

Text 1 – ‘The Guardian’ Newspaper – Charlie Brooker

Like almost anyone who wasn't outside running around with a scarf over their face, I sat at home last week gawping at my TV screen in horror as English cities, including the one I live in, came under attack from their own citizens. It was a self-inflicted horror show, like a man repeatedly smacking himself in the teeth with a breezeblock. But nowhere near as funny.

Since I write for a newspaper, I am now legally required to write an agonised hand-wringing article in which I attempt to explain why the riots happened. Which is tricky because I don't have a clue. Some blame the parents. Or the education system. Or the economy. Or our unequal society. Or just the rioters themselves. I'd guess at some soupy combination of all the above.

Aside from the sheer mindless ferocity and violence, one of the most depressing aspects of the protracted smashup was the nature of the looting: time and again, shops selling trainers or gadgets were targeted first. Fancy shoes and electric widgets mark the peak of ambition. Every looter was effectively a child chanting: "Give me my toys, I want more toys. Look at the guy captured on video mugging the injured Malaysian student. Watch his unearned swagger as he walks away; the size of a man, yet he overdoes that swagger like a performing toddler. That's an idiot who never grew up.

Why the obsession with trainers? Trainers are terrible. You stick them on your feet and walk around for a while 'til they go out of fashion. Whoopie doo. Yes, I know they're also status symbols, but anyone who tries to impress others with their shoe choice is a dismally pathetic character indeed – and anyone genuinely impressed by said footwear has all the soaring spirit of a punnet of moss. There's no life to be found in "look at my shoes". There just isn't.

In the smouldering aftermath, some politicians, keen to shift the focus from social inequality, have muttered darkly about the role of BlackBerry Messenger, Twitter and Facebook – frightening new technologies that, like the pen and the human mouth, allow citizens to swap messages with one another. Some have even called for the likes of Twitter to be temporarily suspended in times of great national crisis. That'd be reassuring – like the scene at the start of a zombie movie where the news bulletin is suddenly replaced by a whistling tone and a stark caption reading PLEASE STAND BY. The last thing we need in an emergency is the ability to share information. Perhaps the government could also issue us with gags we could slip over our mouths the moment the sirens start wailing? Hey, we could still communicate if we really had to. Provided we have learned semaphore.

If preventing further looting is our aim, then as well as addressing the gulf between the haves and the have-nots, I'd take a long hard look at MTV Cribs and similar TV shows that routinely confuse human achievement with the mindless acquisition of gaudy bling rubbish. The media heaves with propaganda promoting sensation and consumption above all else.

Back in the 80s the pioneering aspirational soap opera Dallas dangled an unattainable billionaire lifestyle in front of millions, but at least had the nous to make the Ewing family miserable and consumed with self-loathing. At the same time, shows aimed at kids were full of presenters cheerfully making puppets out of old yoghurt pots, while shows aimed at teens largely depicted cheeky urchins copping off with each other in the dole queue. Today, whenever my world-weary eyes alight on a "youth show" it merely resembles a glossily edited advert for celebrity lifestyles, co-starring a jet-ski and a tower of gold. And regardless of the time slot, every other commercial shrieks that I deserve the best of everything. I and I alone. I'd gladly introduce a law requiring broadcasters to show five

minutes of footage of a rich man dying alone for every 10 minutes of fevered avarice. It'd be worth it just to see them introduce it on T4.

If we were to delete all aspirational programming altogether, the schedules might feel a bit empty, so I'd fill the void with footage of a well-stocked Foot Locker window, thereby tricking any idiots tuning in on a recently looted television into smashing the screen in an attempt to grab the coveted trainers within.

Speaking of Foot Locker, if I were the CEO of Nike (which at the time of writing I'm not), I'd encourage Foot Locker to open special "decoy" branches near looting hotspots – unattended stores stocked full of trainers with soft sponge heels. Anyone pinching a pair of these would find it almost impossible to hoof in a window ever again. You'd be kicking fruitlessly at the glass for 15 years, making it less an act of spontaneous violence and more a powerful visual metaphor for your misguided existence.

But perhaps it's better to nip future trouble in the bud with the use of deterrents. Obviously a small percentage of the rioters are sociopaths, and you'll never make any kind of impression on their psyche without a cranial drill. But the majority should be susceptible to threats. Not violent ones – we're not animals – but creatively unpleasant ones. Forget the water cannon. Unleash the slurry cannon. That kind of thing.

