The riots that never happened

The hidden perceptions of liminality and transgression: the case of the August 2011 riots in London

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Abstract

In this paper I analyze the riots which took place in London and several other English cities between August 6th and 10th 2011. The riots started two days after Mark Duggan was shot dead by the Metropolitan Police in Tottenham and the mass media and politicians were quick to condemn the public violence and dismiss any sociological explanation. The liminal ritual of status reversal and the temporal transgression of the taboo, which protects private property moulded in narratives and acts of fighting police, looting and arson. The opposing experience, which was gained throughout four days of riots shaped unalike reflections and interpretations of the event among the individuals and the social groups that consist of different strata in the structure of the politico-legal-economic hierarchy. However, the dominant position of the mass media and mainstream politicians, as the representatives of upper and middle classes enabled them to eliminate the alternative picture created among the citizens of lower classes.

Key words:

Riots, liminality, transgression, discourse, disenfranchised.

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1. Introduction

In the late morning of August August 7th 2011 a 20-year-old college student woke up in his apparent. He stayed in bed till 11 AM, because it was Sunday and because he was fighting police till 3 AM last night. The day before Arnie and his fellows drove to Tottenham, where the public violence broke up 48 hours later after the Mark Dugan, a local black man was killed in a street by the Metropolitan Police. The initial confrontation between rioters and the police lasted about 5 – 6 hours and went well into early morning. While some people were building barricades from construction material and shopping trollies, other ones went to Tottenham retail park, where the looting went on in the Tottenham retail park till the early morning.

The sunday morning, according to Arnie, was uncomfortably quiet. Londoners stayed inside for the next for days and watch the imaged of looting on TV news. The images of burning housed in Tottenham cause an anxiety of Arnie's mother who was worried that people gonna riots where were and someone might throw a petrol bomb, because they were living on main road. She was not alone who felt in this way. The public unease wiped out most of the Londoner from the street of their city. However the days of silence were constantly transforming into the night of riots. Almost two years after the riots Arnie described his routine back in the days of the riots by telling me: "Riot at nigh, sleep, wake up, go out at night again, riot, sleep, watch the news, see what else is gonna happen then go there – for couple of days. It's episodic." Throughout this thesis, I am going to present and analyzed two contrasting images of the August 2011 riots in London. The first one of the interpretation of the riots, which dominated the public discourse. The second one is the perception among the participants and engaged observers of the public unrests about the events they took part in.

Sai, another informant who has witnessed riots in Dalson, Brixton and Hackney told

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me a joke, which was turn to liberals, but according to him, it is true for the revolutionary and anarchist left: "for liberal riots are fine as long happen in another country or in the past". The reactions of the mainstream media and politicians to the riots in 2011 suggest that the joke has a grounded background. Year 2011 was full of a significant number of outstanding events, which were covered in an international mass media on a great extent[1]. Hence, the August riots[2] have not initiated the long and comprehensive public debate about social issues that relates to the cause, the course and the outcomes of the riots.

Moreover, A number of research shows (Cavanagh & Dennis, 2012; Fuchs, 2012; Milburn, 2012; Taylor, 2012) how the condemning image of the August riots was constructed in the public discourse. On August 8th, the third day of the riots Borris Johnson, the Conservative mayor of London released a statement (Greater London Authority, 2011) that "these acts of sheer criminality across London are nothing to do with this incident", when Mark Duggan was shot dead by the Metropolitan police four days before. However, the statement of the mayor is not factual, rather rhetorical. It detaches the riots from the social background and adds to the manufacture of the public discourse.

Having said that, the outburst of public violence in summer 2011 actually started after police shot and killed Mark Duggan, a black man who used to live in Tottenham. Officers from the Metropolitan Police anti-gun crime Operation Trident, who had Duggan under surveillance at the time, stopped a minicab in which we was traveling and intended to arrest him. Unfortunately, the end of the operation had tragical consequences. The incident took

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1   Arab Spring started after Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi has died after setting himself on fire a month earlier. Public protests, which lead to the regimes changes in Tunisia and Egypt, and a rebellion war that overturn the Libyan Government were among the most popular subject of public discussions world wide. But also, an earthquake, tsunami and subsequent nuclear meltdown in Fukushima; British Royal Wedding; the independence of South Sudan; Breivik's shootings in Norway; Occupy Wall Street protests in the US; EU "double-dip" recession and Greece financial crisis; and Palestine's full membership in the UNESCO were among the headlines of various national and international news outlets.

2   The riots, which took place in London and a number of other English cities between August 6th and 10th, 2011 are also called "English riots" and "August riots".

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place on August 4th, two days before the initial outbreak of public violence. On the afternoon of Saturday, August 6th a protest march to Tottenham police station took place. Once at the police station protesters demanded for further information about Mark Duggan's killing. After their request was rejected, according to the Metropolitan Police Service review (2011: 15), "as soon as [members of Mark Duggan's family] did actually leave the situation immediately intensified with multiple missiles thrown at the police station from the crowd and two police vehicles set on fire." In the next four days the police officers have lost a control of the significant parts of London and few other English cities. The high streets in Tottenham, Hackney, Peckham, Brixton and other boroughs of London were run by local people. In total the riots spread in sixty-six locations and involved an estimated 15 000 people (Bridges, 2012).

In spite of the fact that the death of local man sparked the initial public violence in Tottenham, the mass media and the mainstream politician shifted public focus towards other elements of the riots. The riots in August 2011 were the biggest outbreak of public violence in London since riots of 1981 in Brixton. That being so, these two events were extensively covered in mass media at the time. However, the Cavanagh's and Dennis' (2012) comparison of the discourses of mass media reveals remarkable changes in attitudes toward youth, race, poverty, criminality, the police, the nature of deprived urban areas and the causes of public violence. Also, the strong tendencies to overemphasize and to magnify the agency of social media ruled over the public discourse. Nevertheless, it is important not to blindly jump into a technological fetishism[3] and not to reduce social problems to the level of technology.

My fieldwork and the analysis of its results show that Social Networking Sites

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3   Fuchs (2012) deprives the notion of technological fetishism from Marx (1992) and Lukács (1972) and argues that it ignores social relations, which are underpinned by contemporary capitalism. Furthermore, technological fetishism presents technologies as social cause, but not the conditions of particular society.

(SNSs), the Internet and the contemporary means of communication have played a role in the riots. However it was only a supporting role. Arnie, one of my main informants who was an active participant in riots told me that

> [social media] politically was vital, because on BlackBerries you have BlackBerry messenger, where you put a broadcast, which goes for 200 people. They have other friends. It spreads like wildfire.
> I knew stuff that was gonna happen in Ealing on third day in the afternoon. And it happen an 9 pm at night. It wasn't planned: "we gonna meet up here" or "this place is getting nicked tonight". People just speculated and the speculation through social media made a self fulfilling prophesy. Because people would go there and then there are enough people to do it. But also you hear about one guy tweeting that there is gonna be a riot and no one came. And then he got arrested and he went to jail.

In other words, social media has affected the pace and the share size of the riots. Sai has elaborated, this effect rather well in a comparison between riots 30 years ago and the riots in 2011. According to him 1980s the riots

> spread slower. So in 80's it took couple days or couple of weeks to spread the riot, in 2011 it takes 30 seconds for text that says "we are keep going until a copper[4] dies. They took one of us, lets take one of them" to go from Brighton to Aberdeen. So in that sense it accelerates the process. That's all it does.

Both Arnie and Sai give credit to the agency of social media in the riots, albeit they do not share as much technological fetishism as mass media does.

As I have pointed earlier, the criminality of the rioters was the second feature of the riots, which was presented through a magnifying glass in mass media. On the August 8th 2011, the Daily Telegraph published an article "London riots: police lose battle as lawlessness erupts" by Mark Hughes, and Tom Whitehead. The authors start the article with a description of situation:

> Hundreds of thugs ran riot across the city, looting shops and setting fire to buildings and vehicles with police apparently powerless to stop them.
>
> Dozens of other areas of the city were subject to attacks as the riots entered their third and most violent day.
>
> For the first time the disorder spread to some of the city's more affluent suburbs with Ealing, East Dulwich, Fulham and Notting Hill under attack (Hughes and Whitehead, 2011).

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4   Jargon: Police officer

Furthermore criminality was presented as the opposition to any other way to explain people's motivation to riot. Boris Johnson, tellingly replied to a question about the shooting that sparked the first riot by declaring, "It is time that people who are engaging in looting and violence stopped hearing economic and sociological justifications for what they are doing" (Davies, 2011). However, in this paper I am going to respond to Mayor Johnson's statement and argue that we need an in-depth understanding of the riots, because the existing image reflects only partial and rather bias point of view. Also, the predominant understanding of the August riots fails to raise the question about the long term implications and social values of the riots. I argue that the use of the modern technological means of communication and criminality were only two of several key features of the riots in 2011. In this paper I ask how and why the picture of the riots in the streets of London is different from the picture in the dominant public discourse? Thus, my aim is to present the side of the riots, which was deliberately forgotten by the mass media and mainstream politicians and explain why it was forgotten in the first place.

Consequently, in the first chapter I am going to give an overview of research methods, which were applied throughout my fieldwork in the United Kingdom and after my return to Budapest. After I address a course of interactions with my informants during the period of my fieldwork, I give a brief account of methods used to extract the information of the utmost importance from the data collected throughout my fieldwork. The next chapter present the most relevant academic literature on the August riots. Back in 2011 the interest in the English riots were suppressed by the handful of internationally significant events, such as the Arab Spring and the Occupy movements. Thus, the chain of the event which have happened between August 6th and 10th 2011 did not succeed to create a remarkable echo in an academic society. Despite that, the issue is touched up on in one or two books written by distinguished

authors, which were publish between August 2011 and May 2013. Hence, I am going to deliver the overview of the interpretations of the small number of scholars who incorporated the riots in their studies.

In the third chapter I make a step forward and approach my empirically approach the subject of my study. Considering the shared agents that signifies the participants of any public spectacle in general, I introduce the key elements of the English riots. The analysis of the social pasterns of the riots enables me to reject the orthodox frame of interpreting and understanding popular urban turmoils. Furthermore, I oppose this frameworks with the theoretical concepts, which are mainly based on the Victor Turner's (1991) understanding of liminality and the thoughts based on the Bataille's (1986) intellectual labour on transgression and taboo. Based on the theoretical rumination and the reflection of the data collected during the fieldwork in the United Kingdom I develop the argument that the English riots were the temporal ritual of status reversal, which was performed through the violent transgression of taboo.

Consequently the following chapter presents two opposing interpretations of the events, which took place between August 6th and 10th 2011 in the abundant borough of London and several other English cities. In the first half of the fourth part of the paper I display and interpret the image of the riots in the dominant discourse. Moreover, I explain the how and why the mass media and mainstream politician manufactured and broadcasted the particular understanding of the August riots. The second half of the chapter, I introduce the rather less prominent understanding of the riots. I give the reflection of the point of view of bottom strata of the British society. The explanation why the particular understanding of the riots formed among the residents of deprived estates and boroughs of London is given this part of the thesis. Last but not least, I argue that two very different interpretations of the

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August riots exist because they reflect the experiences of the rituals of the status reversal and general approaches towards transgression and taboo among the members of two dialectically opposing sides of the contemporary British society.

2. Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to explain how I conducted a qualitative research that formed this paper. First of all, I am going to give an account of methods, which I used during my fieldwork in the area of Greater London between 8th and 23rd April 2013. In the second part of the chapter I briefly discuss routines used to extract information from the materials that I gathered in the field.

Although I started the actual fieldwork phase at the beginning of the second week of April 2013, there was a long period of preparation, which led to successful integration in the field. The subject of my study is rather sensitive therefore I was aware that establishing contacts prior to entering into the field was a crucial requisite for me. Through the number of structural holes of various social networks I contacted and started conversations with six people. Five of them reside in the area of Greater London and one lives in Brighton. I met all of these people during my visit in the United Kingdom, albeit some of them provided me with more useful information for my research than others. Also, some of these interviewees introduced me to other people who, according to them, may be useful in the context of my investigation. Eventually I conducted nine interviews with ten informants.

Throughout the fieldwork phase, I spend 15 days in the United Kingdom, where I was engaged in a handful of ethnographic research techniques. As I have already explained above I have conducted a number of interviews. All of those interviews were conducted and recorded during conversation in informal environments. Two times I was taken for a guided

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tour around the areas in Croydon and Hackney, which were affected by the riots. Another two conversations were recorded in the workplaces of my interlocutors. Both of these places are located next to the epicenter of the riot in Croydon. Once I visited a home of my informant. The rest of the interviews were conducted in bars and cafés.

