

# **Public feeling: the entanglement of emotion and technology in the 2011 riots**

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Word count: 5997

## **Abstract**

This chapter is mainly concerned with the problem of how to conceptualise the entanglement of emotion and media in the 2011 riots in England. It examines the ways in which emotions and media technologies have figured in attempts to explain the motivation and momentum of the riots: in mainstream media, accounts provided by rioters and some academic analyses. It reflects on the advantages of deploying 'affect' and 'assemblage' in analysis of relations between feeling, technology and acting in the riots.

In August 2011 the UK experienced, arguably, the worst display of civil unrest in a generation (Lewis et al 2011, p.1). Some politicians were keen to locate clear causes of the disturbance: in criminality, moral collapse amidst disadvantaged communities and poor parenting.<sup>i</sup> Numerous commentators claimed that the 2011 riots were distinguished from previous instances of disorder by: gang culture, the extent of looting and the widespread use of social media (Newburn 2015, p.39). Some academics have sought to contextualise the 2011 riots in relation to structural changes in post-industrial Britain, race, class and consumer culture (Cooper 2012; Treadwell et al 2013; Moxon 2011; Bauman 2011). Yet, various explanatory discourses fail to capture the complexity of the riots and their development. Relatively little attention has been paid to how emotion and media figured in the unfolding of disturbance and its interpretation.

This chapter is mainly concerned with the problem of how to conceptualise the entanglement of emotion and media in the process of rioting. It begins by discussing attempts to contextualise the riots. It then considers how emotions and media technologies have figured in attempts to explain the motivation and momentum of the riots: in mainstream media, accounts provided by rioters and some academic analyses. It reflects on the advantages of deploying ‘affect’ and ‘assemblage’ in analysis of relations between feeling, technology and acting in the riots.

The 2011 riots were defined by various attempts to represent them. It was widely reported in mainstream media that a peaceful protest at the police shooting of Mark Duggan<sup>ii</sup> developed into a riot on 6 August 2011 in North London. Family and friends of Duggan gathered outside Tottenham police station at 5pm, waiting to speak with a senior police officer, who never arrived.<sup>iii</sup> Many of the original protestors left when the crowd swelled and began attacking police property. Images of burning police cars circulated via the Internet and, shortly after, people from neighbouring boroughs began arriving to join the disturbance. The next day, a headline in *The Observer* newspaper proclaimed ‘Tottenham in flames as riot follows protest’.

Over the course of the next four days, disorder spread to other London Boroughs and UK cities. Up to 15,000 people (as participants or observers) took to the streets,<sup>iv</sup> with almost 4,000 arrested by early September,<sup>v</sup> marking a serious episode of civil unrest. Police struggled and failed to contain lawlessness. Rioters attacked police buildings and vehicles but looting was the most common unlawful activity (Lewis et al 2011). It was estimated that approximately 2,500 shops and businesses were looted during the riots (Lewis et al 2011, p.27). Fashion retailers and stores containing high value electrical goods were the most popular targets for looters, although some broke into cheap

supermarkets to steal everyday basics such as washing powder, nappies and baby food (*The Guardian* et al 2011, p.43, p.50).

## **CONTEXTS OF DISTURBANCE**

Newburn (2015) suggests that the riots of 2011 shared with those of the 1980s<sup>vi</sup> a similar structural, political and cultural context: ‘an economic downturn, relatively high levels of unemployment, a right of centre government embarking on fairly radical reform, and rising levels of general social inequality’ (p.50). In both instances, rioting occurred in ‘relatively impoverished, inner-city communities with sizeable minority ethnic communities’ (Newburn 2015, p.59).

However, Newburn (2015) argues, the events of August 2011 were distinguished from earlier riots by: their fluidity and the pace with which they spread from location to location, possibly aided by communications technologies; the extent of looting; the failure of politicians to offer wholesale support to the police; and the nature and scale of the response of the penal system (p.60).<sup>vii</sup>

Although race was played down in accounts of the 2011, partly because they were not ‘race riots’, race has been an overriding theme in post war riots in Britain (Newburn 2015, p.50). Since the 1980s, disturbances have tended to ‘coalesce around conflict with the police’ with race ‘at the heart of the grievances’ (Newburn 2015, pp.50-1). The perception of police misuse of power has been (as in the case of Mark Duggan) a significant trigger for disturbance. But, Newburn (2015) argues, this is only one of several factors as riots are multifaceted and fluid. Indeed, more attention might be focused on the complex intersections of race, class and age.

