RESEARCH ARTICLE

COMMONING AS SOCIAL STRUGGLE

Three Modes of Commoning Mobility Infrastructures in Berlin

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Abstract

The article provides an empirical insight into urban initiatives that advocate for better urban mobility infrastructures and outlines a theoretical perspective of commoning infrastructures as a terrain for political struggles. Rather than constructing commons as the interplay of methodologically presumed elements (resources, a community of commoners, and their institutions of commoning) it takes a relational perspective on commoning that asks how activists mobilize and relate heterogeneous elements to make urban mobility infrastructures a common political concern. Based on ethnographic fieldwork on mobility activism in Berlin, the second part of the article illustrates such a relational perspective and presents three modes of commoning. To achieve what is called "mobility transition" (i. e. more sustainable and equitable urban mobility infrastructures), activists rely on mobilizations of knowledge, space, and affect.

Keywords: *commoning, urbanity, social movements, mobility infrastructures, affect, political mobilization*

Political demands and moral claims for better urban mobility infrastructures in Berlin have been centering since the 2010s around the buzzwords *Verkehrswende* or *Mobilitätswende*, which translate as "traffic transition" or "mobility transition." A wide range of activist mobilization practices and administrative policies were set in motion with reference to mobility transition. Under this banner, civil society initiatives such as *Changing Cities* or *German Cyclist's Association* (*Allgemeiner Deutscher Fahrrad-Club, ADFC*) are fighting for their vision of a city that moves away from a focus on automobility and favors more socially and environmentally sustainable forms of mobility such as cycling, walking, or public transport. Among the key demands of civil society initiatives is Vision Zero, which demands safety for all users of mobility infrastructure and zero deaths due to inadequate provision and poor infrastructural design. Activists are also pushing for the proper implementation of a citywide network of 865 kilometers of priority cycle lanes. Some, such as the *Car Free Berlin Initiative* (*Berlin Autofrei*), are even fighting to ban private cars from the inner-city districts altogether, creating what some are calling the world's largest car-free urban zone (Burbano 2022).

For more than a year and a half, I have been conducting ethnographic fieldwork on the various political mobilizations around urban mobility infrastructures, which, I will argue, aim to transform infrastructures and, ultimately, urban mobilities and urbanity itself. My research methods included in-depth interviews with activists and administrators, as well as participant observation of one initiative and various activist events such as demonstrations,

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often in the form of ride-along bike rides. I collected a large amount of visual and audio-visual material by analyzing social media accounts and newsletters of my research area. I analyzed them together with governmental policy documents and laws in order to get a grip on the goals of the mobility transition and to capture discursive strategies aimed at enabling better and more equitable urban mobilities. Although there are various vibrant activist groups advocating for pedestrians or better public transport, for the purpose of this article, I am focusing mainly on cycling activism.

In this paper, I provide an empirical insight into the field of mobility transition and outline a perspective of commoning infrastructures as a terrain for political struggles. I will discuss how activists' mobilizations relate heterogeneous elements (people, infrastructure, moral claims, space, knowledge, affect) to make mobility transition a common political concern and create a community of commoners. I argue that these practices of mobilization not only form part of ongoing political contestations over urban mobility infrastructures, but that visions of a better city and an alternative urbanity are manifested in them. I will continue with a theoretical section debating current trends in the theorization of commons/commoning. The subsequent section presents my empirical findings where I will discuss three modes of commoning which illustrate my approach of commoning as relational practice.

Making Mobility a Common Political Concern: Relational and Urban Approaches of Commoning

Academic approaches to the study of commons and commoning have shifted their focus remarkably, partly due to the numerous interdisciplinary perspectives that have been put forward. Admittedly, the first shift in perspectives – from commons to commoning – has already been heavily canonized. Suffice it to say that accounts tend to start with Elinor Ostrom, who most prominently has inquired into the institutional arrangements that are needed to safeguard natural resources from enclosure and preserve them as common goods (Ostrom 1990). In contrast to Ostrom's focus on rules, commoning approaches look at the social process of how a resource is made a common-pool resource and emphasize community building. Peter Linebaugh's study of the various historical struggles over competing interpretations of the Magna Carta and the enclosure of grazing and woodlands in England and the British Empire (Linebaugh 2008) is an example of a perspective that constructs commoning as an activity. There have been more recent attempts to further decenter the significance of concrete material resources. They propose an understanding which focuses on commoning as the performance of a set of contingent relations that are subject to the exercise of power. To capture the affective, economic and embodied socionatural relations of a community in Nepal with the forest, Andrea Nightingale provides us with a critical feminist ecological perspective. She advocates to look at the "*doing* commoning, *becoming* in common, rather than seeking to cement property rights, relationships of sharing and collective practices as the backbone of durable commoning efforts" (Nightingale 2019, 31, original italics).