The first interview was conducted with Ben Ferguson, *The Guardian* journalist who is interested in youth and gangs in London. He was member of *The Guardian* and the London School of Economics project "Reading riots". The one-hour long interview gave me a much better understanding of urban geography and the social composition of London. Also, he provided me with useful insights which he obtained during his collaborations with rioters. The preliminary key-words and patterns emerging from the first interview cemented a basis for the semi-structured discussions, which dominated the following part of the fieldwork. Accompanying these talks, I visited and observed various locations in Brixton, Croydon, Dalston, Elephant & Castle, Hackney, Peckham, Stratford, and Tottenham (see Appendixes A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H). Taking fieldnotes throughout these visits, I observed the urban configuration of these areas. At some of these places I established new contacts leading to more interviews.

All of my interviewees agreed to be recorded. Upon my departure from the United Kingdom I had nearly eight hours of recorded audio material. I transcribed the major parts of our talks after I came back from London. The transcriptions consist of more than 13 000 words. The in-depth analysis of qualitative interviews were performed with Atlas TI, the qualitative data analysis and research software. The investigation of the transcriptions enabled me to extract 64 key-words. Defining the relations among these keywords, I assembled a comprehensive and elaborate structural image of my research and the blueprint of this thesis (see Appendix K).

Last but not least, I looked at the BBC, ITV, the Guardian, the Financial Times and the Daily Telegraph coverage of the August riots and the discussion in the aftermath. I investigated a number of written and recorded materials. Moreover, I analyzed, reevaluated and interpreted a good deal of academic analyses on the manufactured of the image of the riots in the public discourse.

The one possible shortcoming of this research design is the lack of opportunity to meet rioters, who are in prisons. The vast majority the rioters were charged with various offenses, prosecuted and sent to prisons soon after the riots. Most of the sentences were longer than one and a half years, thus they are still in prison to this day. Furthermore, even those who did not face any legal repercussions avoid talking about their actions in riots with someone whom they do not know and cannot completely trust. The 15-day long stay in the fieldwork provided me with hardly any chances to prove that my interests are entirely academic. Therefore a common mistrust of my motives and the fear of possible negative outcomes dramatically reduced my access to information in the field. It took me two weeks of intensive work to find an informant who actively participated in the August riots and was willing to give me a first hand account of his experiences.

3. Literature review

As I have explained earlier, the year 2011 was full of events, which ignited many discussions not only in the mass media, general publics and among politicians, but also in academia. The whole series of books about the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement were published in the following months and years. The most distinguished scholars of social sciences have fully engaged themselves into long discussions about aspects of these event. Therefore, many of those, whom a student of social science would expect to lead the discussions of the public outbreak of the urban violence in of the main metropolises of the

world considered the August riots as an event of the rather local and insignificant magnitude. Having said that, I have to acknowledge that a few scholars actually engaged into public discussions about the riots in London and other English cities. A rather small number of anthropological and sociological arguments were brought by Alain Badiou, Emanuel Castells, David Harvey, Slavoj Žižek and other critical thinkers.

Alain Badiou (2012) uses England riots as an empirical example in the distinction of three different types of riot, which he calls immediate riot, latent riot and historical riot. In his categorization the England riots fall into the category of immediate riot, which is "unrest among a section of the population, nearly always in the wake of a violent episode of state coercion" (Badiou, 2012: 22). Moreover, he insists that there are a number of features which distance this type of riot from the other two types. First of all, youth clashes with forces of law and order are an inevitable part of this type of riots. Secondly, according to him, an immediate riot takes place in the territory of those who participate in it. Lastly, an immediate riot cannot be distinguished through creative process, because it is "composed solely of rebellion, and dominated by negation and destruction" (Badiou, 2012: 25). The author of " The Rebirth of History" argues that the England riots share all three features.

The England riots fit very well into the category of immediate riot. According to the BBC (2011b), about a half of those brought before the courts were younger than 21 and only 5% were over the age of 40. Also, violent actions did not spread out of the boroughs, which are inhabited by the poor and the lower social stratum. Thirdly, public violence lacked a clear political message.

However, a number of intellectuals rightfully argue against the oversimplification of the nature of the England riots in 2011. The academic call for the in-depth analysis of the distinguished elements of the August riots was echoed by a number of scholars, albeit the

number was not great. Few students of social sciences (Taylor 2012, Žižek 2011, Žižek 2012) argue that the nature of contemporary riots can be seen through the absence of a political message. Slavoj Žižek touches the core of the England riots by arguing that

> the fact that the rioters have no programme is therefore itself a fact to be interpreted: it tells us a great deal about our ideological-political predicament and about the kind of society we inhabit, a society which celebrates choice but in which the only available alternative to enforced democratic consensus is a blind acting out. Opposition to the system can no longer articulate itself in the form of a realistic alternative, or even as a utopian project, but can only take the shape of a meaningless outburst. What is the point of our celebrated freedom of choice when the only choice is between playing by the rules and (self-)destructive violence? (Žižek, 2012)

In other words Žižek argues against Badiou's idea that the lack of the unified political message creates indistinctiveness. Instead he proposes that this particular absence of *programme* is a distinct feature of contemporary uprisings. Paul Taylor (2012) backs the notions of an empty signifier and insists that the "ultimate meaning [of riots] is to be found in their apparent meaninglessness" (Taylor, 2012: 394).That being so, Badiou accurately observes that the lack of a rooted political organization signifies immediate riot, however he ignores the bigger image, which clearly indicates that it is a feature of a great number of various contemporary anti-systemic movements and public actions in general.

While the political meaninglessness is a key attribute of the riots in 2011, which caught the attention of the scholars of social sciences, the use of virtual communication undoubtably is another one. In the broader context Emanuel Castells argues that global networks of the occupying movement "ignored political parties, distrusted the media, did not recognize any leadership and rejected all formal organization, relying on the Internet and local assemblies for collective debate and decision-making" (Castells, 2012: 4). Furthermore, almost every single civil unrest since the public uprise in Moldova in 2009 is marked with a *hashtag* and popular technological catharsis. Politicians, journalist, bloggers and other public figures are discussing the democratizing effects of virtual means of communication, SNSs

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and the Internet in general.

On the one hand, the England riots in August 2011 are no exception. Social media and violent actions on the streets of London and other English cities were locked together in a matter of hours after the first disturbances occurred on 6th August 2011. On the other hand, virtual communication was portrayed in an extraordinary and rather different light. While, the power of SNS and the Internet was glorified during the Arab spring and other previous civil unrest, it was condemned and denounced during and after the riots in England. Mass media and politicians created the notion that the riots in 2011 as "the work of a 'mob', constructed them as 'pure criminality' rather than the response to circumstances, located them around notions of 'feral youth', and have forced a clear distinction between the riots and other, 'legitimate' political responses to social conditions" (Cavanagh & Dennis, 2012: 379). Prime Minister of the United Kingdom David Cameron said, "Everyone watching these horrific actions will be struck by how they were organized via social media" (Halliday, 2011). Moreover, Christian Fuchs (2011) argues that the demonization of social media and virtual communication is only one of three different discourses on relations between them and public unrests. According to him, the second discourse embraces the idea that the riots could be contained by the surveillance of mobile phones and the internet, switching off the services, and banning participants of the riots from using social media. Lastly, the third discourse was developed after the riots and stresses the positive effects of social media in the riots. Mass media broadcasted images how local communities organize themselves with the help of Twitter (#riotcleanup) and Facebook in order to restore order and sanity. Thus, the academic understanding of SNSs' role in riots is quite multidimensional and elaborated.

Nevertheless, there are many voices which say that the agency of virtual communication in the English riots was not as important and it was reflected in the public

discourse. "I don't know about Twitter or Facebook, neither do I have an account with them" - said a former supermarket worker, who looted a branch of Carphone Warehouse and later was interview by the Guardian and LSE (Ball & Brown, 2011: 824). *Reading riots* (Richards & Lewis, 2011), the joined study of the August riots suggest that SNS played a minor part in the organization of rioting, looting, arson and public violence in general. The study presents the controversial and ambiguous role of SNS in the August events. The authors of the study illustrate their argument with the examples of seven rumours, which were retweeted more than 10,000 times. However, the study does not consider how social media changed the relationships between those who took an active role in the riots and those who were observing the event passively. The well established enterprises of mass media, such as the BBC and the Guardian, reacted rather slowly, especially in the first hours of the outbreak of the violence. For that reason, numerous audiences learned about the riots in Tottenham, Brixton and other areas from text messages and photos in SNS, especially Twitter. In other words, the existence of SNS indeed impacted riots, albeit the considerable significance was lesser than it was articulated by politicians and the mass media.

However, there is another reason why the politicians and the mass media were so obsessed with the search for the technological causes of the riots. Facebook and Twitter were shown as causal elements. According to Christian Fuchs, mass media "employed language implying that the riots had technological causes, and that there is a one-dimensional cause–effect relationship between media and technologies: availability of new communication technologies => riots, violence and uproar" (Fuchs, 2012: 384). Christian Fuchs (2011) argues that 'technological fetishism' reduces attention to social problems and their impact on public disturbances. According to him "focusing on technology (as a cause of or solution for riots) is the ideological search for control, simplicity and predictability in a situation of high

complexity, unpredictability and uncertainty" (Fuchs, 2011: 386). In other words, the mediated overestimation of online communication is not a simple and unsophisticated error. The focal point of the dominant public discourse is directed towards the means of virtual communication in order to avoid discussion about deeper social problems. Unsurprisingly, a comparison (Cavanagh & Dennis, 2012) of the 1981 Brixton riots and the riots in 2011 reveals many significant changes in the way the 2011 riots were construed by the media, politicians and other commentators in comparison with those of thirty years ago. The study shows that the urban disturbances in 2011 were presented as pure acts of criminality, with little in-depth analysis that may reveal further distancing from the egalitarian vision of a democratic society and a welfare state, which were projected after the second world war.

David Harvey (2012) encourages us to take an further step by arguing that the 'feral' nature of the 2011 riots is the reflection of feral contemporary capitalism. Then again one has to go thirty years back in order to comprehensively understand what was happening in August 2011. Riots in the 1980s were a social struggle against the implementation of neoliberal policies under Thatcherism. The labour union of miners, the councils of cities, such as Liverpool, and the other 'enemies within' fought a ferocious war, which was lost eventually. Thirty years later the occurrences of the large scale public unrest are the convulsant reactions of society. In the dominant public discourse the English riots were called 'meaningless, opportunistic and lacking political message, and/or ideology', yet the same adjectives may be used, when we discuss the nature of contemporary capitalism and the always present promotion of endless consumption.

While world wide famous authors, such as Žižek, Harvey, Badiou and the few others, included the August riots in their anthropological and socio-economic studies of the trends and the symptomatic shifts of contemporary societies and states, the chain of the events

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unfortunately never played a significant role in their analysis. Furthermore, none of these authors provide an inclusive picture of the riots, which would give reflections from both the upper and the lower social stratum.

4. Liminal nature of the August riots

Every single person, whom I have interviewed in London, emphasized the role of the police in the riots. I was told many times that the police has a central agency in the riots. The perception of the importance of the police can be supported by several accounts. First of all, the an inadequate action of the police sparked the riots. As it was explained previously, the Metropolitan Police is responsible for the death of Mark Duggan. Also, because the failed police operation with tragical consequences was carried on by officers from Metropolitan Police anti-gun crime unit, the local Tottenham police claimed to have no a priori knowledge about the action. The absence of coordination and internal communication led to police's inability to answer any questions about the incident for a long time. The first public violent incidents took place forty eight hours after the shooting when the peaceful protest march and the public demand for the answers led to a riot.

However, according to many of my interlocutors, the animosity of the inhabitants of boroughs such as Tottenham and Hackney towards the police was accumulating for the long period of time. Furthermore, Ben Ferguson a journalist, who interviewed rioters for the Guardian and the London School of Economics (LSE) study "Reading riots" told me that "'stop and search[5]' was one thing, all the kids said, that pissed so much". The alienating notions, such as 'police brutality', 'police violence', ' police killed another young black guy

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"Stop and Search" is a very often used police procedure, when a police office is allowed to stop anyone on a street and search him/her, without any explanation or legal charges. The Metropolitan Police sees the technique as "an important policing tactic and a deterrent to crime". However, the a number of studies shows that blacks and ethnic minorities have a higher likelihood of being stopped and search by police (Delson & Shiner, 2006; Bowling & Phillips, 2007; Borooah, 2011).

again' and 'police as occupying and alien force within community' were used rather frequently by many respondents when they were trying to explain social long-term implications which led to the riots. Last but not least, police is a force which directly confronts rioters as members of the general public who execute illegal activities, such as rioting, looting and arson. Thus, violent confrontations between the police and rioters have a number of reasons to happen.

