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Capturing Protest in Urban Environments: The ‘Police Kettle’ as a Territorial Strategy

Abstract

‘Kettling’ has emerged in recent decades as an established, if controversial, tactic of public order policing. Departing from a historical emphasis on dispersal, kettling instead acts to contain protesters within a police cordon for sustained periods of time. This article elaborates upon the spatial and temporal logics of kettling by investigating the conditions of its historical emergence. We argue that kettling should be understood as a territorial strategy that co-evolved in relation to forms of disruptive protest. Whereas techniques of crowd dispersal serve to diffuse a unified collective, ‘kettling’ aims to capture the volatile intensities of public dissent and exhaust its political energies. Drawing on police manuals, media coverage, accounts from activists and expert interviews, we show how the ‘kettle’ reterritorializes protest by acting on its spatio-temporal and affective constitution. By fabricating an inner outside of the urban milieu, freezing the time of collective mobilization and inducing debilitating affects such as fear and boredom, kettling intervenes into the scene of political subjectification that each congregation of protesting bodies seeks to fashion.

Keywords: Affect, Kettling, Protest, Public Order Policing, Subjectivation, Territorialization
The Emergence of ‘Kettling’

In recent decades, a particular spatial strategy has manifested itself in the theatre of public order policing. In the UK, Germany, Denmark, Canada and elsewhere, police have responded to protests by encircling demonstrators within a cordon they are not permitted to leave for a sustained period. Official police discourses refer to this as ‘containing’ or ‘corralling’ but activists and the media call it ‘kettling’ (Joyce and Wain, 2014: 154-156; Fernandez, 2005: 248, 2008: 132; Reicher et al., 2007: 411). This terminological division reflects a deeper division on the ethical and political valence of this strategy. The police have portrayed containment as a liberal technology designed to prevent disorder and violence (e.g. HMCIC, 2009a, 2009b; NPIA, 2010). For protestors however, the kettle represents an oppressive tactic bent on discouraging citizens from exercising their democratic right to protest (Penny, 2010a, 2010b).

Strategies of enclosure and isolation have a long history in the military where they are deployed to cut enemy supply chains and preclude opportunities to retreat.¹ In policing, the kettle is a recent phenomenon, presumably not much older than three decades. Archival materials suggest that the first police kettle was formed in Hamburg on 6 June 1986 when 861 protesters were kept inside an encirclement for up to thirteen hours (Von Appen, 2016). Although German administrative courts subsequently declared kettling unlawful on several occasions, the measure was recurrently applied during the 1990s when it spread internationally. London in particular became a hotspot of the deployment and

¹The German term for this military strategy indicates a ‘family resemblance’ with the police kettle: Kesselschlacht, literally ‘kettle battle’. It remains to be explored whether the adoption of spatial elements from military encirclement by the police attests to a wider trend towards what Stephen Graham (2010) has called ‘military urbanism’.
contestation of the technique. At the 2001 May Day protests about 3000 demonstrators were contained by the Metropolitan Police. Kettling sparked further controversy when used during the 2009 G20 summit and the student fee protests in 2010. Other instances of police kettling appeared around the same period in different settings, such as the Copenhagen climate change protests in 2009, the Toronto G20 Summit protests in 2010, on Brooklyn Bridge in New York against ‘Occupy’ protesters in 2011, and in Frankfurt during the annual ‘Blockupy’-protests between 2012 and 2015 (Mullis et al., 2016: 57). Today, the strategy is firmly anchored in the repertoire of police measures for governing public protest in large parts of the Global North.\(^2\)

From a historical perspective, the emergence of kettling involves a spatial transformation in public order policing. The logic of containment diverges markedly from centuries-old strategies of dispersal that continue to be used—often alongside kettling. Wedges, V-formations, mixed shield dispersals, running lines, baton and cavalry charges all operate to divide and scatter an unruly crowd and restore public order (Cocking, 2013). The infamous Riot Act, introduced to Britain in 1714 and exported to the colonies via the Empire, would be read out by the authorities demanding that a ‘riotous’ gathering of more than twelve people should disband and go back to their ‘lawful business’, or otherwise be dispersed by force. Kettling is equivalent to dispersal in that both strategies are applied when the right to assembly is suspended. But spatially kettling operates under an inverted logic. Rather than dispersing protesters, the kettle contains them: hindering disruptive elements from

\(^2\) While this article focuses on public protest, it should be mentioned that techniques of corralling have also been applied in securing football matches. Although the term 'kettling' is rarely used in this context, the affinities in spatial design stand out. Most notably, the police have regularly enclosed travelling soccer fans on their way to and from the stadium. A very similar form of containment – the so-called ‘mobile kettle’ – is deployed to escort anarchist groups (the ‘black bloc’) during demonstrations.
circulating by barring movement. Urban space is striated in a highly flexible manner through the establishment of fleeting enclosures comprised of the flesh of police bodies reinforced with body armour, shields, visors, batons and other equipment organized into densely layered ‘lines’ (Sørli, 2012). Kettling thus turns the spatio-temporal coordinates of crowd dispersal upside down: instead of rapidly diffusing the protest, it sets up a bounded space for containing and potentially absorbing its energy.

In this article, we elaborate upon the spatial and temporal logics of kettling. We intend to contribute to the rich body of research that examines the ‘time-space sequences and settings of police activity’ (Fyfe, 1992: 470). Yet, given the public prominence of the phenomenon and broad scholarly interest in territorial strategies of policing in general (c.f. Herbert, 1997; Wahlström, 2010; Yarwood and Paasche, 2015; Zajko and Béland, 2008), the literature on kettling is surprisingly thin (for notable exceptions cf. Policante, 2011; Rowan 2010; Sørli, 2014). Most of the authors who address the technique refer to it only in passing (Brighenti, 2014b: 14; Cocking, 2013: 220; Martin, 2011: 10), concentrate only on its legal status (Mead, 2012; Wall, 2016) or use the term metaphorically (Paasche, 2013). Decades after its emergence, research on the spatio-temporal constitution of the kettle is still needed.

