

A Short History of Kettling by Scott Sørli

Police Kettling is a recent cultural-spatial phenomenon in which the police use a line of their bodies as a cordon to encircle and hold in place up to several hundred (or more) people over an extended duration of time. The earliest well-documented police kettle occurred only 25 years ago. Since then, the spatial strategy of the police kettle has developed variations, including a compressive form (called a hyper-kettle), a mobile form (wander kettle), and a form where water is used as a barrier without appearing to be one (bridge kettle). Many of the material qualities of the kettle boundary are also developing quickly, in parallel with technological advancements (surveillance, weaponry, tactical training, and so on).

Police kettles generate intense experience through the precise deployment of atmospheric and phenomenological techniques. Once a police kettle is in place, the performance begins: the sun goes down and it gets dark, temperatures fall and it gets cold, relative humidity rises, moisture condenses, and it often rains. The atmosphere—our medium of occupation and existence—is regularly augmented with tear gas, pepper spray, and electrical shocks. At a lower level, the biological organism experiences discomfort through the enforced prohibition of drinking water, consuming food or excreting waste.

Special black costumes detailed to suppress individuality are worn by the police, who, with their backlighting and sound

effects, are perceived as a mass. This mass, while less tidy than the Tiller Girls' dance formations or North Korea's Mass Games, is equally aesthetic.

The negative emotions of those kettled include anger, fear, anxiety, dread, and despair; also, because of its indiscriminate nature, police kettling is an example of collective punishment. As the implementation of economic austerity programs continues by political-corporate elites, such repressive techniques deploying the aesthetic transmission of affect are expected not only to increase, but also mutate and intensify. As Benjamin writes in his famous Artwork essay, these "efforts to aestheticize politics culminate in one point. That one point is war."¹

1 The contemporary practice of kettling can be traced back to the military strategy of encirclement, whereby troops are arranged to surround and isolate an enemy force. It is an ancient practice, dating back at least two and a half millennia to the Battle of Thermopylae, which occurred in the late summer of 480 B.C. Duration is the temporal constituent of encirclement that permits the delivery of supply depletion. Disregard for civilian casualties is another constituent of encirclement. The historically more recent Battle of Stalingrad, for example, lasted from 23 August 1942 until 2 February 1943, and resulted in nearly two million deaths due to hunger and exposure, as well as the more conventional technological means. The German word for military encirclement (which will be useful for our etymology) is *kesselschlacht*, literally 'cauldron battle.'

2 The earliest well-documented police kettle occurred in Hamburg on 8 June 1986 to over 800 people, and lasted up to 13 hours. Despite repeated requests, no washroom breaks during the entire time were permitted. Deprivation of food and water was maintained over this duration as well, manufacturing low-level biological effects. The Hamburg police report noted that of the 838 people taken into custody, 22 were arrested, leading to 15 investigations, seven of which were for illegal assembly. The protest was organized to contest the state withdrawal of the right to protest. *Eingekesselt* is German for 'surrounded,' or 'encircled.'

3 The police kettle put into place in Toronto on 27 June 2010, during the fourth G20 summit, trapped a random selection of over 200 bystanders, cyclists, pedestrians, and shoppers. Not one citizen from this kettle was convicted of any charge, while 90 officers were subsequently disciplined for removing their ID badges, contrary to police policy, during the kettling and throughout the summit. The anonymity of individual police who make up the snare is symptomatic of a police kettle, in part to avoid personal responsibility for violating the legal concept of habeas corpus but also to facilitate the rendering of the individual officer into the martial mass. Due to the lack of any justified reason for this kettle, it is clear that its purpose was as a live training exercise. Police Superintendent Mark Fenton, the commanding officer who ordered the kettling, has since been charged with misconduct.

4 The typical condition of a police kettle (*polizeikessen*), which is static, is differentiated in German from a wander kettle (*wanderkessen*), which is not. In the specific case of a wander kettle, the police arrange themselves in front of, to the sides of, and behind protesters as they march. Once encircled, the police then control the route, starting and stopping the march at will. Large numbers of police, nearly as many as there are protesters—as in this example from a 28 May 2007 protest against the 7th Asia-Europe Meeting in Hamburg—are necessary for a wander kettle to maintain coherence throughout this spatio-temporal form of control.

5 A very recent technological development is bridge kettling, the earliest recorded case of which occurred on the Pont de la Guillotière in Lyon, on 20 October 2010. A wander kettle is deployed to a large bridge and detained over the geographical feature of an urban river. Water acts as a barrier without appearing to be one, and the potential of property damage to private commercial buildings is eliminated. In the Westminster Bridge kettle of 9 December 2010, young students protesting tuition fee increases experienced nightfall and plunging temperatures while held over the open water of the Thames.