Cooper (2012) argues that explanatory discourses (in mainstream media and political discourse) have centred on the ‘problem’ of ‘culturally-deficient communities’ (related to age, ‘race’ and the ‘underclass’) and ‘failing public services’ (police and education) (pp. 8-9). More liberal commentators have focused on conflict between a racist police system and ‘(largely black) marginalised communities’. But, both explanations fail to acknowledge the broader socio-cultural context of the 2011 riots and how this has impacted young people marginalized by ‘race’ and class growing up in England (Cooper 2012, p.11). Cooper argues that three decades of neoliberal restructuring in Britain has ‘has hollowed out the social protections, educational opportunities, job prospects, and spaces for political engagement that previous generations could access’ (p.13).

Others have argued that the 2011 riots were distinguished primarily by looting and that consumer culture, and feverish conformity to consumerist values together with rising inequalities, go a long way towards explaining this disturbance (Treadwell et al 2013; Moxon 2011). Bauman (2011) described the riots as ‘a mutiny of defective and disqualified consumers’. However, Newburn et al (2015) point out that looting is common in major contemporary urban violence (p.1001) and the elevation of consumer culture as a primary differentiating factor ignores the expressive, violent and political character of looting (p.1002). They argue that looting ‘is not an undifferentiated set of activities but rather a set of social acts capable of harbouring multiple meanings, motivations and understandings’ (p.992). Indeed, some rioters were engaged in appropriating goods to engage in high end individual consumerism, others were taking basic goods to make ends meet; some looting was organised, much was opportunistic (pp. 996-8). Looting can be viewed as a form of violence and one means of expressing discontent (Newburn et al 2015, pp.1001-2).

Looting in 2011 was perhaps distinguished by its extent. And, whilst it is always a public action, looting was made more visible by the circulation of mobile photograph and video footage, rolling news and CCTV everywhere (Newburn et al 2015, p.1001). The affective dimensions of looting (anxiety, excitement, the thrill of seizing an opportunity) were also intensified in a highly mediated environment. However, these elements, emotions and media technologies, and their part in the unfolding of the 2011 riots, including the politically pertinent expression of anger and resentment, have been underexplored. Next, I consider how media and emotions have figured in interpretations of the riots.

## **MAINSTREAM MEDIA RESPONSE TO THE RIOTS**

‘As Britons ask themselves what changed in their country that might have caused these riots, one obvious answer stands out: technology’ (*The Economist* 2011)

Commentators (police, politicians, journalists) generally identified communications technologies as a cause of unrest. Mainstream media reporting focused on the scale, speed and intensity of the crowd as it amassed through online social networking (Baker 2011). Prime Minister David Cameron, asked in the House of Commons whether people should be prevented from communicating via social media ‘when we know they are plotting violence, disorder and criminality’ (Cellan-Jones 2011). Facebook and BlackBerry Messenger (BBM) service were the key means of communication, enabling rioters to connect and organise. At that time, BBM provided the cheapest social networking

facility and was especially popular among those from economically deprived communities across England, with a 37% share of the youth market (*The Guardian* et al 2011, pp.108-110). It was an extraordinarily efficient tool for sharing information on where riots were, safe routes home, and what police were doing (*The Guardian* et al 2011, pp.107-108). However, despite the attention paid to social media by government and the press, television, and the dramatic nature of its coverage, played a large part in mobilising rioters (Lewis et al 2011).