This scholarly neglect corresponds with a reluctance on the side of the police to promote the technique of containment explicitly as a rationality of crowd control. If police manuals and government reports refer to it, they primarily highlight legal hurdles (NPIA, 2010: 38) and precautions to be taken ‘to moderate its impact’ (HMIC, 2009a: 10-11). Neither aspect explains why kettling is used in lieu of any other measure to govern public disorder. One clue lies in the declared need ‘to adapt to the changing face of protest’ (HMIC, 2009b: 18).
Yet, there is scant mention as to how the nature of protest has precisely changed and how kettling actually corresponds with the changes. At most, containment is presented as a response to more decentralized forms of protest such as ‘spontaneous demonstrations’ or ‘sit-downs in the highway’ (HMIC, 2009b: 46).

In our attempt to deepen the understanding of the time-space of kettling within the political rationalities underpinning public order policing, we take the insinuation that the kettle has co-evolved with forms of protest as an analytical lead. We contend that the emergence of the strategy of kettling has to be comprehended in relation to developments in the tactics of contemporary protest. Drawing inspiration from Michel de Certeau (2011: 29-42), we conceive of policing and protesting as ‘types of operations’ (ibid. 30) that are asymmetrically linked. Whereas strategies of policing enforce spatial orders, tactics of protesting twist the rules of particular places: they turn sites of traffic into sceneries for symbolic mass spectacles and centres of commerce into venues for political assembly. In so doing, they often challenge, circumvent or divert modes of spatial control – and the police adjust their operational protocols accordingly. As we seek to demonstrate, the strategy of kettling has been devised to counter emergent forms of dispersed and disruptive protest. Empirically, we have analysed materials from the police (including official policy documents and two expert interviews) and protesters (including official accounts, blogs, and media reports). While we refer to a variety of national contexts, our study puts an emphasis on UK policing materials to the extent that they appeared more readily available and explicit. Although further research is certainly necessary to detail the ways in which kettling is understood and practiced in different settings, we are confident of this study's
capacity to elucidate the broader governmental rationality underpinning kettling as well as the principle conditions for its historical emergence.

The first section of this article unfolds what we conceive as a de-territorializing quality immanent to recent changes in protest. Drawing on tactical reflections put forward by activists and historical accounts from the literature on crowd policing inter alia, we show that traditional mass protest has been supplemented by a repertoire of fleeting and widely dispersed manoeuvres in the urban milieu which aim at disrupting infrastructural nodal points. Containment strategies have been developed in the context of a transformation from the symbolism of the unified collective appearance in public space to more volatile, swarming modes of resistance. Against this backdrop, the second section details the particular form of re-territorialization enacted by the kettle as a particular apparatus of capture (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 424-427). Forming a kettle is an attempt at seizing and exhausting the dynamics of protest by spatial means. It intervenes into the bodily constitution of protest, struggling to destitute the political subjectivity that is potentially emerging in acts of public dissent.

In delineating the relation between the de-territorializing dynamics of contemporary protest and the re-territorializing strategy of containment, our argument is informed by a conceptual debate that does not conceive of territory as the pre-existing object of power but as political technology through which power is exerted (cf. Brenner and Elden, 2009; Delaney, 2005; Elden, 2010; Painter 2010; Raffestin, 2012). Notwithstanding the diversity of the different contributions, this debate focuses on the making of multiple territories and how they shape distinct spaces of action. Two analytical aspects are particularly important for our treatment of kettling. First, the notion of territory is not tied to the historical
formation of nation state space but applies to a much wider spectrum of phenomena. As ‘a way of carving the environment through boundary drawing activities’ (Brighenti, 2010a: 61), territory aims at circumscribing behaviour, configuring interactions and providing ‘differential access to things and to others’ (Sack, 1986: 30). We analyse accordingly how the kettle constitutes a territorializing act that shapes the urban milieu in situations of protest, barring possibilities of movement and confining modes of political articulation.

Second, territory is inherently dynamic and contested. This is why it is analytically so useful to translate it into the conceptual pairing of de- and re-territorialization: both processes appear only relative to each other (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 220-29, 324-37; Brighenti, 2014a). Acts of territorialization intervene into a given forcefield; they modulate rhythms of movement and affective intensities which, at the same time, have the potential to overflow, escape or counteract a territorial assemblage. Such a conceptual view is highly conducive to understanding how the kettle corresponds with protest tactics that occupy the urban environment in a hit and run mode. Through investigating the constitutive enfolding of de- and re-territorialization we intend to shed light on the spatio-temporal rationality of the kettle as a political technology for governing protest.

De-Territorializing Tactics: From Symbolic to Disruptive Protests

In his histories of popular contention, Charles Tilly (1986, 2005) explores the evolution of the distinct organizational forms that public ‘disorders’ have taken. What Tilly shows is not only that forms of public ‘disorder’ are, in fact, highly ordered, but that practices of contention are historically malleable. They come into being, rise to prominence, fall away,
become refigured and disappear over time. In this section, we employ a genealogical perspective to render the appearance of the kettle intelligible (Bonditti et al., 2015). We understand kettling as a response to a problematisation of public order policing wrought by transformations of contemporary protest. Here, we chart a trajectory between two forms of contention which we reconstruct as ideal types whose features always already commingle in the complex amalgams of empirical reality: symbolic mass protest and disruptive protest. Symbolic mass protest, on the one hand, re-territorializes the fleeting dynamics of rioting and corresponds with the de-territorializing technique of crowd dispersal. Disruptive protest, on the other hand, performs a tactical movement of de-territorialisation which is met through the re-territorializing strategy of the kettle. We elucidate these forms by reference to a selection of historical events which, though far from comprehensive, allow us to identify the varied, sometimes even contradictory, tactics and strategies available to police and protestors today.

