'Man Dem Link Up': London's Anti-Riots and Urban Modernism

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Abstract

Commentaries on the London riots of August 2011 have tended to ignore the urban context of the disturbances or have treated the city and the urban as an implicit part of their analysis - merely as a backdrop to events. This paper offers an urban perspective in arguing that the socio-spatiality of contemporary London - the legacy of competing forms of urban modernism - plays a critical role in explaining how and why the disturbances unfolded in the highly idiosyncratic form they did. The first stage of the analysis introduces competing notions of urban modernism ranging from a modernism of the street, to a modern urbanism of welfarist/statist control and finally a deregulated neoliberal (post)modernism. Second, the socio-spatial dimensions of contemporary London are outlined. Third, the article moves to contrast the 'inner city' riots of Brixton 1981 and what is described here as the 'anti-riots' of August 2011. In the fourth section the events of August 2011 are argued to be part of a dialectic between the homogenisation, fragmentation and hierarchization of London-space and the resilience of an urban modernism that seeks to re-engage with the experience of the city as totality, as a sum of human efforts.

Keywords: *London Riots, Modernism, Urbanism, Right to the City*

Introduction

1.1 In August 2011 young people from the margins of London unleashed a fury not seen in the capital for over a quarter of a century. The riots provided an unsettling mix of the familiar and unfamiliar, an act of mimesis somewhere between the repetition of previous events and the advent of something utterly distinctive. The fatal shooting by Metropolitan Police officers of Mark Duggan, a 29-year-old black resident of the Broadwater Farm estate in Tottenham^[1], and the police assault of a 16-year-old girl at a subsequent protest outside Tottenham Police Station provided the spark, but what followed defied attempts at categorisation. Commentators invoked ghosts of London's turbulent past but rioters seemed bent on escaping an oppressive present. An older generation searching for political motive in the scenes of indiscriminate theft and violence that flooded news channels felt short changed - where are the activists, the spokespeople? What is the message? Perhaps how we define the political is too narrow. In seeking to understand the political meaning of the disturbances this article suggests it is worth remembering Marx's avowal that the political soul of revolution consists in the desire of classes without influence to end their isolation.

1.2 A week or so after the riots I was peering out of the window from an early morning train from Waterloo and noticed some graffiti written inside a railway bridge just past the Queenstown Road station in Battersea. In large silver letters it read 'Man Dem Link Up'. During the media coverage of the riots I'd become aware what the phrase 'Man Dem' meant - referring to 'my friends' or 'my people' - a street notion for a collective 'we' of similarly disposed youth. The phrase owes its existence to the continued influence of African-Caribbean vernacular culture on London's urban scene. The call for London's splintered and sometimes violently opposed youth to come together - to 'link up' - is disarmingly simple. The ambiguity of the message arises when one considers for what reasons, causes or goals 'man dem' should be linking up for? But I guess this is not the point. The 'lack' of instrumental rationality in this writer's call for alliance is a provocation - but also a reminder of what the urban is really about. The definition I usually turn to is Lefebvre's (1996, p. 131) belief that the urban is a mental and social form premised upon simultaneity, gathering, convergence and encounters. Yet the unity involved in urban life is a communion of difference,

referring to the 'right not to be classified forcibly into categories which have been determined by the necessarily homogenizing powers' (Lefebvre 1976, cited in Dikeç 2001, p. 1790). Modern urban culture arises from a collective imaginary of this differentiated *whole*; it is constructed from a shared yet by no means unitary experience of living in the same city (Bender 2007, p. 268). 'Man Dem Link Up' is read here as a call for renewed urbanity in London (and possibly beyond). In the aftershock of the spectacular events of August 2011 it resonates profoundly.

1.3 The article is structured as follows. The first step in the analysis is to introduce competing notions of urban modernism - ranging from a modernism of the street, to a modern urbanism of welfarist/statist control and finally a deregulated neoliberal (post)modernism. Second, the socio-spatial dimensions of contemporary London are outlined. It is suggested that this space - a product of competing modernisms - is critical in terms of making sense of the distinctiveness of the uprising of August 2011 and its political meaning. Third, the article moves to contrast the 'inner city' riots of Brixton 1981 and what is referred to here as the 'anti-riots' of August 2011. In the fourth section the latter disturbances are argued to be part of an unfolding dialectic between the fragmentation and hierarchization of the city and the re-emergence of an urban modernism that seeks - even if it is not wholly successful - to re-engage with the experience of the city as totality, a sum of human efforts. It should be noted that this article focuses specifically on London and does not offer an easily transferable analysis of the disturbances that occurred in other English towns and cities, events that deserve to be understood in relation their own geo-historical context. The claims made here may have purchase on events in some cities but not others. The aim of the article is to establish a dialectical, urban perspective of last August's events. So far, such analyses have been surprisingly short in supply, even among scholars of the city (see Harvey 2012).

Urban Modernisms

2.1 Marshall Berman (1982:15) argues that:

'To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world—and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are'.

The analysis contained here rests largely on a distinction between contrasting and competing hues of urban modernism, each of which are, just as Berman suggests, capable of both creativity and destruction. The first is a modern urbanism of the street as revealed in the varied writings of the likes of Baudelaire, Benjamin, Lefebvre, Jacobs, De Certeau and Berman. Indeed the celebration of urban vitality and diversity is one of oldest themes in modern culture (Berman 1982, p. 316). This exuberant, impulsive and often disorderly modernism involves practice (people doing things individually and collectively) and the spontaneity - and inevitably, conflict - that occurs when difference is congregated around a shared centre. According to this mode of modernism, cities are defined within *praxis*, through 'unity and scission, struggle and alliance' (Lefebvre 1972: 20). Everywhere is innovation, improvisation and contestation. For example De Certeau (1984, p. 97) argues that even walking through the city constitutes a creative act, a 'process of appropriation [...] on the part of the pedestrian'. If permitted to flourish - and this is by no means a given - urban modernism contributes to the city as an *oeuvre*, a collective work of art (Lefebvre 1996, p. 101).