In this paper, I build on Nightingale's notion of doing commoning as a way of creating a community of people and more than human entities. I ask how activists mobilize people and infrastructures for their political vision of an alternative urbanity and how infrastructural provision is used as an argument to pursue moral claims for better (socially fairer, more sustainable, more accessible and safer) urban mobility. I analyze these mobilizations as fostering relations of sharing that need to be constantly enacted, involving people, knowledge, law, infrastructures, and policies alike.

This relational approach bears methodological advantages over some widely used definitions of the commons. The latter typically include three elements: a common-pool resource, an institution or a set of rules to govern the resource, and a community of commoners (Kip et al. 2015). The conventional analysis of commons may therefore focus on one or more of these elements, and consequently, to a certain extent, takes the elements as a methodological given. By strengthening a relational perspective on commoning urban mobilities, I aim to go beyond such an additive understanding of commoning as the analysis of methodologically presupposed elements.

This move towards a relational perspective should not be read as a neglect of the role materiality is playing in processes of commoning. The premature analytical determination of the one material resource that is to be preserved as common good (e. g. mobility infrastructures) ascribes an ontological status which might obscure the actual role material and non-human actants are playing in processes of commoning. Moreover, it diverts the focus from other crucial non-human elements. After deciding which resource to focus on the analyst might move on too quickly to inquire about institutional settings and a community of commoners. An ethnographic focus on doing commoning in contrast allows me to analyze modes of commoning as a social practice that generates points of reference, be they material or immaterial, human or non-human. It also points to the specific role infrastructures, imaginations of a better city, and activist communities play when urban mobility infrastructures are made a common political concern.

A relational perspective is particularly apt for urban commons. In urban contexts, the contested resources like mobility infrastructures are material. However, what is at stake in these contestations are not solely neatly delimitable resources that are depletable and, therefore, need to be protected from overexploitation. On the contrary, the city itself can be seen as a commons that is relationally produced by using it and, consequently, adding to it. The creation of the urban commons, the sharing of the city, and the participation in discussions about the meaning of urbanity is what constitutes the city and makes the urban commons valuable:

> *In the city, the commons is an inherently relational phenomenon. [...] usage and consumption practices are a constitutive part of the production of the urban commons: in fact, consuming the city is nothing but the most subtle form of its production.* (Borch and Kornberger 2015, 7–8)

From this perspective, contestations over urban mobilities constitute the urban and its contested meanings. More generally, the relational processes that produce the urban commons, "the city-making activities of its residents, in which they produce the city through their lives

and works as a collective social and material product; in effect, a commons" (Holston 2019, 121) lead to the re-/production of the city itself.

In the field of traffic transition a relational approach of commoning yields additional advantages since these relational practices can lead us to the alternative visions of urbanity that are manifested in activists' social practices of mobilization. Neither these visions nor urbanity itself can solely be treated as material resources. They are created by relational social practices and float partly in the realm of the imagination when activists try to make mobility infrastructures a common political concern. For that matter, I focus methodologically on the process of relating in activists' interventions and mobilizations. Concentrating on "the concrete, historically, socially, and culturally situated mobilization of commoners around the resources they rely on or hold dear" (Poderi 2020, 31) leads us to visions of better urban mobilities and the drafts of alternative urbanities underlying them. As the city itself may constitute the resource that activists "hold dear," activists' mobilizations and contestations to make mobility transition a common political concern foster a broader debate about the good life in the city.