Until the late 19th century, riotous protest was the most common medium through which politically unrepresented peoples demonstrated their grievances to the ruling elite (Reiner, 1998: 37; Linden 2016). The riot has been historically understood as a kind of prototypical war machine: a collection of bodies acting together as a force of opposition to striated, state order (Borch, 2012; Brighenti, 2014). Violence—whether direct, indirect, or threatened—is integral (Clover 2016). Yet while the aim is most certainly to foment disorder, the riot exhibits a particular logic of ordering. It is the emergence of an electric affective atmosphere which enacts space through the charging of its composite bodies (Canetti 1978). It is a form of self-ordering designed for maximum disruption to the broader social order. In this respect, tactical elements of early-modern rioting will re-emerge in our most
recent present at the end of the 20th century. As we detail below, some contemporary forms of protest take up the de-territorializing vector immanent to tactics of contention elaborated centuries before. The kettle will serve as the apparatus designed to capture the affective intensity of rioting bodies.

Unsurprisingly, rioting is intimately tied to powerful derogatory narratives, the most prominent being the problematisation of the crowd (Borch, 2009, 2012; Brighenti, 2010b). As a direct inversion of the ideal liberal subject, the crowd threatened the resurgence of pre-social modes of behaviour characteristic of children (dependent, selfish, emotional) or animals (irrational, competitive, violent) (Le Bon 2002). The semantics of the crowd portrays rioters as an object, rather than a subject, of governance thus legitimating, if not necessitating, the exercise of ‘illiberal’ techniques of governance (Valverde, 1996; Ryan 2013).

Symbolic protest evolved from an effort to manifest a politically legitimate expression of political contention. To be distinguished from the riot, the protest must be composed: both ordered and orderly. The influence of the workers movements within early social movements was important in this regard. Like the strike, mass symbolic protest is a demonstration of unity and solidarity. The assembly of protesters stages the appearance of the people as a spectacle of opposition. Its size, measured in number, signifies power and force (Wall, 2016: 396). But the gathering of individuals is more than symbolic. It is a manifestation of collective political subjectivity. To achieve this effect, bodies—individual and collective—must be disciplined. The affective charge produced by the gathering of

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3 The crowd theory advanced by Canetti (1978) represents one prominent exception to the general contempt for the crowd, identifying it instead as a site of equality and freedom.
bodies must be carefully managed. Passions are incited but not permitted to run loose. Rather, they must be constantly folded back in on themselves to strengthen the social bonds of the collective and give concrete form to a common collective identity. The psycho-spatial territorialization of the protest is thus simultaneously a physical and symbolic demonstration of solidarity. The spatial form of the protest is massifying: centripetally pulling individuals into a collective mass-body demonstrative of unity, solidarity and, indeed, force. In this way, mass rallies and marches could be understood as rival centres of power to the state (see Jeffery and Hennessy, 1983: 6-7).

The continued conflation of protests and strikes with ‘crowds’ was a way of delegitimizing their claim to political status while enabling policing practices that aim to restore order through crowd dispersal. Problematizing the crowd in terms of its potentially violent irrationality served to legitimize tactics that aimed to de-territorialize the mass-body of the protests. Water cannons, baton charges, cavalry charges, tear gas, the firing of rubber or live bullets, and the police formation of the ‘flying wedge’ were variously employed for the purpose of putting a crowd into flight. Violence, threatened then exercised, was deployed to reassert and restore legitimate authority. The physical fragmentation of the crowd fractured its psycho-social bonds: interrupting the influence of ‘group think’ over the individual, breaking the influence of illegitimate leaders and allowing the return of individual rationality and morality.

Taken together, the dynamic of protest and policing staged a contest over the extent to which any given protest could be reduced to a crowd. Different moves of de- and re-territorialization were imbricated in that contest. Over the course of the 20th century, numerous social movement organizations sought to elevate and distinguish themselves
from the crowd through self-governmentalization. While these developments were in no way linear (see Della Porta and Reiter, 1998), protest became increasingly distinct from affiliated forms of political contention. The desire to be perceived as professional and legitimate was reflected in the adoption of hierarchical, ‘arborescent’ modes of organization which concentrated decision-making around organs of power, increased bureaucratization, and exercised moral discipline over the membership. While these developments may be partially responsible for the cooling of antagonisms between protests, pickets and police witnessed in many liberal states between the 1950s and 1970s (see, for example, McPhail et al. 1998, Geary, 1985; Winter 1998) the self-governmentalisation of contention was never total. De-territorializing tactics persisted—and in many cases were newly developed—which deviated markedly from the symbolic figure of peaceful protest. These would include the invention of the ‘flying picket’, which was deployed with tremendous success within UK industrial disputes during the 1970s (Jeffery and Hennessy, 1983), or the proliferation of organizationally deterritorialized ‘new social movements’ such as the antinuclear demonstrations in the 1950s, student protests and anti-Vietnam War demonstrations in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and inner-city race riots in America and the UK (including the experience of the Troubles) in the 1980s (Offe, 1985).