4.1 Politics of and through the riots

However, the circumstances in which people confront the police have a high social meaning, which defines the social value of riots to a great extent. As Max Weber (1991: 78) famously says, "state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory". However, during the period of a riot the state's monopoly of violence is being contested and, even, temporally rejected. The massively celebrated fights against the police are the expressions of this temporality. The social subversion of normal order and normality is the best visible aspects of the riots. For a few days society is forced to watch how the police is being chased by violators of a law, the streets are run by locals and the hierarchic structures of society are transgressed. Immediate changes in politico-legal-economic hierarchy, which occur through the violent measures of struggle in an urban environment initiated many responses in a field of social studies and left-wing political ideology. As Castells (1977: 86) observes "the most striking expression of this 'left-wing' version of the ideological thesis on urban society is no doubt the urbanist thinking of one of the greatest theoreticians of the contemporary Marxism, Henri Lefebvre". In a reaction to urban changes Lefebvre (1996) declares need to the *right to the city*. He argues that the right cannot be conceived as a return to traditional cities. According to him, those who inhabits cities have to renew the right to urban life. However, Andy Marrifield states

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(2012) that the notion of the *right to the city* is also outdated. Instead he suggests an idea of *encounter*, which enables "people start to recognize a 'singular essence', especially humiliated and exploited people, who encounter one another not always directly, but through a mode of relating to the world, through unstated forms of solidarity" (Marrifield, 2012: 108). That being the case, from the first glance one may suspect that the spontaneous street battles are the part of class warfare, which threaten the existing order and try to impose a new one. Nevertheless, according to Paul Anthony Taylor "[t]raditional Marxist analysis would suggest that the politically unfocused riots were the act of an alienated lumpenproletariat lacking in class consciousness" (Taylor, 2012: 394), thus the approach of the classical dialectical class struggle is not able to explain social relation in an urban environment in every respect. As Manuel Castels (1989: 171) suggests *urban struggles* distance popular strata from the organization and orientation of working-class movements and shift towards a conscious opposition to state practices marked by the hegemony of monopoly capital (emphasis by the author). Sai and Arnie - politically engaged interviewees, who are also members of Socialist Workers Party (SWP) make it clear that the political left, which is detached from the everyday life in deprived and poor neighborhoods is partly responsible for the lack coordination and political consciousness in the most recent riots. Moreover, the riots, according to Sai, "showed a real division between some of those communities and the [political] left". Although the political representation of lower classes is missing from the riots, the riots still have an active agency, while defining social order.

4.2. Definition of the rioters: ambience and temporality.

Like any social event, riots attract people, who can be differentiated from the rest of the public. It is rather simple to define that in the broadest definition any facility or area, which contains a public spectacle such as a stadium during a football match, is filled with the

masses of people who enjoy the spectacle. Yet, anyone who observed any spectacle in a facility where it takes place, knows that the direct observation raises very different emotions and thus experience, from those which are gained from an indirect observation, for example while sitting in front of a TV or a computer screen and watching the same event. In other words, personal and direct relations with a spectacle, such as a sport event combines many elements and the observation *per se* is only one of many. Hence, a football fan who periodically enjoys football matches in a stadium is defined by the majority of these elements, which also create a greater or lesser, although an actually existing shared sense of the community with other supporters. The authentic personal interaction between two random observes of the same spectacle is an insignificant agent, because the shared experience of the defining elements of the observation of the event in a facility is the signifier, which unites any two persons. While the basic definition of an attendant of a public spectacle is relatively simple, I insist that it is substantially more difficult to define an attendant of a riot and a communality, which unites them.

In addition, a riot just like the majority of sport events is based on the performance of an opposition to a rival side. While on the very basic level all attendants of the public spectacle are the unified social body, they can be divided into at least two groups by the patterns of opposition and rivalry. Moreover, these two groups can exercise very different elements of the spectacle or gain very different emotions and experience from the same elements. In other words, supporters of different sport teams have little in common in a city derby. In the same way, there are very few elements of riots, apart the riots *per se*, which put rioters and police officers on a common ground. Thus, my aim in the following part of this chapter is to show the elements of the August riots that unite those who confronted the police.

During my fieldwork in the UK, I was repeatedly told by a number people, who have

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no connection with each other that the defining elements of the riots are the lack of political consciousness, the extraordinary atmosphere inspired by the reversal of the hierarchal social and power structure, and the absence of long term aims and visions. The particular combination elements imply that the state, which Victor Turner (1991) calls 'the liminality', existed between August 6th and 10th 2010. The author of 'The Ritual Process' distinguishes two main types of liminality: the one that characterizes the *ritual of status elevation* and another one, which may be described as the *ritual of status reversal* (emphases by the author). In the former kind of liminality "the ritual subject or novice is being conveyed irreversibly from a lower to a higher position in an institutionalized system of positions" (Turner 1991: 167). The elevation of the status through liminality can be found in various types of hierarchal organizations, which symbolically convert ordinary members of society into the members of the organization. One has to pass this ritual, when he becomes a soldier or a priest. Also, cyclical and calendric rituals often include the state of liminality, when "groups or categories of persons who habitually occupy low status position in the social structure are positively enjoined to exercise ritual authority over their superiors" (Turner 1991: 167). Turner finds this second type of liminality in a number of African tribal cultures. He also argues that the celebration of Halloween is the annual execution of the liminal ritual in western cultures. However, the social role of liminality is much higher than one may suspect by watching kids with masks of mystical creatures, villains and living dead. Turner explains the role of liminality through dialectical relationships between weak and strong by suggesting that

> one might contrast the liminality of the strong (and getting stronger) with that of the permanently weak. The liminality of those going up usually involves a putting down or humbling of the novice as its principal cultural constituent; at the same time, the liminality of the permanently structural inferior contains as its key social element a symbolic or make-believe elevation of the ritual subjects to positions of eminent authority. The stronger are made weaker; the weak act as though they were strong. The liminality of the strong is socially unstructured or simply structured; that of the weak represents a fantasy of structural superiority. (Turner, 1991: 168)

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While the author of 'The Ritual Process' looks for status reversal in annual calender events, I argue that riots have a high degree of liminality. A riot, in opposition to Halloween in the US and liminal festivals in African tribal cultures, is not an annual event. However, it is not a happening that occurs only once either. The urban disrupts of the public violence against the police and private property mark the history of metropolises and cities around the world rather often. The England riots in August 2011 have significantly similar patterns of the ritual of status reversal to the violent , but also liminal events, which took place in the streets of Brixton in 1981, Tottenham in 1985, Los Angeles in 1992, in Paris in 2004 and in many other urban locations over the history of the last two hundred years.

4.2.1 Ambience

The riots are a social event *per se,* but their causes and outcomes need to be looked upon as an integral part of society. During the meetings with my interviewees I was reassured that the common atmosphere which consists of 'sense of power', 'excitement', 'ferocity' and 'the absence of fear' is a shared experience for those who on any level were engaged in the actions as rioters or their supporters. Even more interestingly, just like the August riots by itself, the particular ambience was rather unexpected and unanticipated. According to Ben Ferguson,

> the fact that people like you reclaimed the area and take control of the area, and scared a police, have people enormous sense of power. The power that they previously never thought they would ever had. And equally that was as surprising for people who were involved as for anybody who was interested in seeing what was happening during those days.

However, among the rioters there was no objection to sustain this reversed order. The festivity of the short term triumph was a sufficient achievement for many.

During the August riots the *communitas[6]* has embraced and celebrated the U-turn of

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Communitas is a '"model' for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating <...>, which emerges

the power structure. A conventional hierarchal social order in which police officers represent the higher authority and the Weberian monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force was contested through ferocious, but highly ritualistic and symbolic street battles. From my point, of view these violent clashes between police and rioters can be explained best the terms of liminality. During the conversation about the goals of the rioters in the conflicts with a police on the streets, Arnie told me that

> the objective wasn't the win. It was to hurt [police] back and get them back. But get back means different thing for different people. The objective was too beat them as hard as you can. If you can do more than that, if you can tip a van and set it on fire, if you can take their equipment and used it against them, if you can hunt them and if you can make them run, then you are winning. That's you beating them up. And that's the aim. I think it wasn't war it structural way: fearing repercussions if you loose. That's the interesting thing, that no one gave a crap about repercussions. Everyone who was involved knew what they were doing and one of the main reasons why they did it because they completely disregarded the risk that were taken: the risk of going to jail, the risk of being caught, risk on their families and on their jobs, on their education and having a record. You had to disregard these if you had them to be able to to what you did on that day.

In other words, the street level violence in the English riots is a counter move against the superiority of the police in the social hierarchy of contemporary British society. In the conventional environment a police officer, a representative and a protector of social and political status quo has the publicly unquestionable authority and the right to impose this authority by violent measures. Police and those who contest the rules of the existing state of affairs also used different kinds of violence. In the introduction to "Violence" Slavoj Žižek (2008) divides violence into two categories: firstly, he declares that subjective violence is encountered as an opposition no non-violent, "normal" environment. However, the "normal" state of thing contains and deploys an objective violence. He says that systemic violence[7] is "not only direct physical violence, but also the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence" (Žižek 2008: 9).

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recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus,* community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders" (Turner 1991: 96).

7   Žižek uses term 'systemic violence' in a same meaning as he uses term 'objective violence'

That being so, the police forces are at the same time tools and the users of objective violence, while anyone who personally resists it is associated with the subjective violence, which in the public discourse is presented and understood as a socially unacceptable phenomenon. The collective denial of the structural position of the police in politico-legal-economic hierarchy is socially deviant.

Having said that, during the period between August 6th and 10th 2011 the dialectical relations between the two strata in the hierarchy was temporally altered. The police has lost a control of the high streets in a number of boroughs in the capital city of the United Kingdom and the few other English cities. People who were engaged in the action fought against the police and in this way negated the dominant politico-legal-economic hierarchy in which they are at the bottom and the officers of the law represent, enforce and defend the structure and those higher positions.

4.2.2 Temporality

Several times I have encountered claims that four days were a surprisingly long period of rioting. Ana, a political activist, who witnessed the second riots in Elephant and Castle and Peckham said that she felt

> like it's going to die anyway. I don't think we expected the third day. Actually in a way a second day was a surprise. You would think that after one day it would die off or the police take control of it. But it was a second day and the third day was a surprise.

Temporality is one of the features of the rituals of status reversal and liminality *per se*. According to Turner "liminality implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low" (Turner 1991: 97). This means not only a dialectical relationship between the high and the low, but also that in the post-liminal period the hierarchal configuration is back in the position of status quo. Those who

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used to be in the low positions before the ritual of status reversal is going to be in the low positions again and those who used to occupy high places are going to be in the high anew. However, both of these strata will be affected by the experiences gained during the period of liminality. The effects of the status reversal are very particular and different for individuals and social groups in the different positions of the politico-legal-economic hierarchy.

The understanding and the acceptance of the temporality of the liminal situation were particularly strong among the rioters. One of the features which have defined the atmosphere in the poor boroughs of London was the ultimate integration only in the present time. Neither past, nor future played a significant part during the moments of the most vicious fights with the Metropolitan Police. In the second part of the upcoming chapter I am going to prove that the public perception of the riots in the dominant discourse was completely opposite. The mass media and mainstream politicians, as outspoken representatives of upper and middle classes created an empty albeit elaborated facade of the August riots in which the prehistory and the aftermath of the public turbulence were more noticeable than the riots *per se.*

As I have showed previously, Arnie was one among the majority of my interviewees who told me that people in the riots have not considered the possible repercussions of their actions. Also, during the interview with George he told me that "people that wouldn't ordinary get involved, were getting involved because they felt they could. They weren't afraid to be caught." In this matter the English riots differs from the better know case of transgression of the taboo, which was observed among disenfranchised in post-socialist Mozambique (Groes-Green, 2010). The author of the study argues, "that *moluwenes*'[8] defiance of death and their attraction to dangerous activities become meaningful if seen against the background of

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    The deprived social group of urban youth, which behavior was observed by Groes-Green. The term in Changana a Bantu language spoken by the majority of people living in Maputo means *wild, marginal.*

ideological decay of the state amid a post-socialist vacuum of legitimacy, as well as neoliberal politics of marginalization" (Groes-Green, 2010: 387). Nevertheless, the moluwenes' transgressive situation does not posses any comprehension of the temporality and hence any type of end, which would transform the inhabited environment in the position under the supremacy of taboo. The only perceivable end is dead. In the meanwhile, the English rioters and disenfranchised in general were fully aware that the celebration on the transgression of taboo is not going to last long, albeit the awareness was not articulated during the August riots. The participants' denial to consider the aftermath of the riots is a reasonable reaction when we consider that in the post-liminal period those who used to be low will be in the low again. In the other words, the end of the ritual of status reversal is negative repercussions per se. Therefore, whatever happens during the time of liminality is not going change the upcoming transition from *communitas* to the politico-legal-economic hierarchal model.

5. Liminality between the public sphere and the dominant discourse.

The ritual of status reversal has different places in the social memory of the low and the high social stratum. Any kind of the recollections of the social turmoil in August 2011 are not welcome in the mass media and the dominant public discourse in general. The short term memory defines the news cycle of the mass media. However the issue of the social power to recall the riots is much bigger than just a fast cycle in 24/7 news channels. In the following part of the paper I am going to analyzed the two perceptions of the same chain of event. First of all, I am going to present and investigate the dominant image of the riots, which was manufactured by the mass media and mainstream politicians. In the second part of the chapter, the rather less well elaborated and published perception of the August riots is going

to be introduced and analyzed. The latter perception exist among lower stratum of the society which gave birth to the riots per se. Also I am going to elaborate why these two picture of the same events are different in a number of ways.