2.2 Yet, the relationship between urban life and the city is always antagonistic. The city - or more precisely, city technocrats and latterly, liberalized markets - can impede the urban; the governing bodies of city can reconfigure the intricacies of a 'sidewalk ballet' (Jacobs 1961) as a dangerous contagion to be brought under administrative control or as an obstruction to business activity and investment. In a second sense of urban modernism - or what should really be called *modern urbanism* (Berman 1982, p. 168) - the diversity of people, places and activities in the city exists as an incitement to government. As Rose (2000, p. 95) argues, modernist visions of order are inevitably 'quickened by a sense of crisis, of the nefarious activities and mobile associations within urban territories that elude knowledge and escape regulation'. Throughout the 20th-Century the governmental requirement to know and subsequently control urban life within cities often translated to a policy of deconcentration. Traditional urban centres were transformed into centres of decision-making, finance and more latterly, consumption. Affluent residents were encouraged to move to the suburbs and poorer 'slum' dwellers were re-housed in mass produced housing as modernism became the official architecture of the welfare state. Le Corbusier's maxim that "Every great city must rebuild its centre" was followed with what now seems surprising enthusiasm (Power 1993, p. 189). The tragic irony of modern urbanism is that in building suburbs and rebuilding centres - in the process sifting and sorting populations - it often destroyed the urbanity that made cities rich and fulfilling places to live.

2.3 In outlining these two dialectically opposed strands of modernism Marshall Berman (1982) draws on two exemplars from New York. He compares the late 19th-century Brooklyn resort Coney Island with Robert Moses' modernist Jones Beach State Park which opened in 1929. The intensity, noise, chaotic motion, mixing and 'seedy vitality' of Coney Island were absent by design from Moses' Jones Beach. Whereas Coney Island was the epitome of New York's 'culture of congestion', Jones Beach exemplified the onrushing 'culture of segregation'. At Jones Beach there was no evidence of the 'vulgar passions' of the masses; there were 'no hotels, casinos, ferris wheels, roller coasters, parachute jumps, pinball machines, honky-tonks, loudspeakers, hot-dog stands, neon signs; no dirt, random noise or disarray' (ibid: 296-7). Jones Beach is instead redolent of Le Corbusier's modernist romance with purity and clarity - of 'perfect light without shadows' (ibid: 297). This contrast can also be observed in London if one juxtaposes the ebullient and cosmopolitan culture of Soho in the 1920s, 'where every street is a song' (Thomas Burke cited in White 2001, p. 105) with the contemporaneous London County Council construction of suburban working class estates such as Becontree, developments that provided sanitary

housing but deliberately 'designed out' spaces where social life could prosper (Porter 1994; McKibbin 1998; Hall 2002). The crucial point according to Berman (1982, p. 317) is that modern urbanism was turned radically against the messiness and disorder of the street:

[T]he street, which had always served to express dynamic and progressive modernity, now came to symbolise everything dingy, disorderly, sluggish, stagnant, worn-out, obsolete—everything that the dynamism and progress of modernity were supposed to leave behind (Berman 1982, p. 317).

2.4 Since the mid-to-late 1970s a third mode of (post)modern neoliberal urbanism has burgeoned in London, as elsewhere (see Harvey 1990, p. 340-1 for a detailed overview). This 'late' modernism, which takes its cue from neoliberalism (broadly conceived), seeks to remedy the contradictions of welfare capitalism and architectural modernism by prioritising business and private interests and by encouraging competition between cities for investment. It is also associated - for 'successful' cities at least - with the movement of the managerial middle classes back into the city (see *inter alia* Lees *et al* 2008) and the self-conscious promotion of a cosmopolitan sheen designed to encourage consumption (Sennett 2002). As Peck and Tickell (2002, p. 389) explain, the neoliberal project is no longer so narrowly concerned with the mobilization and extension of markets. As a matter of maintaining political legitimacy the state now foregrounds new modes of social, penal and disciplinary policy-making, concerned specifically with the containment of the marginalised and dispossessed (see also Smith 2002). This form of (post)modernism may therefore be considered anti-urban in that it attempts to conceal or expel any activity or form of difference that threatens to disrupt the smooth running of markets and/or the positive 'place image' maintained in order to attract investment. In this way, economic deregulation leads to a number of highly organised repressions in space. For example, an atmosphere of continual red-alert surrounds high-profile/high-risk financial districts such as the City of London and Canary Wharf. Consumption and entertainment zones and transport networks suffer a similar fate. The paradox is that while a vibrant, cosmopolitan image may draw investment, 'difference is [also] seen as overwhelming and dangerous, to be excluded or segregated where possible' (Bannister and Fyfe 2001, p. 807). In the following section it shall be seen how contemporary London is a hybrid product of these contrasting, yet entangled forms of urban modernism, the result of a 'strange dialectic [...] in which one mode of modernism both energizes and exhausts itself trying to annihilate another, all in modernism's name' (Berman 1982, p. 165).