Such deterritorializations in the expression of political dissent in turn placed new pressures on public order policing. The adoption of riot gear, including shields and reinforced helmets, tear gas and plastic baton rounds contributed to what researchers refer to as the ‘paramilitarization’ of public order policing in the 1980s (see Geary, 1985; Jefferson, 1987, 1993; Waddington, 1987). Corresponding legislation aimed to re-
territorialize both strikes and protests. In the UK the 1986 Public Order Act, to take one example, introduced an obligation on protest organizers to notify police and provide detailed route plans of a demonstrations 6 days in advance, creating new lines of responsibility (amongst organizers who are given legal liabilities) and communication (between protest organizers and police have enabled the development of negotiated management tactics on the part of police). While some celebrated these developments on the basis of their success in preventing large-scale disorder at demonstrations (Waddington, 1987), others argued that these controls not only restricted free speech, but fuelled resentments and divisions within social movements (Jefferson, 1987, 1990).

From the 1990s to the present, forms of disruptive protest became more frequent as de-territorializing tactics forged in the preceding decades were modified and extended through the creative uptake of new technologies including cell phones, e-mails, and listservs. The 1999 WTO protests in Seattle, the Zapatista struggle in Chiapas, Mexico; and UK Uncut all demonstrated, in different ways, the new organizational and tactical opportunities for forming distributed assemblages of contention (Tufekci, 2017). In contrast to symbolic mass protest, disruptive protest is directed towards incapacitating strategic or emblematic sites. A mix of mobile and stationary (e.g. occupation) manoeuvres are often deployed to disrupt or destabilize the logistical and affective channels underpinning contemporary life (cf. The Invisible Committee 2015: 81-98). These assemblages tend to be comprised of a mix of both hierarchical (e.g. labour unions) and non-hierarchical (e.g. anarchists, black bloc, direct action groups) bodies displaying various degrees of affinity and tension. The decentralized command and control structures employed by contemporary social movements make them robust, adaptable and highly
manoeuvrable while frustrating attempts at ‘decapitation’ (De Armond, 2001) (attacks on leaders) and the negotiation tactics of police (Fernandez 2008).

The shift from policing strategies of dispersal to those of containment correlates with these transformations in protest. This constitutive relation can be ascertained within *Adapting to Protest - Nurturing the British Model of Policing* (2009) which asks ‘How best should the police as a service adapt to the modern day demands of public order policing while retaining the core values of the British model of policing?’ (HMCI, 2009b: 5). Commissioned in response to a legal challenge to containment, which had been brought before the European Court of Human Rights and House of Lords the report acknowledges: ‘The world is changing. And public order policing needs to change with it and evolve to meet the challenges of the modern age’ (HMCI, 2009b: 11). Containment is introduced in response to the evolution of new protest tactics as a purportedly ‘proportionate’ strategy to counter potential or actual disorder (HMCI, 2009b: 85-90). The relation between containment and new protest tactics was further borne out within the interviews we conducted with high-level policing experts. One senior police officer spoke to the issues raised by new protest tactics stating: ‘It’s a massive challenge. The use of mobile phones assists those intent on disorder and damage in lots of ways. Particularly in their ability to quickly respond to different police tactics’. He continued: ‘A containment is a [response to a] pretty serious level of threat or disorder’.

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4 A legal challenge was brought to the court by two people who had been inadvertently corralled by police while on their lunch break in Oxford Circus during the May Day protests in 2001. The claimants alleged they were wrongfully detained in breach of the European Convention of Human Rights. The original court action (2005) and a subsequent appeal (2007) were both rejected. A 2012 decision on this case found containment to be lawful, portraying it as ‘the least intrusive and most effective means to protect the public from violence’ (Austin and Others v. the United Kingdom 2012, application nos. 39692/09, 40713/09 and 41008/09).

5 Interview with a retired UK Senior Police Officer 1 August 2017.
Kettling appears especially reserved for situations where assemblies may get out of control and become dispersed. As retired senior police officer Andy Hayman (2009) wrote,

‘A protest on the move is harder to police than a stationary rally. Tactics to herd the crowd into a pen, known as ‘the kettle’, have been criticised before, yet the police will not want groups splintering away from the crowd.’

Despite the kettle's express purpose of containing disruptive forms of protest, fractions within the so-called ‘autonomist’ left continue to refine disruptive tactics as a means of exacerbating containment techniques. A particularly interesting case in this regard are the ‘Out of Control’ tactics developed by German protesters (AK Out of Control, 2007a, 2007b).

As a concept, ‘Out of Control’ is reminiscent of a homonymous book by Kevin Kelly (1994) that combines biology, complexity theory and cybernetics to inquire into decentralized modes of self-organization. ‘Out of Control’ is exemplary for its entanglement of de- and reterritorializing movements premised on the decomposition of a demonstration into unpredictable movements of flight, dispersal and reassembly. Instead of forming a homogenous group, protesters aim at sudden forms of disappearance and reappearance. As such, the tactic is explicitly designed to counter the strategy of kettling:

‘We want to disrupt [...] the practice of cordoning and mobile kettles [...] by being everywhere, gathering and spreading quickly. We are always behind the backs of the pigs. Always outside of kettles and containments, always at the edge of the on-going demonstration. Always in contact and within earshot. Always attempting to become multiple and develop momentum. The concept [of Out of Control] relies on using the free space that we appropriate.’ (AK Out of Control, 2007a)
At the same time, the new protest tactics develop an aesthetics that differs from symbolic mass protest. Instead of forming a homogeneous collective, protest should now take the form of experimental ‘choreographies’ (AK Urban Swarming, 2010). It is supposed to produce a visibility both distinct from the statist visibility of sovereign power and from the unitarian appearance of traditional protest by using theatrical means such as costumes, confetti or chanting. The spatial practice of dispersal, then, goes along with a performance of diversity and an aesthetic practice of playful performances (cf. Ryan forthcoming).