A notable feature of mainstream media coverage of the riots was reference to emotion. That is, emotions were part of a process of reflecting on and shaping a major series of events. Journalists used specific emotion words (disgust, anger, fear, shock, sadness) to describe the response of police, politicians and the public to the riots and other emotion words (anger, frustration, lack of hope, grievance) to describe the motivations of rioters. Tom Lawrence (2011) wrote in *The Independent* 'Anger and frustration at police drove summer riots', whilst Andy Dangerfield (BBC news, 2011) stated 'London riots: Teenagers "lack hope."' Here, emotions signal some acknowledgement of social inequalities in Britain and possible grounds for grievance. However, the emotions most discussed were those attributed to the public, politicians and the police. These were invariably strong emotions (anger, fear, disgust) and worked to define a clear boundary between the law abiding and the lawless, rational and the irrational, reasonable and unreasonable anger, thereby aligning a pro-social majority against an anti-social minority and invalidating the concerns of the latter. On Tuesday 9 August, a number of newspaper headlines expressed alarm at the unpredictability and escalating force of gathering crowds or, more specifically, 'the mob': 'The rule of the mob' (*The Daily Telegraph*); 'Mob rule: Police and Politicians powerless as London burns for a third night and riots spread' (*The Independent*); 'The Anarchy Spreads' (*Daily Mail*); 'Out of control: riots reach crisis point' (*i*). Here, 'the mob' is characterised by strong emotion (specifically, anger), which is seen as uncontrolled, destructive and contagious. Indeed, palpable concern about the crowd - its force, intensity and effects - suffused public debate about the riots.

Negative thinking about crowds has roots in the work of nineteenth century psychologist Gustave Le Bon who argued that individuals gathering in large groups begin to lose individuality and free will, becoming part of a single collective mind, guided not by reason, but by instinct (Le Bon [1895], 2007, pp.8-9). According to Le Bon, the 'psychological crowd' is always intellectually inferior to the isolated individual, suggestible and impulsive (pp.15 -19). And, ideas and emotions can spread like disease in crowds with 'a contagious power as intense as that of microbes' (p.80). Some social groups are seen as more susceptible to transmitted affects, and the irrationality of the crowd, than

others: namely, those already regarded as socially inferior and weak, such as lower social classes, women, children, minority ethnic groups (Blackman and Walkerdine 2001).

Despite its tenuous foundations, the idea of affective or emotional contagion has endured over time in popular discourse on people in groups and collective action. And, in the 2011 riots, the ‘mob’ was widely assumed to be largely young, Black and male, despite Ministry of Justice statistics, which indicate that a more diverse population appeared in court on riot related criminal charges.<sup>viii</sup> An understanding of the crowd, or mob, as driven by emotion and necessarily irrational worked to subordinate already marginalised subjects and de-legitimise grievance. Digital media were considered responsible for the speed, intensity and violence of the crowd. And so, overall, mainstream media coverage tended to attribute the causes of rioting to a mix of emotion, digital technologies and social identity.

## **A POLITICS OF RESENTMENT**

Journalists from *The Guardian* newspaper and researchers from the London School of Economics (LSE) conducted 270 in-depth qualitative interviews in order to explore the riots from participants’ perspectives (Lewis et al 2011).<sup>ix</sup> Their sample was mixed in terms of ‘self-identified ethnicity’ and included women and girls and those aged 13-57, although it was predominantly male and young.<sup>x</sup>

Interviewees cited poverty and policing as the two most important causes of the riots, with 86% and 85% of respondents respectively saying the causes were ‘important’ or ‘very important’.<sup>xi</sup> They spoke in detail about their everyday lived experience of marginalisation and sense of resentment.

Interview participants articulated resentment toward the police, but also toward large corporations and the government. They resented the way police treated them: specifically, through the everyday practices of ‘stop and search’, mainly targeted at black young men, and frequent insults giving rise to feelings of harassment, disrespect and humiliation. Participants resented big business and advertising corporations, and media generally, for fuelling a consumerist culture from which the jobless felt excluded. Some, particularly young looters, spoke of the pressure and ‘hunger’ for the ‘right’ goods and brands names and said that the riots enabled them to exercise a kind of ‘freedom’ by acquiring such things for themselves (*The Guardian* et al 2011, pp.46-47). Participants resented the government and its austerity policies, which had led to benefits cuts and unemployment. Of

respondents who were of working age and not in education at the time of the riots, a little over half were unemployed. For many, the central issue was not having a job or any prospect of a job (*The Guardian* et al 2011). They resented the disparity between the jobless and bankers receiving huge bonuses. Younger interviewees specifically mentioned the removal of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), increased university fees and the lack of job opportunities.

Researchers write that the rioters felt ‘dislocated from the opportunities they saw were available to others’ and felt that they had little stake in the social order. Asked if they felt ‘part of British society’, only 51% of those interviewed said that they did compared with 92% of the population<sup>xii</sup> as a whole (*The Guardian* et al 2011, p.75). Interviewees talked about being invisible, their voices not being heard and no one caring ‘because you are poor’ (*The Guardian* et al 2011, pp.76-77). Some felt despised for their poverty.