London-space

3.1 Since the mid-1980s London has become a global city, a 'command point' in the world economy, concentrating headquarters of the international financial system alongside producer and consumer services (Fainstein and Harloe 2003, p. 159). This transformation has radically reformed both the centre and periphery of London (see for example Millington 2011). London has also become more separated—in terms of flows of people, capital, information and so on—from other provincial cities in the UK, sharing more in common with other global cities such as New York or Tokyo (see Sassen 2001, 2006). Due to their function within a world economic system global cities are also characteristically more estranged from the social needs of their inhabitants than so-called 'ordinary cities' (ibid; Robinson 2002). The key to understanding this emergent London is to acknowledge Lefebvre's (2003, p. 210) point that space in modernity displays the logic of 'homogeneity-fragmentation-hierarchy'. For example, even in the late 19th Century London was renowned as an individualistic, discontinuous, class-divided space - although crucially it still managed to retain some semblance of 'fullness' to resident or visitor (Sennett 1994, p. 322). The point emphasised here however is that the spatial logic of modernity is *intensified* by the neoliberal modes of accumulation characteristic of global cities (Brenner 2000). In London this leads to the production of an idiosyncratic social, material and mental 'London-space' at once connected and severed from the city of the past.

3.2 London-space is increasingly an abstract space, where exchange value has become the sole arbiter. This makes the city a homogeneous space in the sense that all times and places are related in terms of exchange values only. Homogeneity occurs because abstract space is '[f]ormal and quantitative, it erases distinctions' (Lefebvre 1991, p. 49). Times and spaces become repetitive as housing estates, streets of gentrified Victorian or Edwardian houses, blocks of luxury apartments or local high streets located in different parts of the city begin to resemble one another. 'Sink' estates become indistinguishable from each other, as do gentrified districts. The distinctive character of neighbourhoods is partially lost. Everywhere signifiers designating the value ascribed to particular spaces are visible, yet navigating the city can be disorientating; so much so the overall effect is sometimes that of *placelessness*.

3.3 Although London-space has become increasingly homogeneous it is also 'broken', 'reduced to crumbs' and fragmented into endless lots and parcels. Everywhere in the Capital it seems space is being divided or stacked to create new or more 'space'. For example estate agents and developers create Manhattan-style portmanteau districts such as 'Midtown' (Bloomsbury-Hoxton-St. Giles) or NoHo (the area north of Soho Square) in an attempt to brand 'inbetween' areas of central London. Fragmentation can also be seen in the 'pepper-potting' of affordable housing within prestigious developments creating micro-divides within communities (Hall 2009, p. 31). For example, Davidson (2009, p. 184) explains how within a new development in Brentford affordable housing exists in a separate block ten metres from privately owned dwellings creating a situation where affordable housing residents feel almost completely segregated from the community opposite. Ultimately fragmentation produces 'ghettos, units [and] clusters [...] poorly linked with their surroundings [...]' (Lefebvre 2003, p. 210). It destroys any sense of the *whole* city—that shared imagination so vital for metropolitan culture to flourish. Everywhere marketable London is set in juxtaposition to its defiled other, the spaces of the city that belong within the taxonomy of *peculiar institutions* of class and 'racial' suppression (Wacquant 2002 cited in Keith 2005, p. 62; see also Smith 1989).

3.4 The fragmented spaces of the city are also arranged in hierarchy. Inequalities are a necessary outcome of the exchange of spaces and in an open market it is inevitable that some spaces are valued higher than others. In London *all* space is highly valued in exchange terms yet as more neighbourhoods in the central city undergo an upscaling due to gentrification this heightens distinctions between gentrified neighbourhoods whilst also lessening the reputation of other housing tracts. This is partly a consequence of Dorling and Pritchard's (2010, p. 95) observation that in London 'as the numbers of asset wealthy rise, so to do those living nearby (but elsewhere) that have the least'. This causes a quite remarkable polarisation between rich and poor:

In January 2010 we learnt that within London the best-off 10th of the population each had recourse to 273 times the wealth of the worse-off 10th of Londoners. It is hard to find any city in an affluent country that is more unequal (Dorling 2010, p. 186).

London may appear highly cosmopolitan - equitable even from a lofty vantage point - yet to read too much from appearances is an empiricist fallacy. For example, London Profiler, the mapping website run by UCL^[2], identifies clear divisions in the city in terms of wealth, deprivation and barriers to housing and public services. It may be the case that all London boroughs are becoming more diverse (Finney and Simpson 2009) but closer inspection of London's super-diversity (Vertovec 2007) reveals how the residential spaces of the elite and the middle classes are distinguished perfectly from those reserved for blue-collar, service workers and the unemployed - many of whom may also be immigrants. In London there can also be found sharp processes of residential disaffiliation among the affluent resulting in an archipelago of high-income enclaves that 'float on the surface of a wider urban society from which they are largely detached' (Atkinson 2006, p. 830). The insidious hierarchisation of London-space compromises urban life in the city, preventing any sense of totality or wholeness.