‘Out of Control’ tactics developed mainly after the 2007 G8-summit in Heiligendamm, Germany. However, similar protest tactics – sometimes also referred to as ‘jump and run’ – have formed elsewhere in the last decades. They have been strengthened and refined by the creative uptake of developments in communications technologies: internet-connected demonstrators coordinate street blockades and inform themselves about changing police tactics, or flash up unpredictably as ‘smart mobs’ (Rheingold, 2003). The ‘smart’ in smart mobs inverts historically-ingrained accounts of uneducated masses and irrational crowds. In this way, the immediacy of the bonds which held the crowd together – emotion, suggestibility, mimicry – become technologically mediated, permitting more broadly dispersed activities.

The relatively neat spatial contours of the kettle thus stand in stark contrast to these new figures of protest. The polycephalous and reticular shapes of networked organization that Della Porta and Diani (2006) highlight in these tactics are lacking any clear and fixed boundary. Others characterize the unravelling dynamics of disruptive protest in terms of ‘swarming’ (Routledge 1997a, 1997b; Wiedemann, 2014) or the ‘multitude’ (Woods et. al.
For rendering the re-territorializing feature of kettling intelligible, both notions deserve attention.

First, the concept of the swarm captures the movement embodied by new forms of protests. It highlights that the spatial dynamic of dispersal – now performed by protest itself – does not rely on central control, but rather emerges from multiple localized interactions. The swarm is an auto-spatializing collective that perpetually transforms itself by contracting and expanding, concentrating and spreading again. It is not surprising, therefore, that protesters have modelled themselves after swarms: ‘Do not walk straight lines but detours [...] The swarm divides itself when it confronts security architectures such as barriers. It produces irritations only through the form of its movement.’ (AK Urban Swarming, 2007) In its fleeting and unstable mode, the swarm enacts a de-territorializing flight vis-à-vis the striated setup of the urban milieu.

Second, both concepts highlight the temporal and affective dimension in self-organizing. As Eugene Thacker (2004) argues, a swarm always exists in time, since it is continuously self-transforming. It is a heterogeneous set of dynamic bodies acting on each other. In this sense, ‘swarming is always affective swarming’ (Thacker 2004: no pagination). The concept of the multitude emphasizes this affective dimension in a way that resonates with the new forms of protest. As Hardt and Negri (2004: 99-102) stress, the multitude does not rely on the self-representation of collectivity, but constitutes itself through its immanent life-forces as a set of singularities. This plural constitution resonates with new forms of protest that no longer seek unity primarily in representing a shared identity and a set of corresponding claims. Rather, protest forms itself according to principles of affinity through temporary and volatile alliances.
From the perspective of public order policing, the emergence, spread and continued
evolution of disruptive protests constitutes a problem. Non-hierarchical, leaderless, plural
structures make any attempt to establish ‘negotiated management’ nearly impossible
(Baker, 2011: 143-145). The responsibilization of protest organizers is undermined by the
splintering away of autonomous groups. Moreover, the affectively-laden, highly-distributed
mobile spread of protesters poses a challenge to the traditional techniques of policing.
Kettling, we contend, responds to the problematization of the rationalities and practices of
public order policing engendered by the emergence of disruptive protest. It is a technology
designed to re-territorialize its de-territorializing tendencies.

Re-Territorializing Strategy: Kettling and the Destitution of Politics

In what follows, we elaborate how the police kettle, in its brute simplicity, captures the
fleeting and overspilling dynamics described in the last section. As we will demonstrate,
kettling combines the spatial calculus of containment with a temporal calculus of
decelerating movements which are both corporeal and political. The kettle intervenes into
the bodily-affective formation of collectivities and thereby engages in a struggle over the
constitution or destitution of political subjectivity. To make this argument it is first
necessary to situate the kettle in the space of circulation par excellence – the urban milieu.
According to Foucault, the milieu is ‘the space in which a series of uncertain elements
unfold’ (Foucault, 2007: 20). When the liberal security dispositif was first consolidated, the
events of foremost concern in governing the urban milieu were accidents, disease
outbreaks and criminal acts. Securing the aleatory space of the city in a liberal way meant
maintaining circulatory processes despite the regular chance occurrence of those events (Pavoni 2018). In recent years, scholars have traced this governmental logic in an array of contemporary political practices (Luque-Ayala and Marvin, 2016; Adams 2014). Most important for our purpose, it has been demonstrated that territorial strategies, far from being opposed to liberal rationalities of governing, can become implicated in fashioning circulatory regimes (Brighenti, 2014a; Opitz and Tellmann, 2012; Opitz, 2016). Territories constitute ‘places of passage’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 323). Instead of simply blocking movements they modulate them.

The police kettle also operates in relation to the problematique of circulation. Yet it does so in a peculiar way. To begin with, the kettle is involved in a differential politics of mobility: it creates forms of relative immobility to protect those urban circulations deemed productive. This rationale surfaces in the Austin case ruled by the House of Lords, a decision that determined the lawfulness of containment measures during the May Day protests of 2001 in London. In their judgement, the Law Lords justified the corralling of protesters on the premise that the police had to tackle a form of disorderly crowd behaviour ‘inimical to the life of the city’ (Wall, 2016: 338). The emergence of a crowd threatens to congest and disrupt the pathways that allow for productive circulation. In containing this threat, the police address ‘a problem less of enclosure [...] than of traffic’ (Virilio, 2006: 33). The territorializing act of forming a kettle aims to secure the urban flows that will surround it.