While we were sitting on a bench in a small square next to Hackney Town Hall with no visual signs of the events which took place down the street just 21 month ago and talking about the memory of the riots, George[9] said:

> It's funny how in this country it's not spoken about that. When you mention what are you doing I was quite interested. I forgotten it happened. Things happen really fast, they get replaced by other issues - it's not talked anymore. However this issue by itself because it still remain, it's just put it under the surface. It was under the surface until it exploded into action.

The absence of visual and verbal initiatives to start the discussion about the riots in 2011 and the related issues signal disproportional social representation in a space, which in the term of Jurgen Habermas (1993) should be called the *public sphere*. However, the current deficiency of the public debates on the issues is symptomatic, because the preconditions of communication, which according to Habermas are needed for fair negotiations and free public debates, do not exist in the contemporary public sphere. The hegemonic position of the mass media is one of the number of agents, which have collectively caused this obstructed state of public communication. Habermas argues that

> in conjunction with an ever more commercialized and increasingly dense network of communication, with the growing capital requirements and organizational scale of publishing enterprises, the channels of communication became more regulated, and the opportunities for access to public communication became subjected to ever greater selective pressure <...> The public sphere, simultaneously prestructured and dominated by the mass media, developed into an arena infiltrated by power in which, by means of topic selection and topical contributions, a battle is fought not only over influence but over the control of communication flows that affect behavior while their strategic intentions are kept hidden as much as possible. (Habermas, 1993: 436-437)

The defects of the British public sphere were easily detectible. Mass media, which according

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9   George's photo from the August riots are online at <http://photographyandgeorge.com/2011/08/17/shooting-a-riot/>

to Nick Couldry (2008: 163) concentrates historically unprecedented amount of symbolic resources, has exercised control over the public sphere on a great scale after the killing of Mark Duggan. The British mass media and politicians from the three parliamentarian political parties used all their weights in arena of public communication in order to created the notion that the riots were staged by 'Twitter mobs' and 'Blackberry mobs'. A similar kind of messages have circulated non-stop in public sphere while social disturbances shook the streets of London and for several weeks later on. Milburn (2012: 402) summarize the mass media response to the riots by saying "a hysterical campaign was launched to prevent the riots becoming linked to the context of crisis and austerity from which they emerged". Whence, in the next part of the chapter I am going to look into deep causal roots of "a hysterical campaign".

5.1. The high and the dominant discourse

Georges Batailles (1986) reminds us that transgression does not deny taboo, but transcends it and completes it. Social taboo is put in a place to first and foremost oppose violence. Yet, Batailles raise a social paradox, where an ultimate and systemic expression of lethal violence – war is not in conflict with violence. Albeit war is organized violence (Batailles: 1986: 64), taboo opposes a certain kind of violence, which according do the author of "Erotism: Death & Sensuality", should be referred to as "animal violence". Although, Michael Tausing shows us that "we are told, as result of Bataille's intellectual labors on taboo and transgression, that the function of the taboo is to hold back violence" (Tausing, 1993: 31), it is clear, that in the case of the English riots social taboo holds back only the particular kind of violence. There are no sighs of the opposition between taboo and the violence, which Žižek (2008) calls an "objective". During our conversation Sai raised the issues of covered objective violence and its coexistence with taboo. He told me that "after the

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riots people kept saying 'somebody could died'. I'm sorry, but somebody did die, a black man was pulled out of the cap and executed". Because of the supportive relations between contemporary social taboo and objective violence, the presence of the latter before, during and after the August riots was not raised as a significant issue for public debate in the public sphere.

The transgression, through the public disperse of subjective violence was in the focus of the mass media and mainstream politicians. The correspondence between transgressive subjective violence and taboo (of subjective violence) based dominant public discourse is rather peculiar. Tausing provides us with a descriptive analysis of this relationship in general and says that

> It is true that the transgression occurs and can only occur within the bounds and buffers set by ritual. It is true that just as taboo exists in order to be broken, so transgression fortifies the taboo. But these equilibriums do not diminish the fact that the act of transgression is in itself fraught with the perils of indeterminacy, an indeterminacy constitutive of Being no less than threatening it with dissolution. (Tausing, 1993: 126)

The August riots were the public exhibition of the transgressive ritual of social reversal through sovereignty of low stratum, which was achieved by the performance of subjective violence against the elements of the politico-legal-economic hierarchy, such as police officers and private property. On the one hand, these highly performative actions posed no danger to a socially conventional structure per se. They merely broke daily routine and rules, which had been in force before the riots and were restored post factum.

On the other hand, the fact that the transgressive ritual of social reversal is liminal and do not jeopardize taboo nor established order gives it amnesty from the deviant image in the dominant public discourse. While the Bataillian taboo does not confront the violence by itself, but just subjective violence, the British mass media and politicians made a clear distinction

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that only rioters were acting like animals. Although, the transgression of the taboo, according to Bataille (1986: 64) is not animal violence, the August riots were never contemplated as transgression, nor liminal ritual of status reversal. In a classical understanding, Tuner (1998) argues that a liminal ritual of status reversal, such as Halloween in US and the *Apo* ceremony of the northern Ashanti of Ghana, is accepted and even embraced by the whole society. In addition Bataille (1986) illustrates his theory with a case from Sandwich Islands, where transgression is performed by everyone after the death of the local king.

However, the situation in the UK after the Metropolitan police killed Mark Duggan differs from the classical cases, because temporarily subversive social order is embraced and supported only by part of the society. The middle and upper classes have the rather condemnatory approach toward the public uprise of the lower class. Trevor Reeves, the director of "House of Reeves" a furniture shop in the Central Croydon, which was burned to ashes during the riots - told me that in his opinion riots in one of the satellite towns in the greater area of London were "four days of disgraceful behavior" and "completely pointless". It is easy to understand his emotions about the riots while recalling the pictures of the burning his beautiful shop, which survived both World Wars, a number of recessions and was kept in the hands of five generations of the same family. Thus, the personal losses of the private property are real, albeit from the analysis of the big picture it is clear that the situation is liminal.

The mass media and politicians chose to concentrate attention their and hence the public's, to private loses and completely ignore the symptomatic signs of liminality and transgression. Pierre Bourdieu (1979) explains us the expression of class domination through the production and distribution of symbols. He argues that according to the Marxist tradition,

> the dominant culture produces its specific ideological effect by concealing its function of division (or distinction) under its function of communication: the culture which unites (a medium of communication) separates (an instrument of distinction), and legitimates distinctions by defining all cultures (designated as sub-cultures) in terms of their distance from the dominant culture (i.e. in terms of privation   identifying the latter with culture (i.e. Excellence) (Bourdieu, 1979: 80).

The dominant culture in the case of the August riots has produced a picture of the particular culture which is separated to the very high degree The mass media worked almost in unison with politicians from the major mainstream parties in condemning the riots and anything which relates, but does not oppose them. The discriminative and excluding terms such as "youth culture" and "black culture" were openly used in the public attempts to explain the riots. The comments of David Starkey, a British constitutional historian, and a radio and television presenter on BBC's Newsnight on August 12th 2011 were the ultimate example of racism and the delegitimization of non-dominant cultures. During the show he said that "whites became black. The particular sort of violent destructive nihilistic gangster culture has become the fashion" (BBC, 2011a). Later on the same program Starkey also said that if one listens, David Lamey "an archetypical successful black man on radio you would think [...] was white"[10]. While the roles of race and ethnicity in the August riots need to be analyzed in-depth and discussed comprehensively, the racists comments of Starkey also present the power of the dominant culture in manufacturing and defining the dominant public discourse. Liminality illustrated with the images of "low" black culture dominating over the "high" white culture was strongly denounced by mainstream politicians, commentators and the mass media in general.

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10   David Lamey is a British Labour Party politician, who has been the Member of Parliament for the Tottenham since 2000. In the book he published on the August riots he says that he oppose the latests riots to the 1985 riots in Tottenham. According to him The police was perceived like an occupying force, racism was rife and it was common to be stopped, searched and often humiliated back in 1985. However, situation in 2011 was different and only "a few hundred people had just caused chaos, but there are almost 40,000 people under 25 living in Tottenham. The overwhelming majority were victims, not penetrators. Above all I was determined to communicate one thing: this is not a true face of our area" (Lammy, 2011: 5) While, absence of moral compass, middle class liberals, welfare dependency, in Lammy's argument are portrayed as collective causes of the August riots, he fails to identify with the inhabitants of his constituency and their social problems.

In addition, the spacial reflection of the riots were mostly removed from the borough, which experienced the ritual of status reversal. I visited a number of boroughs and estates where the riots took place in London. Most of these areas had no visual signs of the event, which took place in August 2011. The only minor exceptions were Croydon and Peckham. A temporarily looking fence surounds the area where Reeves furniture shop used to be in central Croydon. The visual history of the "House of Reeves" from 1897 to 2011 is presented on the fence. The pictures of the burning house are present, however there were only images taken on the night of riots.

Meanwhile, Peckham marks the August riots with the Peckham Peace Wall (PPW), which was initiated by Peckham Shed theater company (see Appendixes L, M and N). The permanent public artwork have replaced board covering broken windows outside Poundland[11]. The temporal initiative, according to the founders of the PPW, "attracted the involvement of thousands of local people whose post-in messages of love and respect for Peckham grew to eventually fill eight hoardings". As a result neither of these two memorials reflects the riots per se. The first one commemorates the period before the riots and presents the furniture shop as a symbol of the prosperity and wealth of the middle and upper classes. Meanwhile the PPW is devoted to display the post-liminal phase. The messages, such as "peace for Peackham", "I ♥ Peckham", "Don't set fire to Peckham" and "Stop the violence" dominate the wall of stylized post-in stickers. However, on the few colourful squares one can find messages which confront the dominant discourse and blame external agents, such as the conservative government and unemployment for the riots in the borough.

Over and above that, the ultimate image of the black out of the social memory of the riots is found on the Google maps Street view (see Appendixes I and J). The images from the

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11 Poundland is a British variety store chain which sells every item in its stores for £1. Poundland store in Peckham, south London was stripped of its stock by more than 150 looters.

Church street show the view of the aftermath, which was taken at 2012. Simultaneously, the images from around the corner recall the views back from July 2008, when the furniture shop was still in place and operating. Thus, one who visits the Reeves Corner in both the offline and online worlds is presented mostly with the pre-liminal and the post-liminal periods, but almost no direct physical reflections of the liminal days exist there. I remind the reader once again, that the dominant focus on the pre-liminal and post-liminal periods opposes the rioters' perception, which puts the liminal ritual of status reversal into the spotlights.

The images of the August rituals of status reversal were quickly and efficiently removed from the public sphere and, therefore, from social memory after the Metropolitan Police regained the control of the High Street and retail parks in the deprived boroughs of London. After the *communitas* was destroyed and the politico-legal-economic hierarchal model was secure, those who reoccupied the strong positions on the upper half of the social structure shared no pleasure in remembering what happened during the riots.

5.2. The low and the alternative view.

On the other hand the memories of the riots are still alive among those who the active or passive participated in the events. Ana told me that

> sometimes we listen a radio and every time a young person is interviewed he says, "there is gonna be a riot". It shows that riots are still in people's minds. But they are not in mainstream media, which says that it was done by mad, bad people and criminals, who were acting in their own accord and there is nothing political about it, and there is nothing communal about this, it's just individuals that need to be punished. Because of that discourse media has forgot about it. But among the people there is this latent awareness that it can happen any time.

Contrary to the people on the upper half of the hierarchal structure, those who stayed in the streets of Tottenham, Hackney, Brixton and the other affected areas during the riots recall the liminal period rather well. In the upcoming part of the chapter I am going to analyze the understanding of the riots among the those who Turner refers to as "low".

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All of these people told me that the riots felt like a carnival or party. According to Turner , "emotional, nothing satisfies as much as extravagant or temporarily permitted illicit behavior" (1991: 176). The emotional satisfaction of illegal activities, such as fighting the police and getting free commodities from looted shops, in the opinion of my informants, were among the critical elements of the shared ambience of the riots. Groes-Green (2010) shows us how Mozambican deprived youths construct their transgressive space by constantly crossing the boundaries set up by society's laws, taboos and norms. They do so by positioning themselves in arenas of danger, with an aura of invincibility and fearlessness, and where socially praised notions, such as 'work', 'education' and 'career' no longer matter. In the words of George Bataille, "the urge to reject violence is so persistent that the swing of accepted violence has a dizzying effect" (1986: 69).