3.5 If London-space is the product (and producer) of homogeneity-fragmentation-hierarchy, further reference can be made to how this impacts upon residential areas of the city. Peter Marcuse (1989, 2003) suggests the metropolis has become increasingly zoned or quartered in reflection of social and economic divisions. Marcuse's analysis is useful in making sense of the topography of contemporary London where there is evidence of an intensification of segregation as measured by indicators of disadvantage (Buck *et al* 2002). Marcuse's first residential quarter consists of *luxury* residences for the extremely wealthy—take for example Onslow Square in South Kensington. Inhabitants of such residences live in a world insulated from contact with non-members of their class. As Marcuse (2003, p. 273) pithily states '[i]f the city no longer offers profit or pleasure, they can abandon it'. The second quarter is the *gentrified* city where the middle classes have moved into previously working class and/or immigrant neighbourhoods. Some suggest that gentrification is evidence, at least partially, of a renewed enthusiasm for urban living (see Zukin 2010), but for Marcuse (ibid: 273) the faddish adoption of the city and urban life by new gentry masks what is really 'a quest for other satisfactions found in consumption'. Yet gentrification itself is a fragmented and hierarchical process. Butler with Robson (2003) document the middle-class remaking of central London, studying six different neighbourhoods that each attract a particular section of the middle class, leading to the creation and performance of a range of distinctive 'metropolitan habituses'. Butler and Lees (2006) even point to the emergence of so-called super-gentrification in places such as Barnsbury in the Borough of Islington where a super-wealthy global professional elite have super-gentrified a neighbourhood that first experienced an upscaling two decades previously.

3.6 Marcuse's two remaining residential quarters cater for precarious populations of the metropolis and tend also to be occupied disproportionately by non-white minorities (Marcuse 2003, p. 270). These are particularly relevant when discussing August 2011 because it is these quarters of London where the majority of rioters were found to live - in fact 66% lived in deprived areas that became poorer between 2007 and 2010 (The Guardian 2011^[3]). The *tenement* quarter of the city refers to private-rented housing typically let to low paid workers or those with irregular employment, few benefits, little job security and no chance of advancement (Marcuse 2003: 274). Whereas such districts were once common in London - as Patterson's (1963) famous analysis of West Indian immigrants in Brixton testifies - transitional zones are continuously under threat since they are targets for 'higher uses' such as urban regeneration or gentrification. Butler with Robson's (2003) account of the gentrification of Brixton during the 1990s is testament to this (see also Martin 2005 on Notting Hill). The spaces that comprise London's tenement quarter are further endangered by the Coalition government's proposed cap on housing benefit whereby thousands of low-waged families living in the private-rented sector may be forced to leave the capital and find cheaper accommodation outside the city - a move even Mayor Boris Johnson has claimed would be tantamount to the 'ethnic cleansing' of London (Wintour 2010; Hanley 2010). As Rowland Atkinson (2011) claims, in light of the cuts, 'London will be for the rich; [its] more distant hinterlands will house the poor'.

3.7 Marcuse's final quarter is the *abandoned* city of the very poor, the excluded and permanently unemployed (Marcuse 2003: 274). While London does not contain such great concentrations of the 'truly disadvantaged' found in US cities (Wilson 1987, Wacquant 2008), the spatial concentration of the poor in London is reinforced by use of 'hard to let' social housing estates as a tenure of last resort for the economically inactive and/or those 'left behind' from previous waves of migration (Buck *et al* 2002; Dunleavy 1981; Hamnett 2003). Hamnett (1994, 1996, 2003) has long documented the persistence, and indeed growth, of a long-term state-dependent population in London, a 'housing class' that recent governments have penalised through measures such as Anti-Social Behaviour legislation (see Flint 2006). Under this rubric young occupants of council housing are viewed as the 'progeny of dysfunctional families [who] inhabit precarious twilight spaces, the interstices between communities' (Scambler and Scambler 2011: 1.1). Residential polarisation in London has grown to such an extent that Butler and Hamnett (2009, p. 52) point out that public housing estates are now almost the only exception to a wholly gentrified inner London. Yet social housing belonging to the era of welfarist/modern urbanism is not a problem in itself. To

the contrary, the importance of council housing in terms of providing homes for Londoners cannot be overstated - in fact, over one-third of housing in inner London and 18% in outer-London is social rented (Watt 2009a, p. 221). Moreover, it is social housing that provides London with much of its famed diversity, a quality that helps promote London as a 'world city', a destination for tourists, transnational capital and the staging of mega-events. Although social housing remains a significant presence, it is shrinking and/or undergoing transformation as stock is sold to private or quasi-public owners or demolished for regeneration (Watt 2009a; 2009b). Another issue is that even in social housing the drive towards fragmentation and hierarchization can be observed. For example, Paul Watt (2006) discusses distinctions between respectability, roughness and 'race' among council tenants in the London Borough of Camden, arguing that despite the stigmatising, underclass discourse they are subjected to, there are considerable subtleties to tenants sense of identity and place-affiliation. In a very different sense young residents of areas such as Tottenham form gangs such as 'Tottenham Man Dem', 'Broadwater Farm Posse', 'Ida Bloodstarz' and 'Bruce Castle Bangers'^[4], adopting the name of stigmatised estates in an attempt to 'rep their endz' - or in other words to enhance the notoriety of their own esoteric micro-territory (see Earle 2011). Their insularity appears unfathomable to outsiders but is probably not so different from middle class London characterised by a 'super awareness of the meaning of different gentrified areas and what kinds of people live in them and the meanings they project both to their residents and others who understand the cultural language' (Butler 2002, 1.3).

3.8 For Marcuse (2003, p. 270) residential concentration in global cities is a matter of choice for the wealthy and a matter of necessity for the modest-waged or poor. The continued fragmentation and hierarchy of London-space results in a 'spatiality of injustice' that solidifies social and economic divisions in space and reproduces injustices and/or privileges that arise from segregation or confinement (Dikeç 2001). For example, Buck *et al* (2002, p. 224) identify a series of 'feedback processes' operating through health, family formation, education and the labour market, which reproduce and/or intensify the spatial concentration of multi-dimensional exclusion in London. Such entrenched injustice shames London and prevents many residents from believing they have a stake in the city where they reside. As Thomas Bender (2007, p. 269) argues, 'affiliation with the city is in part, a significant part, an act of imagination. If that affiliation cannot be imagined, the city becomes in a quite fundamental way inaccessible, and urban citizenship is diminished'.