At the same time, the kettle targets a form of movement which is qualitatively distinct from the traffic of goods and people: a political movement. This movement also unfolds its motion onto the street, but in order to occupy or interrupt the infrastructure of liberal exchange. The comparison with uncertain events such as accidents or infectious disease is
instructive here. Whereas the latter emerge as a by-product of circulatory processes and threaten them from within, protest does not inhere in liberal commerce in the same way. Political demonstrations tend to reclaim parts of the urban milieu and turn them into spaces of public dissent. As detailed in the last section, some forms of contemporary protest go even further, deliberately seeking to frustrate or disrupt the circulatory systems themselves. The kettle is supposed to counter this potential threat. It serves as a preventive technology in situations where interference with liberal life appears likely (HMCIC 2009a: 88-89).

One has to bear in mind this intricate relationship between the strategy of containment and the space of circulation when focusing on the topological figure the kettle instantiates. The kettle does not enact an exclusionary ban from the city comparable to the expulsion of the medieval leper or, to choose a contemporary example, the area bans issued on selected population groups (Beckett and Herbert 2009). It rather produces an inner outside that usually lasts for several hours at a location that is not predetermined or fixed – as if highly malleable city walls were erected inside the city on an ad hoc basis. For establishing such an inclusive exclusion, different materials are deployed. In addition to the geared up bodies of the police, crowd control fencing or steel barricades are used, but also flexible and lightweight shutoff devices made of plastic fabric. Furthermore, elements of the built environment such as buildings and bridges tactically serve to solidify the police line.

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6 This was the case during the Occupy Wall Street protests in 2011: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EQix5ji9MY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EQix5ji9MY); [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gdly5teKIB4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gdly5teKIB4) (both accessed 5 October 2018).

Utilizing these heterogeneous materials, the kettle sets up a boundary within the urban milieu to create an environment out of reach. It carves out a temporary zone of abandonment, putting those contained into what Giorgio Agamben has once termed a ‘relation with the nonrelational’ (Agamben, 1998: 23). This particular form of unrelatedness is epitomized by the scene of policemen standing at the fringe of the kettle and not responding to any requests from inside – be it for using a toilet, receiving nutrition or accessing medical service. The re-territorialization of protest movements accomplished by the kettle thus excises small bits of terrain from the realm of free movement and cuts off those captured from their urban surroundings. It quite literally hollows out liberal space.

The topological geometry of the kettle is intimately bound with a temporal calculus. At a basic level, the kettle ‘buys time’ in a situation perceived as critical. It is supposed to extend a state of affairs where protest is kept from its disruptive potential. In this regard, the kettle is an instrument to hold the future with all its surprising possibilities in store: an element of contingency planning. As a senior police officer put it in one of our interviews: ‘the tactic [...] is keeping people, whether they like it or not, in an environment to protect [it from] the greater threat that is emerging’. Recent scholarship has identified a range of

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8 This is a recurrent topic in reports by those who have been kettled. See for instance the interview statements in the CBC (2017) documentary on a kettling incident on June 27, 2010 during the G20 summit in Toronto, Canada.
9 With our reference to Agamben, however, we do not claim that the kettle embodies the logic of the concentration camp. From a sociological angle, Agamben’s statement about the camp as the ‘nomos of modernity’ (Agamben 1998: 166) is deeply problematic since it tends to override the differences between multifarious forms of ‘inclusive exclusion’. Dropping some of the ontological baggage at this point opens the possibility of elaborating topologies of abjection and disenfranchisement in their distinctiveness. It also keeps social scientists from overdramatizing governmental technologies such as kettling by relating them to a singularly catastrophic machine of mass murder.
10 As the senior officer responsible for public order policing put it in one of the expert interviews we conducted: ‘So I kettled with a capital ‘K’ [...] for the best part of an hour [...] and that hour bought me time [...] to get some of my critical areas of concerned covered so that we were in a position to better respond’ (Interview 2017).
11 Interview with a retired UK Senior Police Officer 1 August 2017.
political rationalities acting on potential futures, from preparedness over precaution to preemption (Anderson 2010). Against this backdrop, the peculiarity of the kettle lies in the situational tactic of *deferral*: It temporarily freezes the movements of bodies with the purpose of releasing the protesters hours later and slowly, sometimes in small groups, more often person by person. One might therefore argue that the *telos* of the kettle is, in fact, the dispersal of the crowd. Although such a characterization is certainly not fully incorrect, it is important to highlight the governmental concern for the tendencies and intervals of critical situations. The kettle addresses the potential behaviour of a crowd through a politics of deceleration that radically modulates the speed of bodily movements in the urban environment.

Due to this preventive concern with potentiality, the police are attentive to the atmosphere of a given situation in considering whether to build a kettle or not (Wall 2016; see also Adey 2014). As a senior police officer explained in our interview: ‘you need to feel, scent, smell the mood in the crowd’.¹² Much seems to depend on sensory intuition about what kind of events a situation might harbour and how it might unfold. The kettle corresponds with the transient quality of this situational awareness. Depending on the atmospheric apprehension of police officers it can be formed relatively quickly; it can also shrink and expand its volume, it is removable and even transportable, as with the so-called ‘mobile’ or ‘wandering kettle’.¹³ Containment actions are thus related to the ability of sensing the crowd dynamics assumed to inhere in political protest.