‘People look at us and once they take one look at us we can’t afford clothes to look good for [a job] interview and once they take a look at how we’re dressed and that they just automatically look down on us and it’s annoying. People hate it. That’s where a lot of the hate comes from’ (*The Guardian* et al 2011, pp.77-78).

The authors of *Reading the Riots* suggest that an outpouring of anti-police and anti-authority attitudes was for some a five-day catharsis. Many spoke of feeling empowered, liberated, and euphoric. Repeatedly, they said confrontations with the police made them feel ‘powerful’ (*The Guardian* et al 2011, p.91). Such statements further underlined rioters’ everyday feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness, which rioting, and specifically looting, temporarily reversed. A seventeen-year-old, Denise, said ‘People were just passing fags from the counters’ and ‘You know what? For once it felt like you had so much power’ (*The Guardian* et al 2011, p.21). Others described a sense of disbelief at the inability of police to stop them. A sixteen-year-old said: ‘People were smiling. It was just everyone was smiling. It was literally a festival with no food, no dancing, no music but a free shopping trip for everyone’ (*The Guardian* et al 2011, pp. 51-52). Others described a happy atmosphere or vibe, with laughing and giggling (*The Guardian* et al 2011, p.52).

Such accounts convey clearly joy, excitement and exhilaration at what rioters could do – transgress and feel unstoppable – and show how the disturbance gathered and sustained momentum through emotion. Systematic and opportunistic looting are presented as a way of acting back (materially, symbolically) against lack of (economic, social, educational) opportunity, as looters seized what

other people had (high end goods, everyday basics) and with them a sense of self-worth and power. Participants describe feeling empowered through the process of violent consumerism.

Digital media played a vital part in sharing information on how to get to specific locations, safe routes home and police activity. They were used to display goods taken and intensified the symbolic importance of collective action: the circulation of images of police cars ablaze and police unable to contain rioting were affectively potent and emblematic of standing up to authority and large corporations. The display of goods seized invoked (previously unarticulated) feelings of resentment at systemic unfairness and signalled (temporary) affective empowerment through taking decisive action.

However, this is not to imply that all participants in the riots felt the same way or that their feelings were unambiguous and static. Indeed, some rioters wanted to march to Downing street to protest at austerity measures and sought to distance themselves from looting, others resented materialism but stole high end goods. Some of those interviewed reflected on their actions with pride, others with regret and shame. Nevertheless, their articulation of feeling can be seen as politically potent and a critical comment on lived experience at the margins of late modern society, characterised by increased individualisation, responsibility for self, insecurity (focused around lack of opportunity for education and employment and social protection), and reflexivity mediated by consumption and technology.

## **DIGITAL SOCIETY AND MEDIATED EMOTION**

Late modernity is digital society: digitally networked communication tools and platforms have become thoroughly entangled in everyday activities, interactions and relationships. And, digital media have transformed social and emotional life, partly by expanding and intensifying the processes of reflexivity.

Following media theorists (such as McLuhan, Poster, Castells), any medium can be understood as a symbolic structure or social environment that shapes human interaction and the production of culture (Lindgren, 2017). The internet and social media, characterised by increased connectivity and interactivity, afford more extensive and frequent opportunities for social interaction, including sharing, performing and displaying emotion (Lindgren, 2017). Yet, digital technologies are

distinguished not by enabling something completely new but rather by the proliferation, speed and intensity they afford communication. And, as with other media, the possibilities afforded by the internet are shaped by the relational and contextual aspects of social interaction and the cultural political context in which its tools and platforms are used (Lindgren, 2017).

Manuel Castells (2012) discusses the role of digital communications and emotion in the emergence of new social movements. He argues that, whilst their roots lie in various manifestations of injustice and their structural causes, contemporary social movements (from the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street) start with the emotions of individuals angered or outraged by specific (unbearable) events: financial crisis, food crisis, poverty, rampant inequalities, undemocratic polity and so on. Emotions are transformed into collective action as individuals reflect, connect and share feelings with others via an effective channel of communication. Digital communication provides distinctive opportunities for forging a sense of togetherness and mobilising collective action. Indeed, '[t]he faster and more interactive the process of communication is, the more likely the formation of a process of collective action becomes..' (Castells 2012, p.15).<sup>xiii</sup> So, Castells argues, the origins of social movements are found in the emotions of individuals and in their networking on the basis of cognitive empathy. They develop in a hybrid social space consisting of social media, mainstream media, people's pre-existing social networks and the occupation of urban space (Castells 2012, p.10, p.59). Yet, Castells insists that social media – or any technology – do not determine social movements but are more than mere tools (Castells 2012, p.229). Rather, communications technologies are part of the materialisation of cultural practices (including emotions).