The violent course of the riots has uplifted people from the low positions in the social hierarchy. In their own perception and the perception of those who witnessed the actions directly, the social status of rioters has significantly moved up on a vertical scale. Meanwhile, the authority of the Metropolitan Police was heavily impacted by the severe drop of their status. Therefore, the English riots have to be seen as a ritualistic and symbolic event which reversed the statuses of those who occupy low positions and their superiors. On top of that, the actual fights with police officers were not interpreted and/or comprehended by either side as rituals. Hence, the shared sensation of anger and power gave a rise to state of sovereignty for those who rioted. Groes-Green remind us that "in Bataille's writings sovereignty includes moments of non-reflexivity and extreme bodily experiences of superiority which stem from transgressive moments" (2010: 400). The sovereignty of rioters, according to my interviewees, was understood as the control of estates and boroughs where they locate themselves. In the pre-liminal and post-liminal phases police officers are representatives and

protectors of the structure of the politico-legal-economic hierarchy. Thus, they have the unquestionable superiority. Having said that, the moments of transgression during the August riots created a sensation of unprecedented and previously inexperienced superiority among the residents of the most deprived areas of London. A number of my informants recalled that the people were empowered by the fact that they were able to deny the authority of the police. Sai told me that during the riots

> You feel powerful. It's incredible to be with three other people and have a group of 15 coppers cross the road. It's incredible to walk up to the copper just to stare him into eyes. And it's the copper that turns away and fucks up. It's incredible to stand on a street corner while you see 30 kids belting coppers on horses and their massive things in vans, and getting hammered while onlookers: parents, children, people our age starting clapping and saying "it's fantastic".

The rioters' image of the organization of the riots also is different from the image which was reflected in the mass media. Contrary to the popular image in the dominant discourse, the riots was not masterminded by the criminal gang using social media and BlackBerry message service. Albeit these technologies were used, the public uprise of the "low" was mostly composed of spontaneous acts of rioting and looting. When I asked Ana, why she thinks the riots had not spread into Central London where the political power and the financial wealth are concentrated, she replied that "if you and your friends wanna get to the central London it requires planing. And there was no planning at all. It was really spontaneous. When you have that kind of spontaneity, you go: 'hey, downstairs in the high road'." The loose and spontaneous organization of the English riots is not abnormality. Quite a contrary, according to Groes-Green

> transgression is never completely intentional, enmeshed in predefined organizations of mimesis or captivated by images of state, idols or mountains. There are certain movements which are prone to produce anxiety or ecstasy, and these must be looked for in tangible acts of transgression, together with the subjects who initiate them and heedful that no rule, law or taboo precede their violation (Groes-Green, 2010: 390).

This statement together with the Ana's answer supports my argument that arson and looting

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were spontaneous expressions of anger, but not well organized crimes.

After the death of Mark Duggan ignited riots, many explosions of public violence were directed against private property. A significant number of shops were looted. Also, there are reports of people being mugged on the turbulent streets. These acts of criminal behavior caught and arrested the attention of mass media and politicians. The same kind of explanation was given to me by Trevor Reeves during our conversation in the remaining building of the House of Reeves[12]. He told me that

> the sooner people stop trying to justify, they realize that it's just criminal activity and although there may be social things that go on behind the scenes. There is very few people that did it. It was across the board. The heavier policing would have stopped it has started in the first place. And give opportunity to worry about what they think is a social thing. You know, people who want it fixed shouldn't riot. That's not a way to get it fixed. I don't believe they wanted fix it.

The voices from upper and middle class called the behavior of the rioters *opportunistic*. On top of that it was set as the opposition to the ideological and/or political nature of the riots. In the words of the dominant discourse, the August riots had no political, sociological and/or ideological message to deliver, because the rioters looted shops and hence were opportunists. During our conversation Rod, a 40 year old manager of a piercing saloon and retail shop in Croydon, which sells smoking supplies told me that

> the riot was completely opportunistic, it was no message sent, it was purely an exercise of what I can get. That's because the message that to these people have been send all they lives is "What can you get?" That's the culture we live in.

On the one hand his argument reflects the popular image of the meaninglessness of the violence on the streets during August riots. On the other hand, the passage has an inner contradiction, because it distributes the responsibility between the individual acts of opportunism and the social environment that Rod called "the culture we live in".

Nevertheless, the so called opportunism is an element of the liminality which was

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12 After the main building was burned down on August 8th, 2011, the store continues to operate in the smaller building across the street from the previous location of the original House of Reeves.

performed during the riots. In the streets and estates of English cities the ritual of status reversal also targeted the structure of the possession of commodities. Those in the low, who posses little or nothing in the status quo situation, reclaimed the commodities during the liminal phase. On the other had, those who own a lot in the economically conventional situations were deprived of their goods during the riots. Ana, a current inhabitant of Tottenham, presented the acts of looting from the other side by insisting that the riots were the product of common consumerist practices in the daily life of contemporary British society. During our conversation she rhetorically addressed those who were caught by surprise in riots by saying:

> You put [massive shopping mall] in the heart of communities like Tottenham and Hackney. It's horrendous, because you put the right on their faces "this is what you cannot buy". Which also I think was element of the riots two years ago. Because these people had... it also was mentioned, I cannot remember in what kind of media, but I do remember reading: these are daily bombarded with adverts. Not just TV, but also on the road. <...> Billboards all the way with consumer goods that they put in your face "this is what you can't afford". And then you put a shop right in a face, with things that are advertised. What do you expect?

Next day, but in a different borough of London, George told me almost the same thing. According to him

> you have to see riots here also through a material perspective. Looting not any random shop, but specific chains like "footlocker" and "JD sports". That tells you these people recognize that there are items of clothing or products that they want. Why they want them? Because they are being bombarded with information saying "you need this to be this".

While I am not in a position to relocate the responsibility of looting from rioters to the consumerist nature of the contemporary society, I insist that we have to look into the socially conversional state of order and its taboo in order to understand the temporal transgression between August 6th and 10th 2011. The English riots caused a colossal outrage among the members of middle and upper classes precisely because they were the acts of transgression of the core taboo which opposes any kind of violation against private property. Meanwhile, the lack material wealth among the deprived stratum of the society creates a situation in which

the transgression has the potential to reanimate the experiences of sovereignty and implement a social raison d'être, which the politico-legal-economic hierarchy and people in power have deprived them of.

Ernesto Laclau (2007) explains us that the existence of any system is based on the negativity, because it exists only its limits. Through the manufacture of differences and therefore exclusion it creates signifiers to signified those who are inside the system. Since the system has a number of various limits the excluded are not necessary are signified by the signifier of exclusion. As claimed by Laclau "only if the beyond become the signifier of pure threat, of pure negativity, of the simply excluded can there be limits and systems" (Laclau 2007: 38). In the case of the August riots the system, its limits, its exclusions and its taboos are presented throughout this study. As one may expect the mass media and politicians painted the picture of the structure of the politico-legal-economic hierarchy without the rioters. In other words, in the public discourse the participants and supporters of the August riots were perceived as the outsiders of the systems.

Nevertheless, the exclusion from the hegemonic system is not the signifier, which defines the rioters as individuals and social group. According to Laclau, the signification of a radical exclusion which is the ground and condition of all differences can possibly be signified "only if the differential nature of the signifying units is subverted, only if the signifiers empty themselves of their attachment to paticular signifieds and assume the role of representing the pure being of the system – or, rather, the system as pure Being" (Laclau 2007: 39). The August riots were the cause and the outcome at the same time of the signification by the empty signifier. Any differences which existed in the pre-liminal phase were subverted and the sense of disenfranchisement rose as the empty signifier during the ritual of the status reversal.

The common sensation of disenfranchisement incorporates a handful of additional dark tones to the picture of the riots and people who took a part in the action. The lack of material wealth at the actual time and strong pessimism about the perspectives in the future are the agents that signified residents of poor estates and deprived boroughs in London and other English towns. I cannot, nor do I intend to assert that the leading motivation to riot is generated by the actual poverty and/or the nonexistent future prospects. Even so, I maintain the argument that the popular perception among these people about their deprived lives is the part of the reason to go the turbulent streets and to join the ritual of reversal of status in the structure of the politico-legal-economic hierarchy. In this way, the characteristics of disenfranchisement, which are as much social construct as it is a economic reality transforms into the empty signifier of the participants of the riots.

The social environment in many deprived areas of London, which I have visited during my fieldwork, looks very similarly negative. Closures of many public facilities, the scarcity of free of charge activities, a high unemployment rate and an increase of the signs of exclusion create a vidid and sharp contrast to the image of upper and superior social strata among inhabitants of areas like Tottenham, Brixton and Croydon. Therefore, the popular ambience of disenfranchisement has a twofold affect. First and foremost, it pushes people directly into the transgression of the taboo. Secondly, it escalates the riots to the maximum scale, because it manufactures the shared implication that the chance to celebrate the ritual of status reversal will be never repeated again.

6. Conclusions

In the previous chapters I have presented the vivid images from the riots, which took place between August 6th and 10th, 2011 in an abundant number of boroughs of London and several other English towns. Although the civil turmoil caught the immediate attention of the

mass media, politicians, intellectuals and the general public, it was forgotten soon after the status quo was reestablished. The attention to various national and international events suppressed the initiatives to start a extensive and comprehensive public discussion about the causes, the course and the outcomes of the riots. A handful of scholars incorporated their interpretations of the August riots into several publications, albeit the academic echo of the riots was rather insignificant. The inclusive picture of the riots which would give reflections from both the upper and the lower social stratum was not reflected in the academic literature.

Meanwhile, the mass media and mainstream politicians from British parliamentarian parties fabricated the very partisan image of the public turmoil in August 2010. The riots were denounced and strongly condemned in the dominant public discourse. Furthermore, a significant number of commentators for the upper and middle classes rejected any suggestion to look for the social causes of the riots. Through the accumulation and the possession of the unrepresented power, the mass media prevented the all-inclusive discussions of the issue in the public sphere. This has led me to ask how and why the picture of the riots in the streets of London is different from the picture in the dominant public discourse.

As I have demonstrated above the orthodox theories of dialectical urban violence with the elements of class consciousness fall short of the explanation of the social agency of the August riots. From the academic labour of Victor Turner (1991) we know that the ritual of status reversal reverses the hierarchal roles during annual events, such as Halloween in US. This U-turn brought into the being an alternative social construction called *communitas*. At the same same time, several distinguished authors (Batailles, 1986; Taussig, 1993; Groes-Green, 2010) discuss the dialectical relations between the transgression and the taboo. I argue that the four days of riots have to be seen through the lenses of liminality and transgression of the most dominant taboo in the contemporary western society – the sanctity of private

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property.

The ethnographic information which was collected throughout my fieldwork in the area of greater London and the data which was investigated outside the fieldwork enables me to reason that the liminal ritual of status reversal and the temporal transgression define and explain the August riots in the most accurate manner. Rioters reversed social order and gained sovereignty in their boroughs through the violent street battles with the police. Meanwhile, the police officers, the representatives and protectors of the structure of the politico-legal-economic hierarchy – lost their superior positions. Nevertheless, as I explained above the situation in August 2011 was exceptional from both the liminal and the transgressive perspectives. In the former dimension the riots differ from the cases presented by Turner, because the ritual of the status reversal in the streets of London was not embraced and celebrated only by those whose social status went up during the liminal phase. Meanwhile, those who occupy positions in the upper and middle strata in the hierarchy of British society were not refused to acknowledge the ritual nature of the public street violence. Secondly, the rioters' acceptance of the temporality of the transgressive period deviates the August riots from the conventional understanding of the transgression of the taboo.

With regards of the public image of the August riots, I have explained that the individuals and the social groups from dialectically opposing sides have contrasting interpretations of the August events. The social memory and the social amnesia of the English riots in 2011 are strongly affected by the ritual of status reversal. On the one hand, the images of the rule of other cultures in the streets of London, Manchester, Bristol, Birmingham and several other English towns gave rise to public anxiety, fear and disgust among the members of the middle and upper classes. These social strata have a significant influence in the dominant public discourse. Thus the image of the riots in the mass media and public discourse

has a twofold nature. First of all, the public unrests that started two days after the killing of Mark Duggan were immediately and tenaciously condemned by a great number of public personas. Secondly, the images and even the fact of the riots per se were removed out of the public discourse soon after the riots ended, because the conception of the social structure during the ritual of status reversal was socially deviant for the middle and upper classes. The mass media and mainstream politicians, as outspoken representatives of the upper and middle classes replaced the images of the riots with an empty albeit elaborated facade of the August riots in which the prehistory and the aftermath of the public turbulence were more noticeable than the riots *per se.*

On the other hand, those who in the terms of Victor Turner (1991) can be called "low" enjoyed elevations of their socio-hierarchal statuses during the liminal time between August 6th and 10th, 2011. The combination of dizzying effect of public open violence and mirage of temporal sovereignty during the riots leaves rather blurry images of the period between August 6th and 10th, 2011 in the memories of those who enjoyed the uplifts of their social statuses and established *communitas* during the riots. On top of that, in the post-liminal phase they were brought back into pre-liminal positions in the structure of the politico-legal-economic hierarchy where, as I explained earlier, the dominant discourse almost deny the happenings of that time.