¹² Interview with a retired UK Senior Police Officer 1 August 2017.
¹³ For further information and a picture of a ‘mobile kettle’ see: [https://www.heise.de/tp/features/Freiheit-im-Polizeikessel-3413728.html](https://www.heise.de/tp/features/Freiheit-im-Polizeikessel-3413728.html) (accessed 5 October 2018).
The police, however, do not only attune themselves to situational atmospheres: they also seek to manipulate them. There is strong evidence, stemming from reports of police experts and demonstrators, that the kettle is a technology for actively intervening into the bodily-affective constitution of the collective. This is highlighted by the scholar and police advisor Peter Waddington who has been heralded as the main architect behind the strategy in the UK. A long-time critic of the use of baton charges, Waddington worked with the Metropolitan Police in the 1990s on an alternative strategy of keeping protesters in a limited place. Subsequent to the controversial use of kettling during the G20 protests in London in 2009, he laid out its rationale to the media, presenting it as a means to regulate the affective state of a crowd. ‘In a tension filled environment’, Waddington (2009: no pagination) wrote, ‘sparks will inevitably fly’. In such a situation, the kettle helps to maintain or restore ‘order by using boredom as a principle weapon’. From this perspective, the kettle is a device to administer a certain anaesthesia on the crowd, acting on its turbulent passions. It territorializes its affective intensities.

In an interview we conducted with Waddington, he further elaborated this strategic aspect:

‘The whole point was to slow everything down, to reduce the temperature, to calm down all parties, including the police. ‘Cause when you get people running around their nervous system switches from flight to fight, and [...] that’s a recipe for them being aggressive and responsive. It struck me that using baton charges and things of that sort was just a recipe for putting officers under a sort of stress that would cause them to possibly use excessive force. So, the whole idea was slow things down, just encircle people, not allow them out of the kettle, except under controlled conditions and avoid situations of aggression or violence. And if it came from anyone, it would
have to come from the protesters. The police would be in a defensive posture having established a cordon.’ 14

In this quote, the kettle appears as a political technology for re-territorializing protest in a complex sense. It implements a form of spatial enclosure to achieve temporal and affective control. The operations of cordonning demonstrators, slowing down bodies and calming the nervous system are intimately interwoven. According to Brian Massumi (2002: 23-45, 2015), affect inscribes future possibilities into the present: ‘Affect is simply a body movement looked at from the point of view of its potential’, it is a ‘reserve of … newness or creativity […] a more to come’ (Massumi, 2015: 7-8). As such it holds the promise of becoming. The kettle, in turn, aims at closing down the opening enshrined in affective capacity. It is designed to lower the collective potential embodied in protest. If affective intensities such as collective excitement and anger are activating, the kettle aims to be deactivating. Inducing boredom is a way of reducing what bodies can do.

This account of a territorialization of affect can also be drawn from more critical reports by journalists and protesters captured in police kettles. With one significant difference: according to many, what is induced is not boredom but fear. For instance, in her coverage for the New Statesman, activist Laurie Penny (2010a, 2010b) vividly describes the seven hours she spent inside a kettle during the student fee protests in London 2010. Two distinct phases of affective modulation can be inferred from her account. The first started immediately when the kettle was formed. The realisation of being unable to move and having no way out made protesters panic. The term ‘kettle’, Penny writes sardonically, is

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14 Interview with PAJ Waddington 8 August 2017.
therefore ‘rather apt, given that penning already-outraged people into a small space tends to make tempers boil and give the police an excuse to turn up the heat’ (Penny, 2010a). The realisation of being entrapped set the bodies of protesters into a frightened alarm, which further increased when the cordon was pulled tighter, inducing claustrophobia. Other witnesses and journalists concurred, attesting a suffocating atmosphere.¹⁵

The second phase of affective modulation started gradually, when protesters realised their bodily abandonment and exposure to forces of nature. They turned from an over-excited anxiety into something akin to a state of fearful resignation. Again, in Penny’s view,

‘this is the most important part of the kettle, when it’s gone on for too long and you’re cold and frightened and just want to go home. Trap people in the open with no water or toilets or space to sit down and it takes shockingly short time to reduce ordinary kids to a state of primitive physical need. [...] The police] decide when old people can get warm, when the diabetics get their insulin. [...] It’s a way of making you feel small and scared and helpless.’ (Penny, 2010a)

Kettling thus not only turns boredom into ‘a principle weapon’, as Waddington maintains, but employs environmental elements to manipulate the affective composition of the crowd: cold or heat, darkness or bright sunlight, rain or humidity all play a role in slowly draining the energy of protesters. Even though each kettle is unique, many accounts highlight this effect (cf. Sørli, 2012, 2014).

¹⁵ In a report by the Guardian, an anaesthetist providing medical assistance to the protesters kettled on Westminster Bridge is quoted as follows: ‘Police had us so closely packed, I couldn’t move my feet or hands an inch. We were in that situation like that for hours. People in the middle were having real difficulty breathing [...] Repeatedly I tried to speak to officers, telling them that I was a doctor and this was a serious health and safety risk.” (Townsend and Malik 2010)
Although it makes a huge difference whether the police induce boredom or fear, dejection or anxiety (Anderson 2015), the mode of intervening into the affective state of the crowd is, at closer examination, always a way of targeting political subjectivity. By exhausting and depriving bodies of their capacities of self-determination, the kettle counters the event of political subjectification that public demonstrations usually strive for. This aspect is particularly evident in production of shame which, intentionally or not, takes place in many instances of kettling. Confined over hours in the open, people have to urinate and defecate in the closest proximity to others; women during menstruation may run out of sanitary articles; strangers become witnesses of one’s own most personal feelings and bodily needs.\(^1^6\) Shame arises where the Self becomes openly and irreducibly tied to one’s intimate existence and is thence ‘overcome by its own passivity’ (Agamben, 1999: 105). Shaming amounts to ‘an irrefutable order to be present at its own defacement, at the expropriation of what is most own.’ (Agamben, 1999: 106) In kettling, what was intended to be a demonstration of a political body is diverted into a demonstration of a vulnerable body thrown back upon itself.\(^1^7\) As an apparatus that incapacitates, intimidates or distresses those who carry their protest onto the street, it tends to produce bodies in shame who witness their own disorder as political subjects. *In extremis*, the kettle is a machinery of political destitution.