Stephanie Baker (2011) examines the role of digital media and emotion in the 2011 riots. She argues that despite parallels with the social conditions (government cuts, poverty, discrimination) in which riots took place in the past,<sup>xiv</sup> the 2011 riots are distinguished by the emergence of the 'mediated crowd'. The mediated crowd is formed through 'affective reflexive communication in the virtual public sphere' in a context where, Baker argues, digital media technologies have helped to intensify the reflexive processes pervading modern social life (as theorised by Beck, Giddens, Lash and others).

Baker states that the police shooting of Mark Duggan provided a focus for collective reflexive consciousness and action in Tottenham, and further unrest across the country. Individuals felt empowered to act together when they recognised that they shared feelings in common with others (Baker, 2011). Affective reflexivity communicated via social media became a major factor in

mobilising the mediated crowd and creating new forms of collectivity (Baker, 2011). Baker makes the point that, whilst crowds may appear homogenous and monolithic entities acting in unison, individuals decide to engage in collective action and this decision-making reflects the agent's judgement and 'disposition to act'.

In attempting to specify the role of emotion in the riots, Baker draws on social psychologist Joseph de Rivera's concepts 'emotional atmosphere' (a transitory mood) and 'emotional climate' (a longer term environment).<sup>xv</sup> She suggests that the initial unrest in Tottenham in 2011 reflects an 'emotional atmosphere' of anger and resentment towards the police following the police shooting of Mark Duggan. The subsequent riots, and their escalation, indicate an 'emotional climate' consisting of 'deeper structural conditions of political and social inequality', together with related feelings of anger and resentment, which facilitated disturbance (Baker, 2011). Emotional climate, Baker points out, refers to 'a common structural environment that influences how individual and collectives experience the social world' but does not predetermine action or infer that participants experience the same emotions or operate as a homogenous group (Baker, 2011). This analysis is helpful in showing how emotions might be considered collective phenomena. However, it treats environments and subjects as external to one another and fails to specify their relationship. Anger and resentment feature as both atmosphere and climate and are undifferentiated in terms of their qualities, intensities and effects. Perhaps, as I argue below, anger and resentment are better viewed as qualitatively and quantitatively different, and subjects and environments as not only interactive but also co-constitutive. Also, resentment might be seen as a complex emotion, differently experienced in relation to the police and government (clear cut) and consumer culture and large corporations (ambivalent).

Both Baker and Castells view emotion as an individual response to particular (socio-economic-political) stimuli, which may then lead the subject to think and act differently. From this perspective, emotions are viewed as largely cognitively controlled and located in individual bodies and biographies, even though they are recognised and develop in social interaction. Both authors emphasise individual reflexivity, judgement and choice, and imply a linear connection between emotion and (collective) action, facilitated by communications technologies. This approach successfully rejects a notion of 'emotional contagion' (implying involuntary, irrational processes), in accounting for collective emotion and action. However, it tends to present an understanding of the individual as overly rational and atomised, embodying an accentuated, albeit networked, individualism.<sup>xvi</sup> And, a focus on subject positions and origins fails to capture theoretically the

complex dynamics of movement and the process of affective empowerment. Additionally, more work is needed to understand how feelings, technologies, subjects and (social, emotional) environments, combined in the 2011 riots. Here, I suggest, it is worth considering the analytical power of affect and assemblage.

## **AFFECT AND ASSEMBLAGE**

Affect theory presents a way of thinking beyond overly rational and goal oriented understandings of human action and viewing experiences as connected with process rather than position, movement rather than stasis, as collective and external, rather than individual and internal (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, p.7).