3.9 London-space is a cosmopolitized rather than cosmopolitan space (see Beck 2012 for a full discussion of this distinction). Whereas the cosmopolitan refers to a normative ideal of the global (city) citizen where anyone can feel at home, cosmopolitization - referring to the internalisation of the other - is a product of 'assymetries, dependencies, power and force [...]' (Beck and Grande, 2000, p. 418). Contemporary London emerges from the clash and enmeshment between metropolitan modernities and urban modernisms; it is forged from the socio-spatial contradictions emerging from a composite legacy of the Victorian city (so sought after today), the early LCC estates of the 1920s, welfarist/modern urbanism from the 1950s, 60s and 70s and deregulated neoliberal (post)modernism. London-space has become increasingly abstract and homogenous, yet also intensely fragmented and hierarchical, preventing Londoners from gaining a sense of themselves *as Londoners*. Yet somewhere - surviving in the fissures between the wreckage of programmed order and neoliberal reinvention - may be found a countervailing urban modernism that takes the city to its heart.

Riots and Anti-Riots

4.1 If the Brixton riots of 1981 expressed the decay and growing social marginalisation of London's de-industrialised inner city (Unsworth 1981), then the disturbances of August 2011 articulate London's transformed socio-spatiality. In Fordist-era London economically marginalised populations and racialised minorities tended to be residentially confined either to unreconstructed slum areas or what were becoming known as 'hard-to-let' estates. Brixton 1981 articulated the simmering frustrations of 'racial' segregation and disadvantage in addition to a more righteous response to the injustices committed against such communities by a racist police force. As Greaves (1984) explains authorities had for a decade prior to the riots resorted to 'saturation policing' in an attempt to combat street crime in the area. This policy was famously known as Operation Swamp. The Scarman Report (1982) describes the concentration of deprived and unemployed West Indian immigrants in the most defamed and aggressively policed spaces of London as a volatile mix. For Scarman, the riots were the escalation of a long-running conflict. Yet they were also performances in the sense that they took place, or emanated from a symbolic staged space or 'front line' (Keith 2005, p. 70-71). Brixton's 'front line' - referring to the infamous Railton Road - had in preceding years become a barrier of defence and/or a fulcrum for resistance against the Metropolitan Police. After the riots Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Kenneth Newman pushed for his own method of 'community policing', which involved identifying 'symbolic locations' in London, each of which conspicuously conflated urban crisis with 'race'. According to Newman his list of volatile inner cities were places where 'unemployed youths - often black youths - congregate' (cited in Campbell 1993, p. 108). In all these senses Brixton 1981 was a *centred* disturbance characterised by, what now seems like relative socio-spatial-historical clarity.

4.2 In August 2011 London experienced its first anti-riots - decentred, disconnected and dispersed disturbances lacking entirely in concentration - a series of detours without a destination. An anti-riot lacks many of the defining characteristics of a riot but - for want of a more appropriate term - remains a riot (of sorts). In the summer of 2011 there was no front line and these were not 'inner city' riots. Rioters were not necessary locals - in fact many travelled across the Capital following 'tip-offs' via social media about where action would occur next (Newburn *et al* 2011). Moreover in contrast with riots of the past where embittered local communities clashed with the police, in 2011 highly mobile youth clashed *not only* with police but also the local community, for example the self-defence campaigns led by Turkish shopkeepers in Dalston and Green Lanes or the self-styled 'clean-up wombles' of Clapham so praised by Prime Minister David Cameron (Murji and Neal 2001; Millington 2011). A crucial point of distinction between the

Brixton riots of 1981 and the anti-riots of August 2011 is that the temporal union attained by rioters in 2011 did not lead to the appropriation of a centre. August's insurrection was peculiarly scattered and self-contained within each moment and location of enunciation, in the main at the extremities of the global city, in places such as Tottenham, Hackney, Enfield, Ilford, Croydon, Ealing and even Olympic Stratford. London's political and financial centres maintained a stonyhearted composure. The closest the riots got to bourgeois London was Clapham where youngsters from local estates temporarily invaded the cosy milieu of florists, delis and coffee shops.

4.3 Yet it was the *decentredness* of London's anti-riots that caused authorities to panic so much, even to the extent that Police were authorised by the Prime Minister to shoot plastic bullets. As rioting youth fought with some success to depose authorities at a localised level Police struggled to deploy officers to such a dispersed and disconnected set of locations. They also found it difficult to predict where trouble would flare next (Home Affairs Committee 2011, p. 17). In 2011 there was no list of 'symbolic locations' to reel off in anticipation of disorder - either that, or the list drawn up in the 1980s was hopelessly dated. Whereas London's riots have historically been contained in residential streets or estates (Notting Hill, Southall, Brixton, Broadwater Farm Estate) many of August's disturbances occurred in the 'non-places' (Augé 1995) of the Post-Fordist city, sites such as the Arena shopping park in Finsbury Park, the Sony distribution centre in Enfield or Tottenham Hale retail park^[5]. It was highly significant that the spaces where trouble flared disrupted widely held racialised geographies of London (Murji and Neal 2011, 2.8). This apparent disconnect between anti-riots and the 'old' city can also be linked to the communicative disassembling - and relative anonymity - afforded by social and media networking, especially the use of the BlackBerry Messenger service to instantaneously circulate when and where disturbances were taking place.