Greater Manchester police has attracted attention by using Twitter as a substitute for the "perp walk": naming-and-shaming rioters by tweeting their personal details as they leave court. Not bad, but maybe not humiliating enough. Personally, I'd seal them inside a Perspex box glued to a billboard overlooking a main plaza for a week, where people can turn up and jeer at them. It's not totally inhumane: they would be fed through a tube in the top – but crucially, they would be fed nothing but cabbage, asparagus and figs, and since they wouldn't be allowed out for toilet breaks, it would be getting pretty unpleasant in there after 48 hours. And it would be a cheery pick-me-up for passersby.

Text 2 - The Telegraph - Editorial

London riots: the underclass lashes out

No one seemed surprised. Not the hooded teenagers fleeing home at dawn. Not Ken and Tony, who used to live in Tottenham and had returned to stand vigil over the missiles and torched cars littering an urban war zone. Tony claimed to have seen the whole thing coming. “This was always going to happen,” he said.

The police shot a black guy in suspicious circumstances. Feral kids with no jobs ran amok. To Tony’s mind, this was a riot waiting for an excuse. In the hangover of the violence that spread through London, the uprisings seemed both inevitable and unthinkable. Over a few days in which attacks became a contagion the capital city of an advanced nation has reverted to a Hobbesian dystopia of chaos and brutality.

“In the evening there is fear, and in the morning they are gone. This is the fate of those who take our goods, and the reward of those who violently take our property.” Isaiah 17:14. No such Old Testament fate awaited the pillagers of N18, strolling away from 21st-century megastores with a looted haul of iPod accessories and designer trainers.

This is the most arcane of uprisings and the most modern. Its participants, marshalled by Twitter, are protagonists in a sinister flipside to the Arab Spring. The Tottenham summer, featuring children as young as seven, is an assault not on a regime of tyranny but on the established order of a benign democracy. One question now hangs over London’s battle-torn high streets. How could this ever happen?

Among several obvious answers, one is a failure of policing. The evidence so far points to more ignominy for the rudderless Met, as doubts emerge over whether Mark Duggan, whose death inspired the initial riots, fired at police. The stonewalling of Mr Duggan’s family precipitated the crisis, and the absence of officers to intervene in an orgy of looting led to a breakdown of order suggestive of the lawless badlands of a failing state.

The second alleged culprit is ethnicity. But, as David Lammy, Tottenham’s MP, has said, these are no race riots. The Eighties uprisings at Broadwater Farm, as in Toxteth and Brixton, were products, in part, of a poisonous racism absent in today’s Tottenham, where the Chinese grocery, the Turkish store and the African hairdresser’s sit side by side.

So blame unemployment and the cuts. It is true that Tottenham is among London’s poorest boroughs, with 10,000 people claiming jobseeker’s allowance and 54 applicants chasing every registered job vacancy. In other affected boroughs, such as Hackney, youth clubs are closing. Unwise as such pruning may be, it would be facile to suggest that homes and businesses have been laid waste for want of ping-pong tournaments and skateboard parks.

The real causes are more insidious. It is no coincidence that the worst violence London has seen in many decades takes place against the backdrop of a global economy poised for freefall. The causes of recession set out by J K Galbraith in his book, *The Great Crash 1929*, were as follows: bad income distribution, a business sector engaged in “corporate larceny”, a weak banking structure and an import/export imbalance.

All those factors are again in play. In the bubble of the 1920s, the top 5 per cent of earners creamed off one-third of personal income. Today, Britain is less equal, in wages, wealth and life chances, than

at any time since then. Last year alone, the combined fortunes of the 1,000 richest people in Britain rose by 30 per cent to £333.5 billion.

Europe's leaders, our own Prime Minister and Chancellor included, were parked on sun-loungers as London burned. Although the epicentre of the immediate economic crisis is the eurozone, successive British governments have colluded in incubating the poverty, the inequality and the inhumanity now exacerbated by financial turmoil.

Britain's lack of growth is not an economic debating point or a stick with which to beat George Osborne, any more than our deskilled, demotivated, under-educated non-workforce is simply a blot on the national balance sheet. Watch the juvenile wrecking crews on the city streets and weep for all our futures. The "lost generation" is mustering for war.

This is not a *cri de coeur* for the failed and failing. Nor is it a lament for the impoverished. Mob violence, despicable and inexcusable, must always be condemned. But those terrorising and trashing London are also a symptom of a wider malaise. In uneasy societies, people power – whether offered or stolen – can be toxic. Most of the 53 per cent of e-democrats calling to have the death penalty reinstated (of whom 8 per cent would opt for firing squad or gas chamber) would never dream of torching a police car, but their impulses hardly cohere either with David Cameron's utopian ambitions.