Cultural theorists have used the term affect to refer to sensible experience beyond signification (Grossberg 1992; Massumi 2002). Affect is seen as ‘unstructured and unformed’ (Massumi 2002, p.260). It does not require a subject and, indeed, precedes the individual. Emotion, on the other hand, is viewed as inevitably personal: experience recognised, organised and expressed. That is, emotion functions in the realms of meaning and ideology through ‘the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal’ (Massumi 2002, p.28).<sup>xvii</sup>

Deleuze, drawing on Spinoza, understands affect as a body’s capacity to affect and be affected (Deleuze 1988).<sup>xviii</sup> For Deleuze affect is ‘transitive’: it refers to the change or variation that results when bodies (human, non human, organic, inorganic, conceptual, social) come into contact and is ‘experienced in a lived duration that involves the difference between two states’ (Deleuze 1988, p.49). That is, affect is the force or intensity of an encounter, involving process, change and possibility (Deleuze 1988).

Understanding the riots through the above mentioned elements of affect theory foregrounds intensities in encounters between bodies (human and non human) on urban streets. It directs attention to inarticulate sensible experience, a developing atmosphere, temporary affective alignments, possibility, transformation and movement. It enables us to see how inarticulate feelings of resentment (quantity) may become recognised and expressed (qualified) as anger and so have impact. By focusing on in-between-ness as people and messages encounter one another, affect offers

a way of thinking how the riots took place. This avoids the issue of identifying a single causal agent (particular individuals or technologies) and problematising the susceptibility of certain social groups. It presumes relationality and side steps a bifurcation of the individual and the social.

However, Grossberg cautions that affect - used to refer to all non-semantic effects – may cover ‘too much ground’ (Grossberg 2010, p.314). Work on affect often assumes its immediate effectivity whereas affect, in order to produce specific effects, needs to ‘go through’ regimes and discourses that organise the body and everyday life (Grossberg 2010, p.316), recreating the unequal (economic, social, educational, political) relations of a particular historical conjuncture.

The place of digital media in the relationality of the particular historical conjuncture in which rioting occurred can be examined using the concept ‘assemblage’. Assemblage captures the interaction of human and non-human elements, avoiding determinisms (technological or social) and viewing technologies and humans as external to one another (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Macgregor Wise 2005, p.81). Deleuze and Guattari use assemblage to refer to a ‘constellation of singularities and traits’ (1987, p.406). These can be diverse entities such as people, technologies, things, social institutions, concepts, ideas, words, images, emotions and so on. Assemblage includes specific entities and also qualities, affects and effects: directing attention to not only what an assemblage *is* but also what it *does* (Macgregor Wise 2005, p.78), and so to movement and change. Assemblages create territories and stake a claim; they are not fixed but are constantly being made and unmade (Macgregor Wise 2005, pp.78-9). Assemblage provides a way of thinking about how feelings, technologies and ideas were entangled in particular ways to make a protesting assemblage that became a series of looting assemblages through the encounters of numerous bodies.

An initial protesting assemblage comprised: a gathering of people on a street (protesters, commentators, spectators), symbols of authority (police personnel, buildings and cars), the practice of protesting, ideas of (in)justice, emotions (expressions of grief by family and friends and solidarity by supporters), affects (a sense of grievance), various communications (between those physically co-present and virtually present others). This assemblage claimed a new territory: the right to protest at perceived injustice and seek answers to questions about what happened and why.

The protesting assemblage was dismantled as family and close friends left and remade as others arrived. A new assemblage formed consisting of some of the original protestors, incomers, affects (a sense of unfairness, resentment, excitement, togetherness), emotions (anger, solidarity, pride),

buildings and the circulation of images acts of lawlessness (in particular the destruction of property and looting) via social media and broadcast television and social institutions (criminal justice system, government, media). This assemblage claimed a new territory: the possibility of affective empowerment through taking revenge against authorities (police, government, large corporations) over social inequalities.

These assemblages created affective alignments and made things happen because of the way in which different entities were 'brought together in particular relations' (Macgregor Wise, 2005: 78). The influence of digital media technologies cannot be separated from their interactions with other elements in the assemblage.