4.4 Historically, riots have made relatively easy sociological sense (Murji and Neal 2011). The narrative of August's anti-riots is not so easily decipherable.

'There may have been an element of disengagement on the part of some of those involved in the disorder, but unlike some events in the past, including the riots in the 1980s, there does not seem to be any clear narrative, nor a clear element of protest or clear political objectives' (Home Affairs Committee 2011, p. 31).

The meaning of the 2011 anti-riots is so fragmented and perpetually deferred as to bear resemblance to the millions of text messages young rioters zapped across a virtual London in order to communicate with one another. Understandably, 'race' and class have been raised in attempts to identify a political objective to the uprising. Murji and Neal (2011, 2.7) point to how events have been both racialised and de-racialised (see also Solomos 2011). 'Race' was explicitly evoked by historian David Starkey in his confused reference to Enoch Powell on BBC Newsnight where he also claimed that white youth had 'become black', implying it was the influence of anti-authoritarian African-Caribbean culture that was to blame. Yet it soon became clear that a 'race' narrative did not hold in relation to television pictures that showed 'the extent and depth of the super-diversity of England's urban spaces in which rioters, victims, bystanders, youth workers, commentators and residents were utterly multicultural and heterogeneous' (Murji and Neal 2011, 2.9). Class has also been debated. As Scambler and Scambler (2011) conclude, in what has become a familiar refrain, the riots of August were *not* a manifestation of a class politics of the disadvantaged, rather they were opportunistic, consumerist and rather than overtly political. David Harvey (2012) has similarly denied the possibility of understanding the riots in terms of a coherent class narrative, suggesting that August 2011 was another manifestation of feral, slash-and-burn capitalism, where young people 'mimic on the streets of London what corporate capital is doing to planet earth' (ibid: 156). Yet while anti-riots depart from riots in that 'race' and class narratives may not ring immediately true, there is enough continuity with the past to suggest that deep social and psychic wounds from previous decades may have been sealed, without ever being healed. The difference today is that the terrain - i.e. the emergence of a fragmented, hierarchized London-space - has altered significantly having a profound effect on how 'race' and class intersect and also the nature and content of social unrest. A summary of the distinction between riots and anti-riots may be found in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Riots and Anti-Riots

Riots	Anti-riots
Centred—	Decentred—
Inner city as fulcrum for recognition (e.g. Brixton)	Periphery as site of exclusion and displacement (e.g. Croydon)
Segregation—	Super-diversity—
Black and white	Intensified fragmentation and hierarchy
Visibility of minority community	Anonymity as offensive position ^[6]
Saturation policing	Dispersed policing
Local community versus Police	Mobile youth versus 'concerned communities' and Police
Streets and estates—the 'front line'	Non-places—
Symbolic location	retail parks, supermarkets
Narrative	Symbolic dis-location
	Txt

Unity in Disunity: Conflict, Conviviality and a London 'Yet to Come'

5.1 Despite the anti-urban tendencies that dominate contemporary London-space a countervailing brand of urban modernism based upon congestion, social mixing and appropriation - a moving chaos that is a marvellously rich and complex - never entirely disappears from the city. In foregrounding the resilience of this dominated form of urban modernism this discussion claims to make sense of the 'political soul' of London's anti-riots. This final section will explore *first* why an urban modernism of the street is necessarily - and beneficially - conflictual and why conviviality is impossible to entirely banish from the city (see 5.2). *Second*, there is a critical discussion of the desire among rioters for union and the creative and/or transformative potential of street-centred modernism (see 5.3, 5.4, 5.5).

5.2 In the 1960s Jane Jacobs defended the humble city street against the anti-urban theories and practices of bankers and planners. For Berman (1982, p. 316) this defence evoked what Baudelaire called the 'universal communion' available to the man or woman who knows how to 'take a bath of multitude'. The street is so full of potential because it remains the medium in which the totality of modern material and spiritual forces meet, clash, interfuse and work out their ultimate meanings and fates (ibid). It is this 'rubbing along' that causes Sennett (1970) to stress how urban life is not about fleeing the friction of difference; rather: 'the need is [...] to recognise conflicts, not to try to purify them away in a solidarity myth, in order to survive' (ibid: 139). There is timidity in manufacturing consensus but there are lessons to be learned from conflict, most notably the potential for realising mutuality and compatibility (ibid: 181). Lefebvre (1996, p. 53) also argues it is important to value the conflictual aspects of cities, claiming that urban life is the 'seat of the dissolution of normalities and constraints, the moment of play and of the unpredictable' (ibid: 129). This mode of urban modernism is not nostalgia for the 'old neighbourhood'—a criticism sometimes levelled at Jacobs—but an articulation of the organic connections and improvisations made by ordinary residents. It incorporates all aspects of living and expression, from everyday forms of sociality to expressive cultures such as jazz and also street protest. It is rather like the multicultural conviviality that Paul Gilroy (2005) argues is an antidote to the dreariness and pettiness of Britain's post-Imperial melancholia. For Gilroy, diversity engenders a conviviality marked by unruly, chaotic and antic interruptions (ibid: 131). Of course, such interruptions prompt anxiety and discomfort for certain residents of the city, but *working through* differences is essential to urban life and the challenge of confronting a perpetually changing world while striving to feel at home in it (Berman 1982: 348). Moreover, if London really is a cosmopolitised metropolitan space, this condition necessitates a dialogic imagination whereby it becomes 'a matter of fate to compare, reflect, criticize, understand and combine contradictory certainties' (Beck 2002, p. 18). Disagreement and contestation are inevitable. There is no modernism without tears (Berman 1982, p. 137). London's middle classes may continue to 'pad the bunker' (see Atkinson 2006) but in an unequal city where poverty, relative deprivation and the increasing brutalisation of everyday life continue to humiliate those trapped in the marginalised residential quarters of the city, this strategy of disaffiliation is simply not sustainable.