6 A kettle can also be a compression machine in the special case called a hyper kettle. The police link arms, push forward firmly, compressing people against each other and any available building façades. Pushing back can result in the serious charge of assaulting a police officer. The experience of pain and claustrophobia can be as intense, the purpose of which is to discourage future protests. For example, the Unite Against Fascism protesters were hyper kettled by police on 21 March 2010, as the English Defence League were left to fly their St. George's Cross flags freely.

7 Nature, specifically fauna, is introduced on the periphery of the kettle in the form of attack dogs and police horses. These domesticated animals have been trained to release themselves into a state of wildness and then revert to domesticity upon command, a feral condition that has been seen among trained police officers as well. Discipline of the police is very rarely enforced, as the state takes advantage of the benefits of the anticipated, excessive, extra-legal police behaviour.

8 While a police cordon is a line that cannot be crossed, in contrast to a police kettle, it can be retreated from. The membrane of a police cordon and a police kettle consists of the bodies and minds of the police, as well as inorganic mobile material, such as polycarbonate shields, truncheons, tough fabric, and Kevlar. In a new international style, metal elements, such as crowd-control fencing or steel barricades have become part of the police line. Plastics have also been commonly deployed as barriers during the Occupy Wall Street protests because of their light weight, flexibility, low cost, and ease of use.

9 The technologies of police cordons are also evolving at a quick pace. Two hundred of the mobile, ten-foot-tall steel police cordons shown here have been purchased in the U.K. in anticipation of the 2012 London Olympics™. Like a transformer, sections of the cordon fold up into holding cells for protesting citizens, who, based on past history, will largely be held without charge, documented, and released after an arbitrary period of time.

10 In another form called Apache kettling, landscape urbanism leaps off the face of the earth as cordon materials are tossed into the air. In this example, a helicopter identified as Crazyhorse One-Eight shot a video as it encircled its target and fired, tracing the form of a slowly spinning, oscillating, inverted cone. In the age of continuous drone wars, this cone could be described as Rumsfeldian—certainly not Platonic. Bradley Manning, accused as the whistleblower who leaked the video, is a political prisoner, torture victim, and Nobel Peace Prize nominee. x



Bombing of a train station in Stalingrad by the German air force, August 1942. Photographer unknown. Source: German Federal Archive. Identification Code: Bild 183-B22081.



"Police Terror Against Anti-Nuclear Activists: 800 People Kettled in One Day." Hamburg Heiligengeistfeld 8 June 1986. www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/sanis/archiv/brokdorf/kap_06.htm, retrieved 2012-03-18.



"An Aerial View of the Kettling Seen From Up High on the Southwest Corner of Queen and Spadina, on June 27, 2010." Photo by Eldar Curovic. The Toronto Star, 27 June 2010, retrieved 2012-03-18.



"Police Repression at ASEM Protest in Hamburg." Photographer unknown. de.indymedia.org/2007/05/179084.shtml, retrieved 2012-03-18.



Westminster Bridge kettle, 9 December 2010. Photo by Jon Cartwright Photography. Courtesy of Jon Cartwright.



"A cordon of police battle to hold back the protesters as they surge forward towards the Right-wing marchers." Photo: Press Association. dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1259409, retrieved 2012-03-18.



"Take a Bite Out of Crime." Photographer unknown. worldwide canine.com, retrieved 2012-03-18.



"Mariam Solayman, a member of an Egyptian activist group, shouts anti-government slogans in front of a police cordon during a demonstration outside the press syndicate in central Cairo January 27, 2011. Demonstrations demanding the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak, in power since 1981, have raged since Tuesday in several Egyptian cities, with the biggest clashes in Cairo and Suez." Photo by Yannis Behrakis / Reuters. totallycoolpix.com/2011/01/the-egypt-protests/, retrieved 2012-03-18.



"The steel cordon stretches across the road in central London today as police unveil their latest tactic in the bid to stop disorder on the streets." Photo by Mark Large. http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2068180, retrieved 2012-03-18.



Still frame from classified U.S. military video. Wikileaks, collateralmurder.com, retrieved 2012-03-18.

Notes

1. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," in *Selected Writings Volume 3 1935-1938*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2002), 121.

Scott Sørli has received professional degrees in process control engineering and in architecture, and a Master of Science in design research. His practice operates across scales and among disciplines. He is also co-curator of *convenience*, a window gallery that provides an opening for art that engages, experiments, and takes risks with the architectural, urban, and civic realms. His current design research considers agencies of wilding as bubbles of liberation fracturing institutional stratifications.