What price for the Big Society as Tottenham, the most solid of communities, lies in ruins? The notion that small-state Britain can be run along the lines of Ambridge parish council by good-hearted, if under-funded, volunteers has never seemed more doubtful. Nor can Ed Miliband take much credit for his unvaried focus on the "squeezed middle", rather than on a vote-losing underclass that politicians ignore at their peril, and at ours.

London's riots are not the Tupperware troubles of Greece or Spain, where the middle classes lash out against their day of reckoning. They are the proof that a section of young Britain – the stabbers, shooters, looters, chancers and their frightened acolytes – has fallen off the cliff-edge of a crumbling nation.

The failure of the markets goes hand in hand with human blight. Meanwhile, the view is gaining ground that social democracy, with its safety nets, its costly education and health care for all, is unsustainable in the bleak times ahead. The reality is that it is the only solution. After the Great Crash, Britain recalibrated, for a time. Income differentials fell, the welfare state was born and skills and growth increased.

That exact model is not replicable, but nor, as Adam Smith recognised, can a well-ordered society ever develop when a sizeable number of its members are miserable and, as a consequence, dangerous. This is not a gospel of determinism, for poverty does not ordain lawlessness. Nor, however, is it sufficient to heap contempt on the rioters as if they are a pariah caste.

One of the most tragic aspects of London's meltdowns is that we need this ruined generation if Britain is ever to feel prosperous and safe again. If there are no jobs for today's malcontents and no means to exploit their skills, then the UK is in graver trouble than it thinks. Mr Osborne may congratulate himself on his prudence, but retrenchment also bears a social cost. We are seeing just how steep that price may be.

Financial crashes and human catastrophes are cyclical. Each reoccurrence threatens to be graver than the last. As Galbraith wrote, "memory is far better than the law" in protecting against financial illusion and insanity. In an age of austerity, there are diverse luxuries that Britain can no longer afford. Amnesia stands high on that long list.

Text 3 – reddit eyewitness accounts

thebattlingsilki:

Let's make one thing clear—this isn't rioting, it's looting. Plain and simple. There is no longer any grievance being addressed, people are simply exploiting an opportunity to steal, damage and destroy with impunity.

I'm in Notting Hill, and last night diners in a restaurant were mugged, shops broken into, and buildings set on fire. It had absolutely nothing to do with the communities in East London other than that the police were there, and not here.

I'm extremely worried about what's going to happen tonight. The police seem powerless, and the looters seem emboldened. It's a living nightmare.

Lazy_and_Weak

I was in Clapham at the time of the first car fires, I was coming home from the gym with a few of my mates, then I saw a load of criminals running my way. I managed to video tape most of their faces (ive sent to the footage to the police) then me and my mates were taking all of the injured people out of harms way (to the local park), getting people out of fires. Waiting with them until the ambulances came (which took ages)

muftiman:

I am a Medical student and I was on my way home from a day out when I got caught in the middle of it all around 6PM. I was luckily on scene before paramedics and was able to treat someone who had been stabbed in the kidney and was thankfully able to stop the bleeding with my coat.

The guy is now in hospital but I don't know the full extent of his injuries. I then volunteered my help at a local hospital (9PM) to help with the massive influx of patients. I am only now (8.30AM) getting home and contemplating heading out for the riot cleanup in my local area.

Edit : Off to help with the clean-up in Croydon!

tiny_painted_lady:

I live in Streatham, South London. Was up until three sat in the dark listening to the radio and the sirens. My partner and I were out in the car at about 9.30pm and we couldn't hardly get anywhere for road closures and police, we ended up going past a big retail park with a huge PC World and Currys, and there were people everywhere carrying as many laptops abd TVs as they could. They were just running out in the road, and to be perfectly honest I was terrified, they were so intimidating.

congofeet:

My friend and her fiancée are on their honeymoon in London, and while eating at a restaurant there, were interrupted by looters who took many of their belongings. This sadly included her wedding band and engagement ring. The staff at the restaurant tried their best to fight off the looters, and keep patrons safe. Patrons were eventually ushered into the wine cellar for their safety.

possiblygreen:

A friend owns a car stereo store. My husband and his friends have plans to stay in the shop tonight, barricading themselves in and armed with subwoofers and swinging malfunctioning GPS units stuffed in socks (or something) to defend it. They can't afford the damage or the loss and from what we've seen so far the area the shop is in could be next on the list. Liittle bit scary.

foxbiscuits:

They attacked the local Sainsbury's :(

There were clumps of ash/coal on the streets around my house this morning. A Jeweller's down the road was ransacked.

I'm supposed to be going to a self defence class on the high road tonight. Looks like I might be putting my class to use on the way home... Somewhat scared. O.o