5.3 In the disturbances that broke out from Tottenham on August 6 you could sense a social libido to achieve a 'unity of disunity' - that quintessential modern experience so valued by Marshall Berman (1982, p. 15). In a telling denunciation of violence but a celebration of street-centred urban modernism, an 18-year old rioter from North London claims, "Yeah, that's what I'd call it, unity...It brought unity to certain classes...so there was a lot of unity involved in the riots...that's the only good thing I saw" (cited in Newburn *et al* 2011). Gangs called a temporary truce on ordinary hostilities and post-code beefs were suspended as London's dispersed and alienated youth asked simply 'How do we find each other?' (Invisible Committee 2009:19)^[7]. The unity gained during the disturbances brought much joy to young people who contend daily with nefarious—yet self-constructed—boundaries that restrict their freedom. Commenting on how members from opposing gangs helped each other raid a local branch of Footlocker one rioter claimed, "In the sickest way possible it felt good" (cited in Newburn *et al* 2011). Moreover Reverend Paul Perkins who gave evidence to the Home Affairs Committee report on the disturbances in Clapham Junction reports 'a carnival atmosphere...a very, very hyped-up intense celebration' (cited in Home Affairs Committee 2011, p. 4). David Lammy MP similarly recognises the exuberance displayed by youngsters as they joined forces on the streets:

I expected the faces of rioters to be filled with rage and resentment. If not avenging the death of Mark Duggan, perhaps they were seething at previous treatment by police, or the humiliations of poverty and disadvantage. How else could you explain the ferocity with which they attacked the police, if not anger? The video depicted a far more sinister emotion: happiness. (Lammy 2011, p. 13)

Happiness is rarely viewed as a 'sinister' emotion but then Lammy - like other spokespeople constrained by the expectations of the political field - appears unwilling to recognise the modern spirit in the events he is witnessing. London's anti-riots were destructive, yes; but transformative and transcendental also. For Kofman and Lebas (1996, p. 19) 'the ludic in its fullest sense of theatre, sport, games of all sorts, fairs, more than any other activity restores the sense of *oeuvre* [to the city]'. For sure, these scattered disturbances were compromised, imperfect and sometimes barbarous but - whether we approve of them or not - they reveal a reinvigorated fervour for urban modernism by dispersed, fragmented, marginalised and stigmatised social groups who have for too long been forbidden from participating in the city as *oeuvre* and excluded from sharing its riches. In light of such discouragement it is worth remembering that 'what then is excluded is not simply a category of persons and the sentiments and capacities these categories point to, but important knowledge about what city life could be' (Simone 2009, p. 827).

5.4 The anti-riots of August and the call from our anonymous artist for 'man dem link up' can be understood as a collective cry and demand for what Lefebvre calls the 'right to the city' - a superior right

concerned with *inhabiting* the city, rather than owning or renting a home or being allowed to work there (Lefebvre 1996, p. 173). The right to the city demands participation, appropriation and a renovated centrality based upon the regrouping of differences and the restoration of the sense that the city is a totality, a sum of contributions from all residents. While the anti-riots were not successful on all these counts, they signalled a clear intent. For Purcell (2003, p. 565) the usefulness of the right to the city as idea and practice is that it offers an 'imaginative opening, [...] a challenge to the current structure that points towards a new politics'. The direction that August's anti-riots point is not clear (perhaps *that is* the point) but they do declare that the bland fantasy of a non-antagonistic city (Flint 2009) - the kind promoted in promotional literature for the 2012 Olympics, for example - can no longer go unchallenged. Yet whilst the anti-riots were an expression of urban modernism not seen in London for decades, they also demonstrated the extent to which the claims on the city by ordinary residents have been diminished in recent years. This point requires illustration. The right to the city is partly concerned with achieving the 'possible impossible', i.e. developing a possible theoretical object (i.e. a London 'yet to come') from the problematic posed by reality (i.e. actual London). U-topie - as in the yearning for a place that does not yet exist - plays a major role in Lefebvre's conception of the right to the city (Kofman and Lebas 1996, p. 21). Yet what worries many is that for thousands of young people in London, the 'possible impossible' ostensibly extends no further than raiding Footlocker for the latest trainers or Comet for a wide screen TV. In The Guardian and London School of Economics report *Reading the Riots* (2012, p. 29) a fifteen-year old girl from Wandsworth describes her experience of looting: '[...] You just joined in and it felt fine. It just felt natural, like you were just naturally shopping'. This illustrates just how everyday life for many young people has been transformed into a banal routine of consumption that even a riot cannot disrupt. Rather than declare this as conclusive evidence of consumer conformity and 'post-political' inertia (see Winlow and Hall 2011) it seems more appropriate to suggest that popular conceptions of the right to the city require nurturing. Certainly the possibilities glimpsed during summer 2011 will have nourished such visions. The challenge then, is for London's disenfranchised youth to make greater demands on their city rather than less.

