deregulation-asset-reallocation-uk-august-2011>, last accessed 6th July 2014