\(^{16}\) An extreme case was the confinement of protesters at the Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen 2009. People were held for hours on the ground in the freezing cold of December, handcuffed and without the ability to move. This means they had to urinate and defecate *on themselves*. One might argue whether this practice goes beyond kettling, even if the media used the term to relate to it: [https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2009/dec/15/copenhagen-194-arrests](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2009/dec/15/copenhagen-194-arrests) (accessed 5 October 2018).

\(^{17}\) This is a central theme in the CBC documentary (CBC 2017) on the kettle in Toronto on 27 June 2010. Most of the interviewees express their experience of being kettled in a politico-affective register, highlighting both the deprivation of their basic capacity to act and their bodily devitalization through exposure to low temperatures and rain over hours without the chance to leave.
At the same time, the kettle exhibits an almost paradoxical mode of functioning: it seeks to capture the excessive forces of a political assembly not by dissolving or isolating the assembling elements but by keeping them in place *en masse*. According to Judith Butler (2015: 9), there is an ‘indexical force to the body’ assembling with other bodies on the street. Prior to the verbal utterance of particular demands, the bodies are collectively ‘exercising a plural and performative right to appear, one that [...] instantiates the body in the midst of a political field.’ (Butler, 2015: 11) On the one hand, then, the kettle alters the conditions of appearance for bodies assembling collectively and publicly. It threatens to neutralize the expressive force of the self-indexing body. If political protest aims to create a scene for staging its disagreement, the kettle builds a frame that may transform political speech into uncivil noise. On the other hand, crisscrossing the political appearance of bodies by acting on their mere physical presence is itself a precarious operation. The indexical force of the body can almost never be fully abducted. In reckoning with the tendencies of physical bodies to grow tired, cold or frightened, the kettle also perpetuates the assembly at least to some extent. Even in denying the fundamental autonomy of determining when to move, to eat or sleep – something that ‘total institutions’ (Goffman, 1961) are specialized in – the kettle always already exhibits the potential of bodies to gather collectively. The kettle, in other words, engages in a struggle over the emergence of political subjectivity whose outcome is far from predetermined. By re-territorializing urban protest spatially and affectively, it intervenes into a spatial organization of power that will remain contested.
Polly, Put the Kettle on?

This article analysed the spatio-temporal mode of operation of police kettling and the historical conditions under which it could emerge. In doing so, we concentrated on the co-evolution of protest and police practices. Although the ‘repertoires of contention’ as well as the ‘repertoires of protest control’ are in themselves always diverse, our analysis supports and extends recent diagnoses about a turn towards ‘strategic incapacitation’ in critical studies of contemporary policing (Gilham, 2011; Gilham, Edwards and Noakes, 2013). Taking up the preventive stance of what has been termed a ‘culture of control’ (Garland 2001), the kettle is not primarily concerned with issues of law enforcement. Instead, it acts on the nexus between the bodily and the political in urban protest, seeking to address a potential for movements preemptively that may disturb the social order (Neocleous 2000).

As we have shown, the principle strategic aim of kettling lies in containing the decentralized, highly volatile, sometimes swarming modes of action characteristic of what we have called disruptive protest. Whereas traditional techniques of crowd dispersal look to de-territorialize the unified symbolic mass corpus in a rapid show of force, the kettle re-territorializes protest by acting on its spatial, temporal and affective constitution. It fabricates an inner outside of the urban milieu, freezes the time of collective mobilization and induces debilitating affects such as fear and boredom. While it is certainly true that the strategic objectives have switched sides – demonstrators now operate partly through dispersal and the kettle is deployed to concentrate groups – the impact of kettling reaches beyond the narrowly-spatial manoeuvre of pooling and zoning. Ultimately, the act of re-
territorialization intervenes into the scene of political subjectification that each congregation of protesting bodies seeks to fashion.

Understanding the relation between protest and police in terms of co-evolution also discourages us from making any deterministic evaluation. On the one hand, the persistence of dispersal strategies by police undermines any idea that kettling represents a ‘paradigm shift’. On the other hand, new technologies and choreographies of protest have been created to counter or invert the effects of kettling. For instance, smartphone applications such as Sukey have been developed to circumvent and evade police containment, using GPS technology to alert users to escape points from police kettles that are forming in real time.18 The name of the technology is reminiscent of an English nursery rhyme (‘Polly put the kettle on, Sukey take it off again’), highlighting a certain playfulness of the politics of contention at stake. A different example could be drawn from the ‘Blockupy Protests’ in Frankfurt 2012 in which a group of protesters encircle a police kettle, chanting: ‘Hey! Hey! Our kettle is much nicer!’19 In ‘kettling’ the police kettle, protesters acted on the police kettle in parody: countering the fear inducing practice of lining up in riot gear through mocking mimicry. Rather than seeking to evade or circumvent containment, protesters acted to re-appropriate an open space of collective appearance.

Even though such scenes of contestation are little more than fleeting episodes, they nonetheless evoke the inherent instability of policing technologies, even ones as apparently solid as the kettle. Far from producing homogeneous effects across heterogeneous

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18 The self-description on the website reads as follows: ‘Sukey is a web app that is designed to keep people safe, mobile and informed during demonstrations.” (http://sukey.org/what, accessed 5 October 2018)
19 Footage of the tactic has been documented on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wH7KYV7IENU (accessed 18 January 2018).
situations, their governmental rationality has to be analysed in its multiplicity, its inner
tension and its potentials for transformation. Given the surprisingly scarce academic
literature on kettling, this article may hopefully serve as a prelude and stimulus for more
research to come.

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