However, the empty signifier of the disenfranchisement, which signified the participants of the empty structure of the riot continues to exist almost two years after the violent events took place. While the physical organization which typically unites the participants of the same event is absent, the perceptions of the exclusion, of the vast social cleavage and of the lack of future perspectives shaped the empty signifier that gave a common ground for inhabitants of the various deprived estates and boroughs from several English

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cities. In the aftermath of the events the participation of the August riots was converted into the inclusive element of the empty signifier, which continues to signify those who are excluded from the hegemonic system.

Last but not least, I strongly encourage further studies of riots and urban conflicts. The adaptation of the framework of liminality and transgression in analysis of the directly unrelated events is going to produce a basis for comparative analysis. The comparative analysis would allow us to understand if the findings of this thesis are unique only for the case of the August 2011 riots in London or they explain the broader pasterns of the contemporary urban societies.

Appendixes

Appendix A
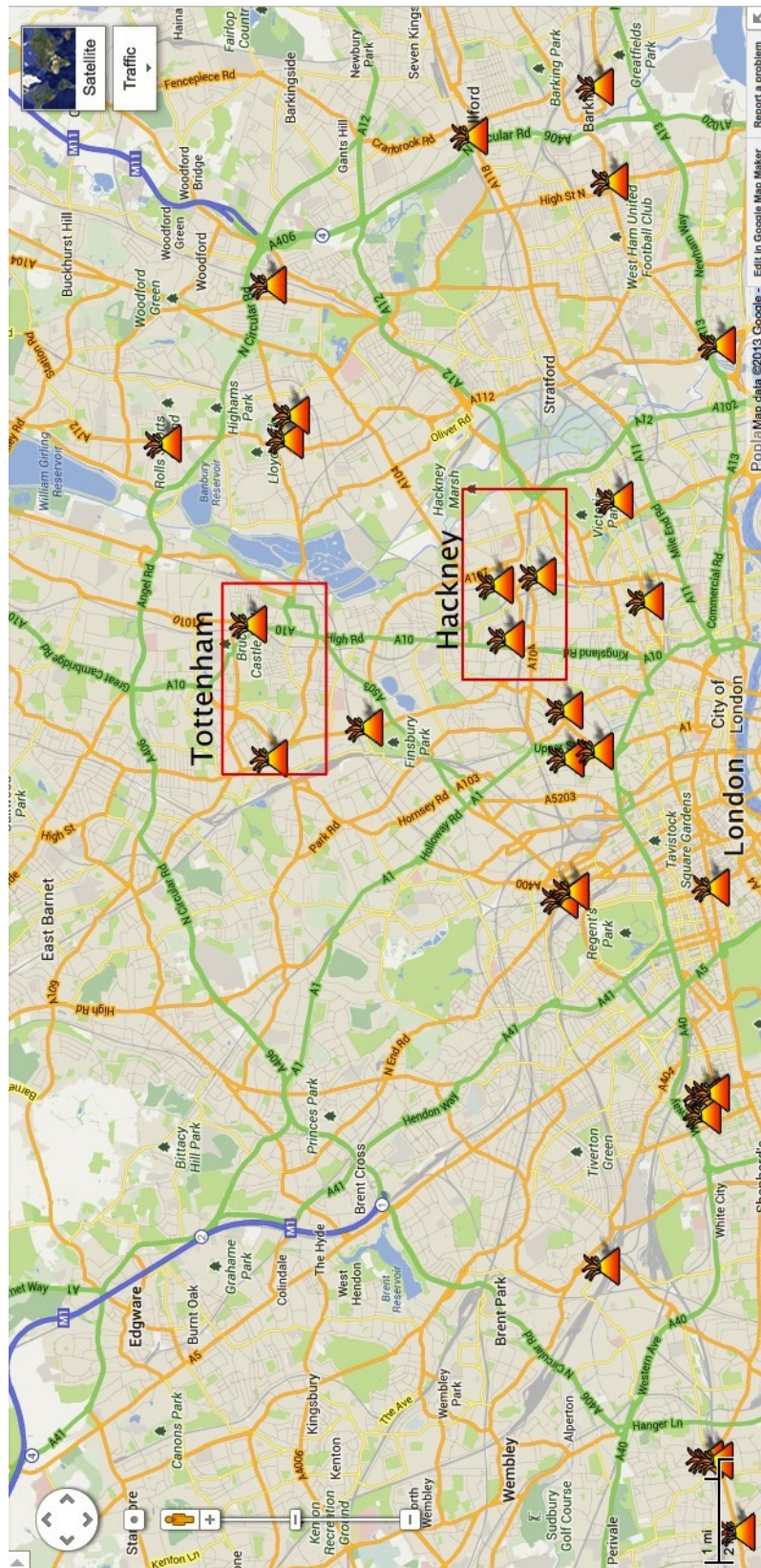
Illustration 1: Locations of the riots in north London. Online at <http://maps.google.co.uk>Retrieved June 1, 2013

Appendix B
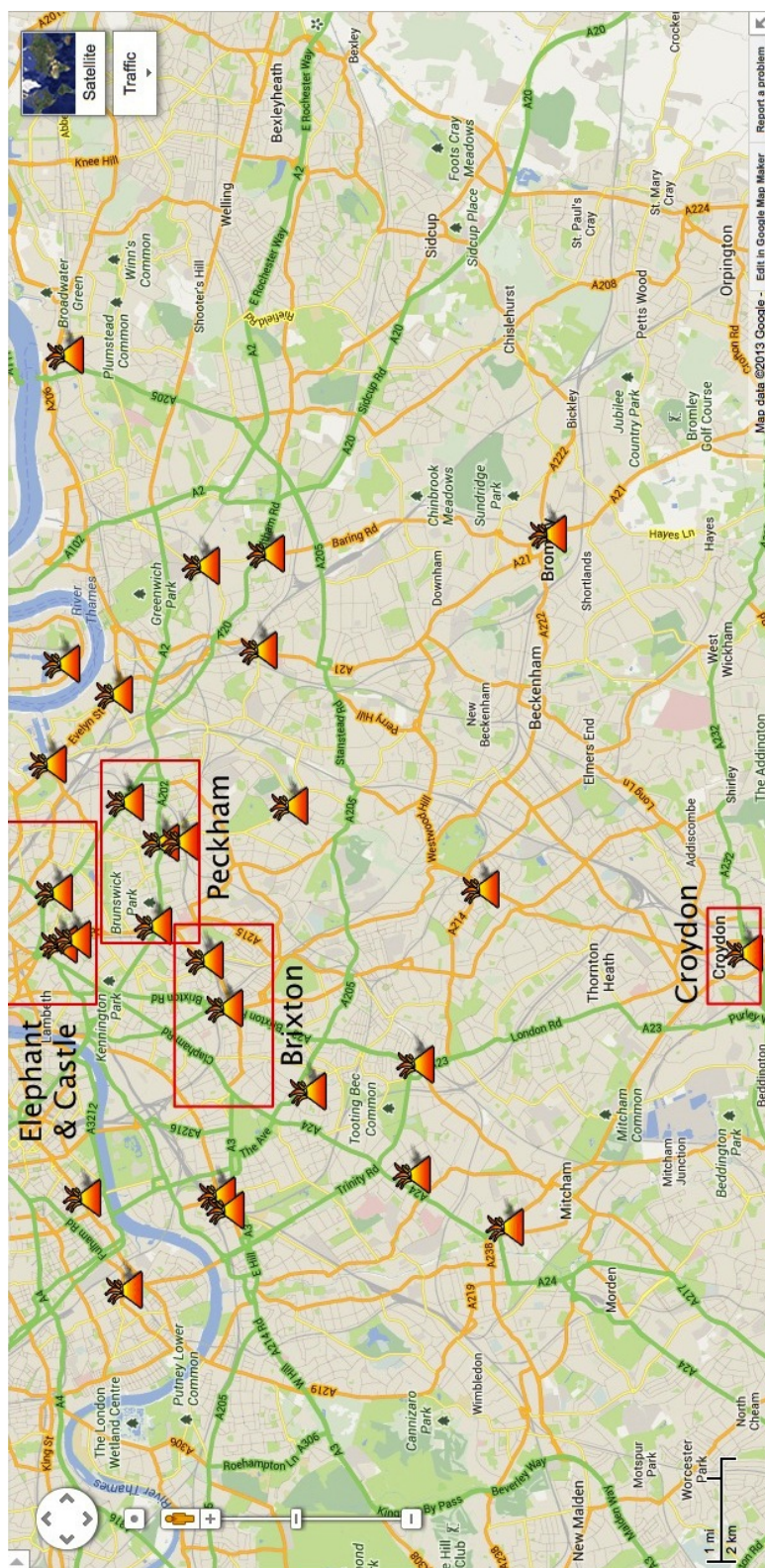
Illustration 2: Locations of the riots in south London.
Online at <http://maps.google.co.uk>