5.5 Anti-riots did not emerge from and nor did they lead to the 'capture' of a centre. This apparent 'failing' may be used as evidence against the main point of this article, that the anti-riots are evidence of the prevailing desire of London's contemporary outcasts to embrace a dialectical urban modernism. Yet, the reality is that it is not possible for a modernism of the street - on the scale celebrated by say, Baudelaire - to flourish in contemporary London-space. Rather it is the desire for man dem to link up that is recognised here; it is that enthusiasm *for the crowd* (as opposed to the disdain so common in today's neoliberal city) that makes London's anti-riots quintessentially modern. So, on one hand London's anti-riots embrace the 'maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish' that comprises the modern experience (Berman 1982, p. 15). On the other, however, they are an example of Marx's famous line that men (sic) make history but they do not make it under self-selected circumstances. The disturbances of August 2011 resemble an improvised urban modernism in a city torn apart by the anti-urban rationality of homogeneity, fragmentation and hierarchy. It should, therefore, come as no surprise that anti-riots occurred in the disaggregated form they did - and this is not a failing. Moreover it should not come as such a shock that, despite the wishes of those who govern London or who reside in its protected enclaves, the injustices of this fragmented and hierarchical city did not go completely unanswered or unopposed by the millions forced to its margins. A modern spirit attracted to simultaneity, gathering, convergence and encounter (Lefebvre 1996, p. 131) is too restless to allow that to happen. The unity in disunity achieved by young people during August 2011 is confirmation that the city has something (and somebody) to live for.

Conclusion

For one luminous moment, the multitude of solitudes that make up the modern city come together in a new kind of encounter, to make a *people*. 'The streets belong to the people': they seize control of the city's elemental matter and make it their own. For a little while the chaotic modernism of solitary brusque moves gives way to an ordered modernism of mass movement. The 'heroism of modern life' that Baudelaire longed to see will be born from this primal scene in the street. Baudelaire does not expect this (or any other) new life to last. But it will be born again and again out of the street's inner contradictions. (Berman 1982, p. 164 original emphasis)

6.1 Much has been written about the disturbances in London during August 2011 yet urban perspectives have not predominated among these discussions. This article offers a view on events that foregrounds the historical tenacity of a mode of urban modernism based upon the street and an appetite for urban living. This is in many ways a *heroic* modernism that, despite exceedingly low odds of success, makes a claim on the city and seeks to restore a sense of totality, an imaginary of London, or at least a revised consciousness or imaginary of London as a city that belongs to its inhabitants. It is this claim - and the distinct space in which it is articulated - that prompts this article to distinguish the 2011 disturbances from earlier examples of unrest in post-War London. Whereas previous riots such as Brixton 1981 were *centred*, August 2011 was a dispersed, symbolically dislocated and *decentred* anti-riot where union was temporally rather than spatially attained. There was no appropriation of a centre as such, yet the mobility and anonymity afforded through lack of visibility were turned into an advantage by young people keen to outwit authorities. Perhaps the anti-riots point to a radical poly-centricity whereby new, oppositional urban centres are being appropriated on the margins and periphery of London, beyond the scrutiny of authorities and those concerned with maintaining a banal 'place-image'. In this way, despite the dispersed form of the anti-riots, their political soul is *urban* - a cry and demand for the simplicities of simultaneity, gathering, convergence and encounter (Lefebvre 1996, p. 131). They also articulate a desire to oppose intensified processes of fragmentation and hierarchy and to end the isolation of the millions without influence. The cry for 'Man Dem Link Up' - addressed to young people in London (some involved in the anti-riots, some not) - challenges the (post)modern drift of London-space; for these youth are

'locked in a dialectical duel with a dominant thesis that strives to silence all the shouts and wipe all the streets off the modern map' (Berman 1982, p. 331-2). It is 'this struggle of radically opposed modernisms' (ibid: 332) that should also spur scholars, activists, politicians and residents to think carefully about whose interests need to be prioritised in the post-riot, post-recession, post-Olympic city. August's anti-riots were a profound statement of dissatisfaction regarding the quality of life and opportunity on offer to millions of residents of London. Let us not forget them or ignore the mechanisms that jeopardise their right to the city.

Notes

¹Mark Duggan was shot by Metropolitan Police officers and died Thursday 4 August.

² <<http://www.londonprofiler.org/>>.

³Available at <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/interactive/2011/aug/10/poverty-riots-mapped>>.

⁴For a borough by borough list of gangs see <<http://www.londonstreetgangs.com/>>.

⁵Examples taken from *The Guardian*, Tuesday 9 August 2011

⁶See Invisible Committee (2009, p. 112)

⁷The compromised urban modernism of the anti-riots bears an uncanny resemblance to 'the coming insurrection' forecasted by The Invisible Committee (2009). This book, which has provoked widespread controversy - especially in France where it was written - details the tactics that need to be used in a war against what they view as a collapsing civilization. This affinity is most clear in the passages where dissatisfied people are warned against participating in community organisations or activist groups. It is argued that these or indeed any existing social milieus are oriented towards the neutralization of the truth (ibid: 100). They also urge against patience and instead favour seizing the possibilities of the present (ibid: 101). Perhaps most presciently the authors argue that the challenge facing anti-establishment youth is to 'find each other', to travel in order to locate weak spots in the system and to open new lines of communication. It also advocates an opposition that flees visibility and turning the 'anonymity to which we've been relegated as an advantage [thereby] creating an invulnerable position of attack' (ibid: 112). Moreover, 'to be socially nothing is not a humiliating condition, the source of some tragic lack of recognition—but is on the contrary the condition for maximum freedom of action' (ibid). This invisibility is linked explicitly to how the dispersed, unpredictable nature of disorder means that by forcing the police to be everywhere they can no longer be effective anywhere (ibid: 127). The book also challenges the notion that—in France at least—radical change will begin in the centre (i.e. Paris). This is because insurrection will naturally occur from the periphery inwards (ibid: 132).

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