## **CONCLUSION**

The 2011 UK riots signalled a public articulation of feeling that deserves to be understood in part as political. Participants identified policing and poverty as the main causes of the riots. They reported feeling insecure and excluded from the social order. Public discussion (led by police, politicians and journalists) focused mainly on the capacity of digital media technologies to accelerate, multiply and intensify the communication of negative emotions fuelling the violence of the crowd. This interpretation presented technology as determining social action, emotion as contagious and certain social groups as undiscerning and irrational, thereby de-legitimising a sense of grievance and obscuring its structural and political roots. Subordinate groups were further subjugated and unvoiced through this discourse. Sociologists analysing the role of digital communication technologies and emotion in social movements (Castells) and the UK riots (Baker) have tended to understand individuals as overly rational, focusing on cognitively controlled emotions, and technologies and subjects as external to each other.

In contrast, I have argued that certain analytical tools – affect and assemblage – are especially useful in exploring a sense of movement and the entanglement of emotion and technology in the riots and side-stepping the bifurcation of subjects and technologies, subject and environments. I have argued for an analytical focus on process and movement, rather than position, in order to grasp some of the complexity of the riots and the possibilities they offered for transitory affective empowerment.

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<sup>i</sup> See, for example, Prime Minister David Cameron's statement on violence in England on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2010; and Home Secretary Theresa May's speech in the House of Commons on 11 August 2011, specifically focusing on criminality and gang culture.

<sup>ii</sup> A 29-year-old British man shot and killed by police in Tottenham, North London, England, on 4 August 2011. At the time, the Metropolitan Police stated that officers were attempting to arrest him on suspicion of planning an attack, and that he was in possession of a handgun.

<sup>iii</sup> There were fewer than 100 people at the original gathering (Lewis et al 2011).

<sup>iv</sup> See the final report of the Riots, Communities and Victims Panel (2012).

<sup>v</sup> Statistics produced by the UK Ministry of Justice (2012) show that: 5,175 offences were recorded by the police; 4,000 people were arrested by early September; and 3,103 had appeared before courts by 10 August 2012.

<sup>vi</sup> For example, in Brixton (London), Handsworth (Birmingham), Moss Side (Manchester) and Toxteth (Liverpool).

<sup>vii</sup> Specifically, the numbers arrested and prosecuted (aided by all night court sittings), the scale of sentencing imposed, the use of CCTV and the extensive resources put into locating and arresting perpetrators (Newburn 2015, pp. 59-60).

<sup>viii</sup> According to Ministry of Justice statistics, 37% of those appearing in court on riot related charges were white, 40% were black and 6% Asian. There was some geographical variation with 37% white in London and 79% white in Merseyside (Lewis et al 2011, p.3).

<sup>ix</sup> The 270 participants were from London, Birmingham, Manchester, Salford, Nottingham and Liverpool.

<sup>x</sup> 79% of those interviewed were under 24 years old and 21% were women and girls (Lewis et al 2011). 'In terms of self-identified ethnicity, 26% of the sample were white, 47% black, 5% Asian, and 17% "mixed/other"' (Lewis et al 2011, p.3).

<sup>xi</sup> Participants were asked to say which of a list of causes of the riots they regarded as most significant and these same factors were also put to 1,001 adults across the UK by ICM, the Guardian pollsters. Participants in the ICM survey cited poor parenting (86%) and criminality (86%) as leading causes of the riots (Lewis et al 2011, p.11).

<sup>xii</sup> According to an ICM survey of 1,001 adults across the UK (Lewis et al 2011, p.11).

<sup>xiii</sup> Castells' consideration of the significance of emotion and digital communications in propelling new social movements draws on a theory of affective intelligence, his 'network theory of power' (2011) and his conceptualisation of 'mass-self communication' (2009).

<sup>xiv</sup> During the 1980s and early 2000s (for example, in Brixton in 1981 and in London, Brixton and Birmingham in 1985; in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in 2001).

<sup>xv</sup> de Rivera defines 'emotional climate' as an objective measurable environment, relating to underlying social structures, social relations and the exercise of political control (de Rivera 1992, pp.2-3, 7).

<sup>xvi</sup> Rainie and Wellman (2012) outline the concept 'networked individualism' as feature of late modernity. Here, networks replace more traditional social groups and communities and each individual resides at the centre of his/her own set of networks in a social world marked by increased individualism (Lindgren 2017, p.101).

<sup>xvii</sup> According to Massumi (2002), affect can be qualified and potentially transformed into emotion.

<sup>xviii</sup> Deleuze distinguishes between Spinoza's conceptualisation of affectio ('the state of the affected body', which 'implies the presence of the affecting body') and affectus ('the passage from one state to another') (Deleuze 1988, p.49).