43
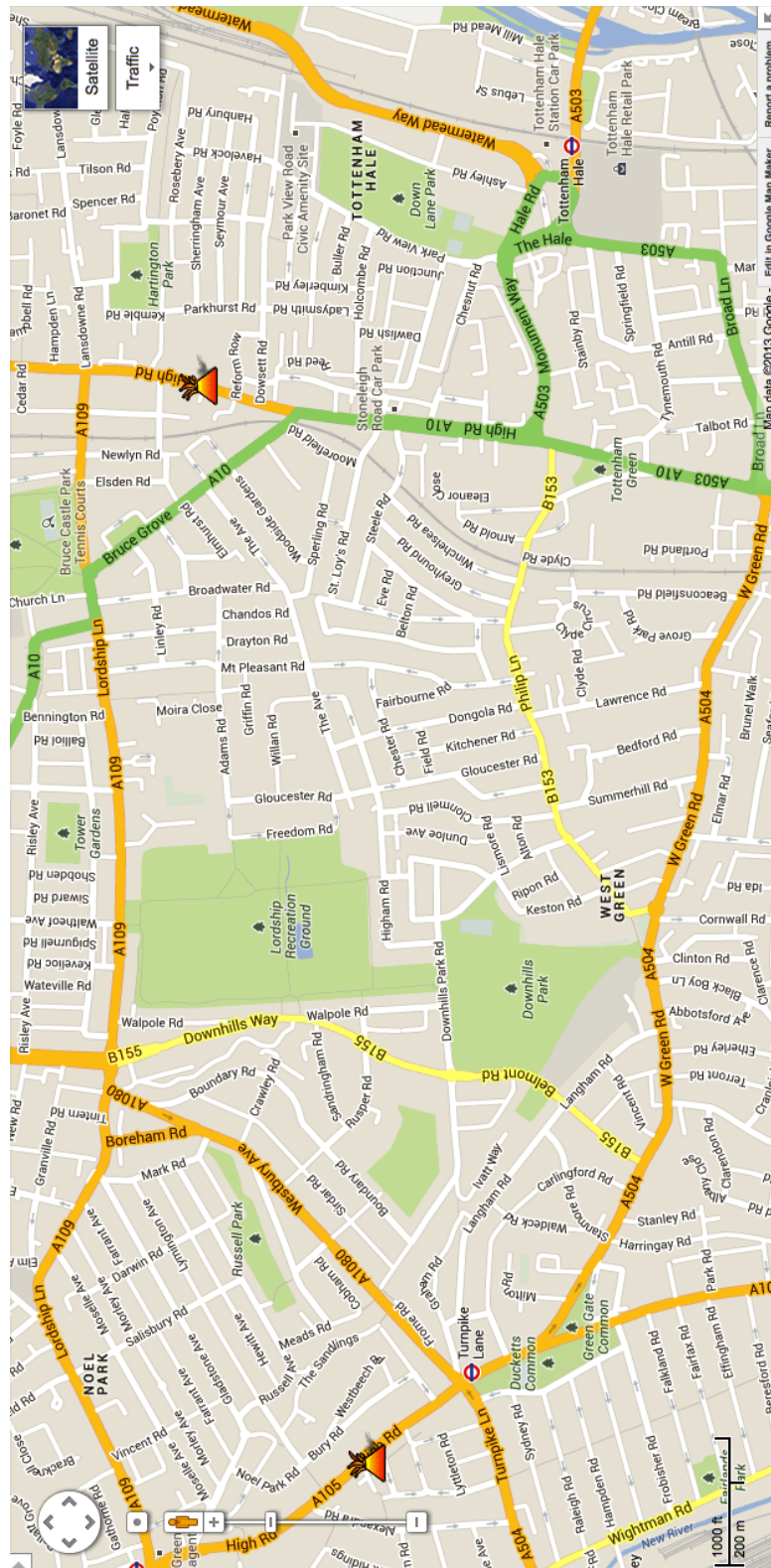
Appendix C

Illustration 3: Locations of the riots in Tottenham. Online at <http://maps.google.co.uk>Retrieved June 1, 2013
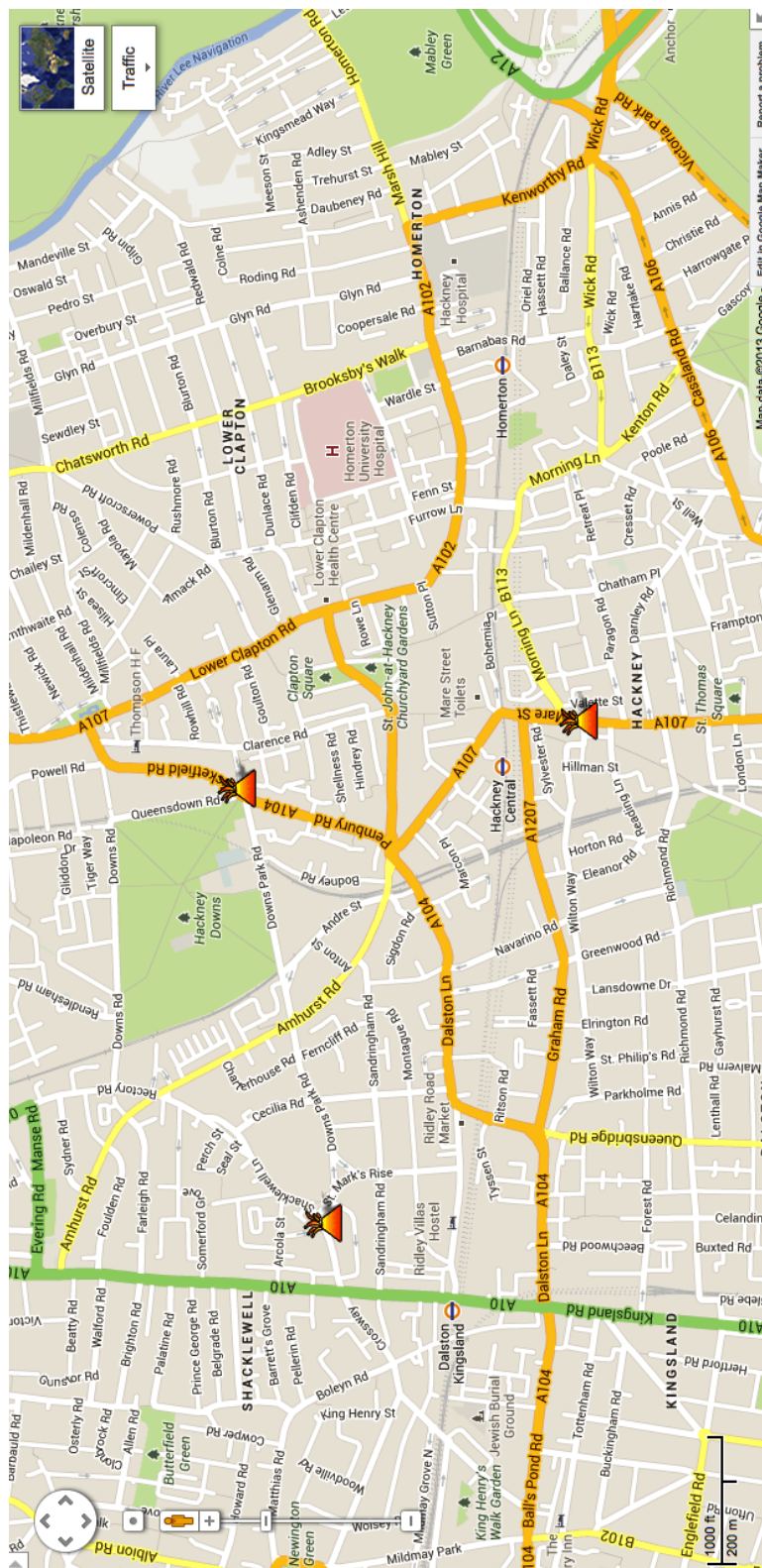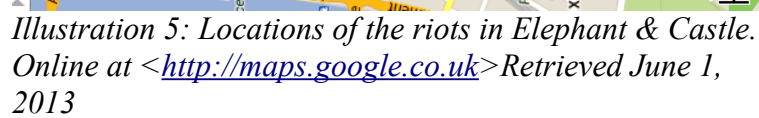
44

Appendix D:

Illustration 4: Locations of the riots in Hackney. Online at
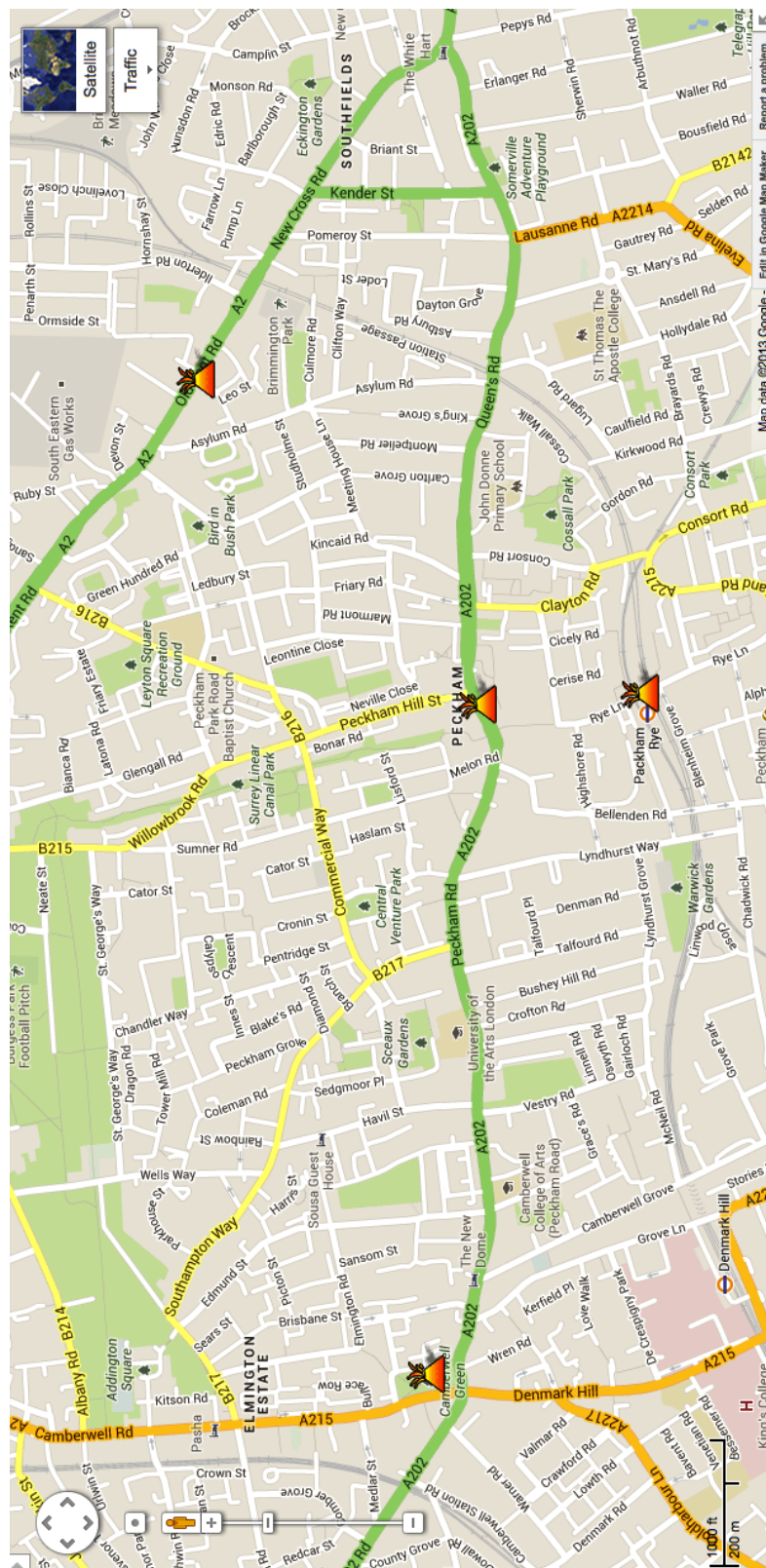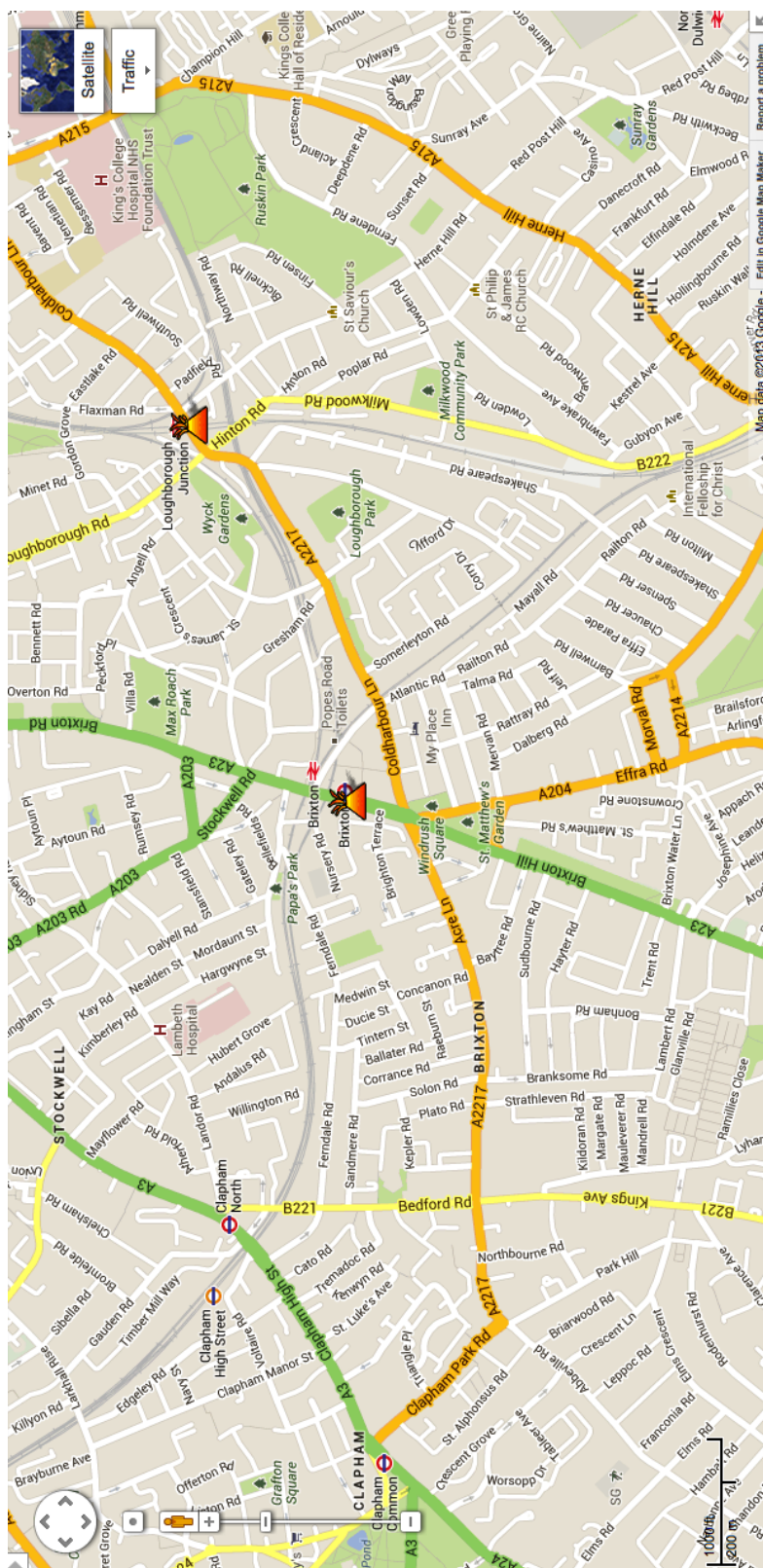*<http://maps.google.co.uk>Retrieved June 1, 2013*

Appendix E

Illustration 5: Locations of the riots in Elephant & Castle.
Online at <http://maps.google.co.uk>Retrieved June 1,
2013

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Appendix F

Illustration 6: Locations of the riots in Peckham. Online at
<http://maps.google.co.uk> Retrieved June 1, 2013

Appendix G

Illustration 7: Locations of the riots in Brixton. Online at
<http://maps.google.co.uk> Retrieved June 1, 2013
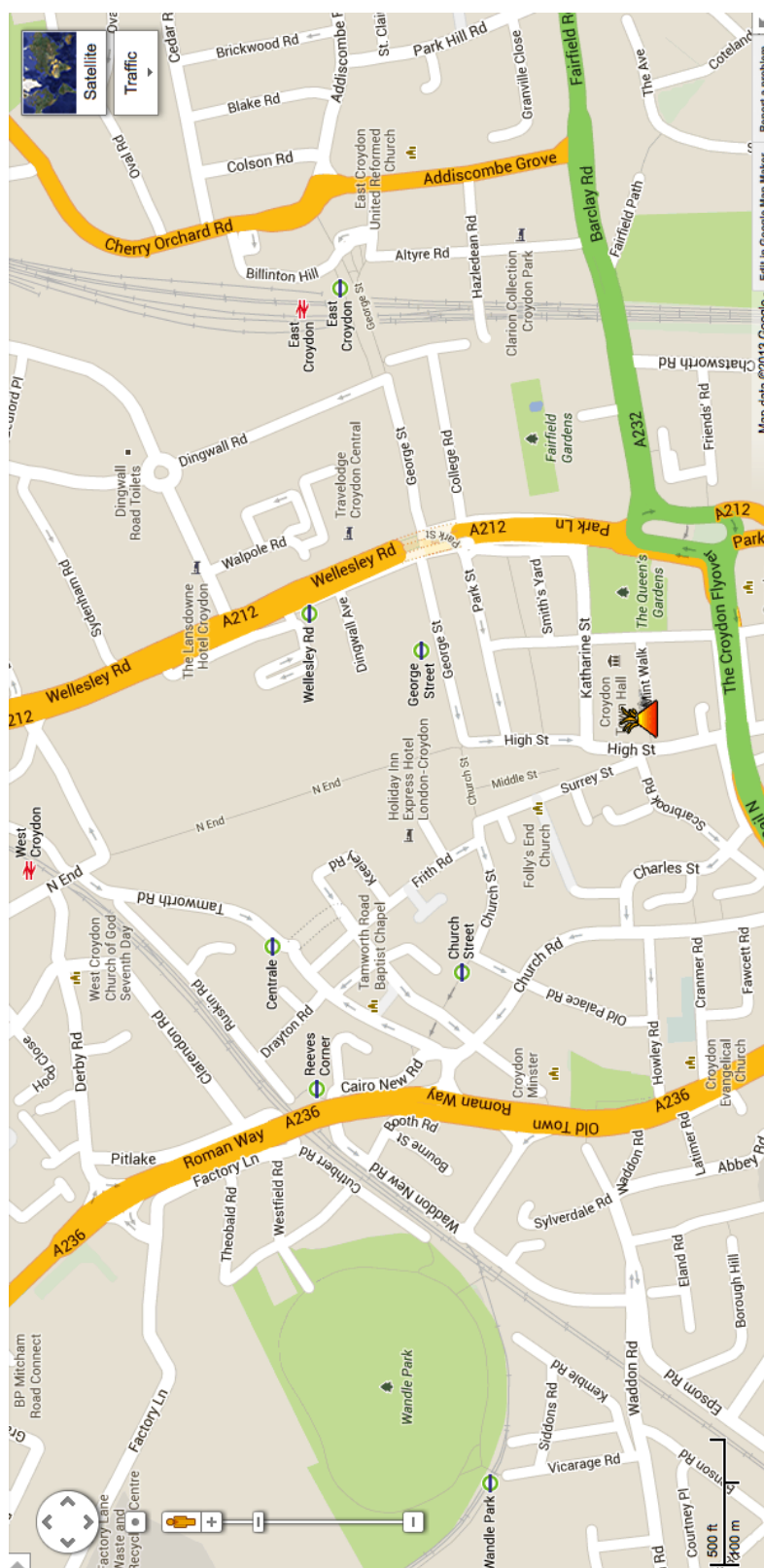
Appendix H

Illustration 8: Locations of the riots in Croydon. Online at <http://maps.google.co.uk> Retrieved June 1, 2013
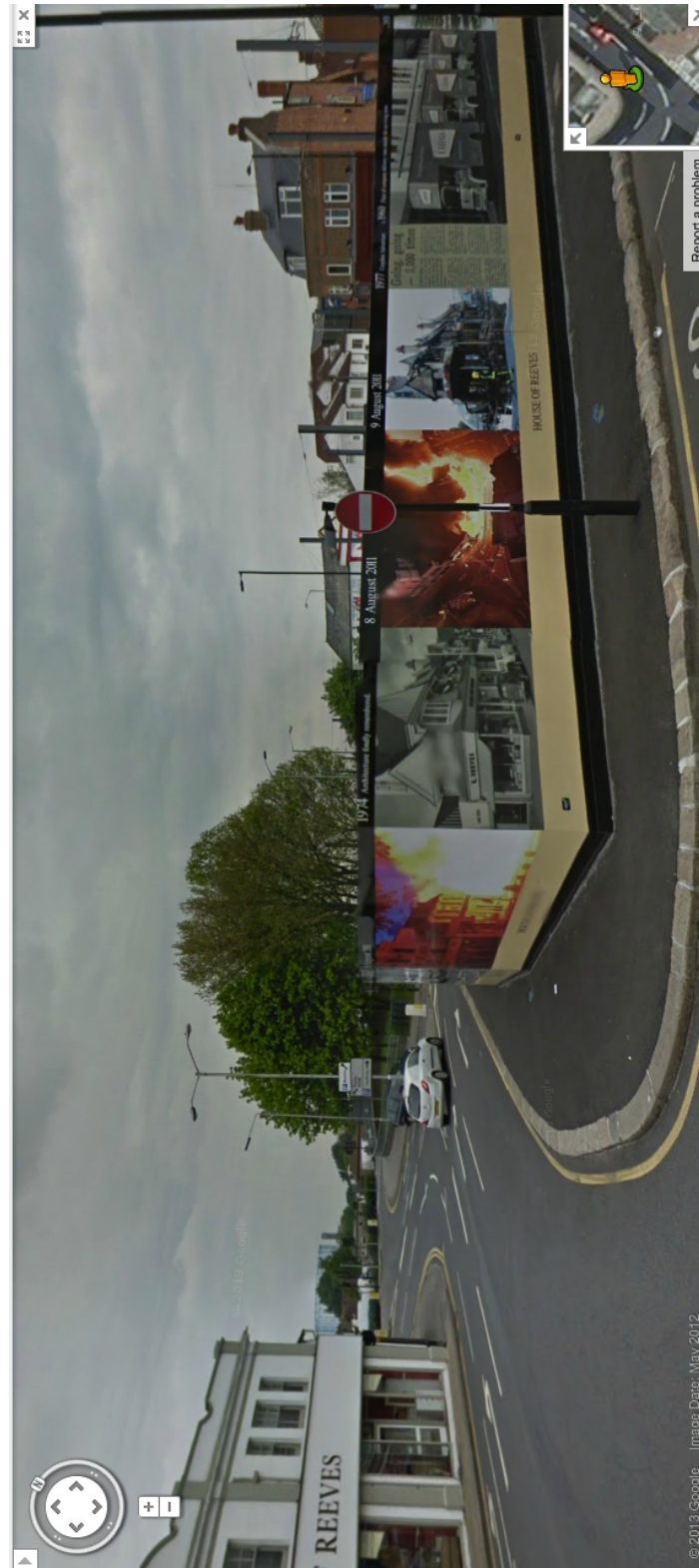
Appendix I

Illustration 9: Google Street view of House of Reeves.

Online at <http://maps.google.co.uk>

Retrieved at April 27, 2012

Appendix J

Illustration 10: Google Street view of House of Reeves

Online at <http://maps.google.co.uk>

Retrieved at April 27, 2012

Appendix K

Illustration 11: A map of the key words

Appendix L

Peckham Peace Wall

Following the disorder of August 2011, The Peckham Peace Wall was started by four members of *Peckham Shed* theatre company on a board covering the broken window outside Poundland. This attracted the involvement of thousands of local people whose post-it note messages of love and respect for Peckham grew to eventually fill eight hoardings.

When the time came to replace the windows and remove the public original Peckham Peace Wall board, members of the public were anxious not to lose this unique record of the public's thoughts and emotional response to what had happened within their town centre.

This permanent public artwork has been developed as a creative response to a public consultation, led by young people from *The Challenge Society* working with *Peckham Shed*, which asked members of the public in Peckham what they would like to see happen to the original Peckham Peace Wall and for their thoughts about how best it should be preserved.

The Peckham Peace Wall is a project originated by *Peckham Shed* which has resulted in a public artwork by *Garudio Studiage* commissioned by *Peckham Space, Camberwell College of Arts* funded by *Southwark Council* through *the cleaner greener safer programme and Peckham and Nunhead Community Council.*

Peckham Space is an art venue that is part of *Camberwell College of Arts, University of the Arts London*, dedicated to commissioning location-specific artworks made in partnership with community groups in Peckham.

Garudio Studiage is a Peckham-based creative collective set up by *Chris Ratcliffe, Laura Cave, Anna Walsh* and *Hannah Havana*. Their practice includes graphic design, jewellery, illustration, fine art and printmaking.

Peckham Shed is an inclusive theatre charity that provides free theatre arts training for young people in Peckham aged between 5 and 17 years, offering them a safe place to imagine, create and play, giving a weekly, regular activity to commit to and rely on.

Camberwell College of Arts is part of *University of the Arts London (UAL)*. Operating at the heart of the world's creative capital, UAL is a vibrant international centre for innovative teaching and research in arts, design, fashion, communication and the performing arts.

Funded by:

Commissioned by:

In partnership with:

Illustration 12: Peckham Peace Wall

Appendix M
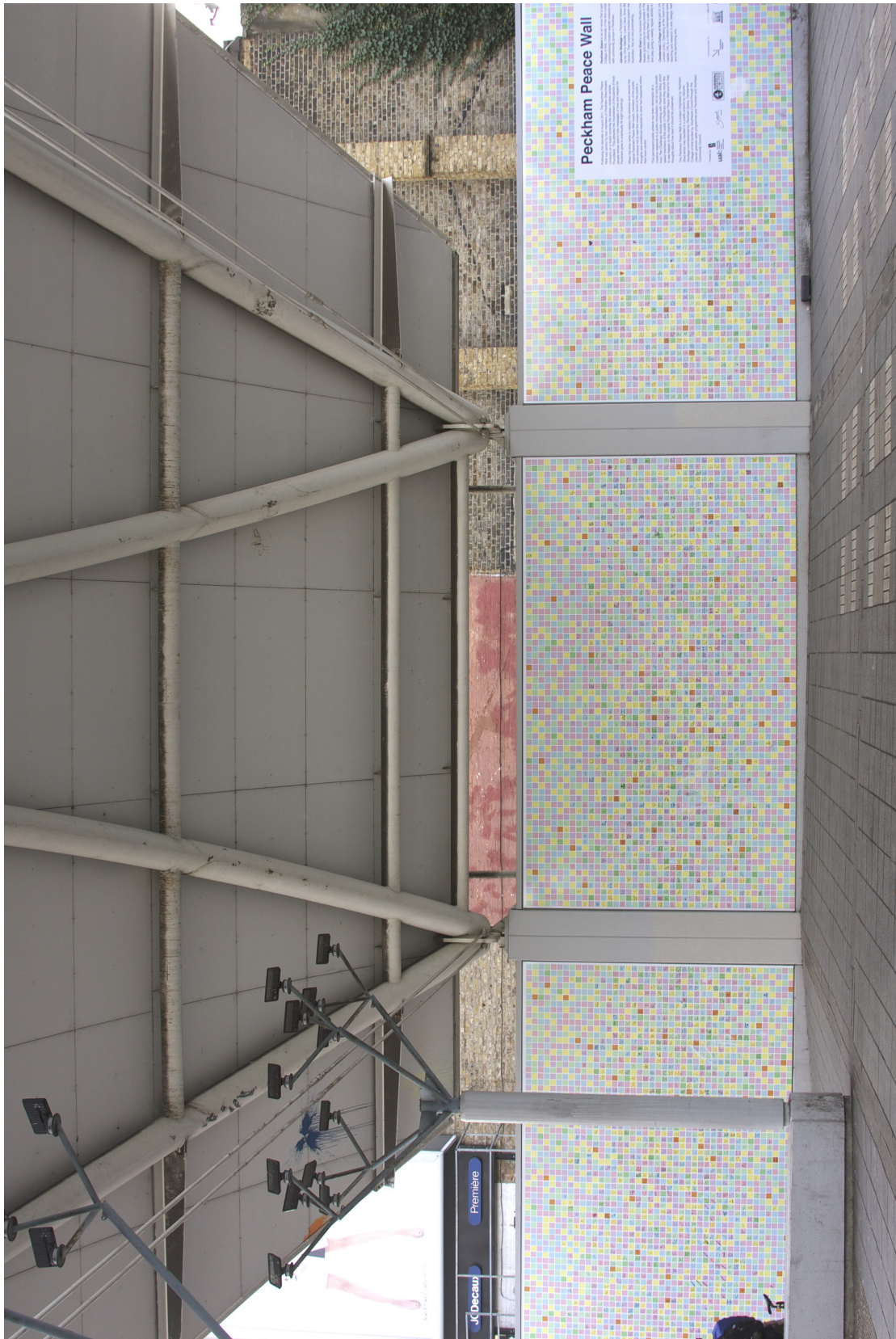
Illustration 13: Peckham Peace Wall

Appendix N

Illustration 14: Peckham Peace Wall

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