Classic approaches in contrast would guide us towards questions of how urban infrastructures (as supposedly the material resource, that is to be preserved as a common good) are to be managed, and whether the private market, the state, or the commons as a third way between state and market are suited best for this task. In fact, both state rhetoric and liberal market-oriented ideologies are currently claiming the commons, which points to a renaissance of the commons in political discourse (Bluhm and Münkler 2015). Although liberalism suggests that the invisible hand and the free pursuit of the individual good will automatically lead to the common good (Bluhm and Münkler 2015), commons debates draw much of their political force from dissatisfaction with market-oriented liberal capitalism. Hence, the liberal promise of the market is not a solution for the commoning of urban infrastructures. The state seems better suited to act as a guardian for the common good. As legal and political scholars suggest, it should not be the state's role to provide substantive norms and thus decide once and for all what the common good entails. Rather, the democratic state should facilitate the procedural preconditions for societal debate and ensure polity mechanisms for decision-making (Offe 2019) so that people can decide for themselves what the common weal means for them.

These idealistic legal and political science perspectives support a conflation of the common, the public, and the state, a conceptual blending which Amanda Huron (2017) has identified as one of the key tensions within conceptions of the urban commons. In light of recent ethnographic studies on the commoning of infrastructures, the equation of the public and the common can no longer remain unquestioned. Instead of responding adequately to citizens' demands for decent housing for the poor, the government in Santiago insists on its property rights, while criminalizing and undermining squatter movements (Ortiz 2015). In Athens, austerity policies have created an infrastructural gap (Dalakoglou 2016). As the state withdraws from maintaining crucial infrastructures, its roles and relationships to the public are being redefined and "ideas of the commons and solidarity are becoming the new force behind the organization and function of novel forms of infrastructures." (Dalakoglou 2016, 829). People address the crisis of reproduction and care by setting up food banks and shelters

for asylum seekers. Thereby, they mobilize and create solidarity networks initiating "infrastructures from below" (Gutiérrez Sánchez 2022).

These examples from the field of commoning infrastructures show how common interests as the self-declared goals of social movements and public interests represented by governmental agencies have diverged. I argue that mobilizations of infrastructures that are claiming the common good deserve more empirical attention, because they reveal alternative visions of urbanity and reflect important reconfigurations of the public/private and market/state divides (see also Valverde 2023). Moreover, through such processes, analysts can shed light on new forms of governance by paying attention to the different forms of interaction between social movements and state authority.

To summarize my theoretical discussion, I would like to strengthen a theoretical perspective on activists' mobilizing urban mobility infrastructures as a process of relating rather than the management of resources. Drawing from strategies I actually encountered in the field, rather than methodologically preset entities, I will show how mobilizations create communities and thereby initiate a process of commoning mobility infrastructures, that is, a process of relating political actors, the built environment of the city, political goals, and legal regulations. Since this process takes place under urban conditions, I see mobility transition as a process that establishes the urban commons, (re-)produces the city, and reveals alternative visions of urbanity.

From this perspective, making mobility transition a common political concern can be seen as a civic platform for social struggles (Müller 2015). Commoning infrastructures may be used as an analytical perspective for the active political engagements that produce the city and visions for an alternative future, including engagements and entanglements with both the market and state (Kip et al. 2015). In the remaining sections of the article, I will delve into the struggles for a better urban mobility in Berlin and, after providing some more context for the research field, present three different modes of commoning to exemplify my brief theoretical sketches of commoning infrastructures.

Mobility Transition: Politico-legal Mobilizations for Better Urban Mobility

Berlin's Mobility Law was a milestone in terms of activist mobilizations for mobility transition. In 2016, leading bike activists wrote and proposed the law to be passed by a Berlin-wide referendum with the goal to make traffic planning primarily about public transport, cycling, and walking, consequently, leaving behind the automobility-centered planning of previous decennia. Due to a broad coalition between established actors like *German Cyclist's Association* (from now on: *ADFC*) and the newly formed *Referendum Bike*, activists were able to gather more than 100 000 signatures in favor of said referendum in only three weeks' time. In light of this success, the Berlin Senate decided to adopt the activists' proposition and passed the law in 2018, obviating an official vote and making Berlin the first German state to introduce such a law.

Subsequently, *Referendum Bike* renamed to *Changing Cities*, but continued its' coalition with *ADFC*. Both leading civil society actors are now working together towards a proper

implementation of the Mobility Law. All political actors involved, including administrators, admit that without the constant pressure from civil society groups, infrastructural changes to accomplish mobility transition would be much slower. However, the Mobility Law does not only work as a lever for activists to pressure Berlin's politics to speed up mobility transition. It also paves the grounds for activists and the administration to work together by establishing new participatory mechanisms for consulting civil society in governmental decisions, thereby, embedding activist engagement in governmental and administrative processes. Based on my ethnographic fieldwork, I found three modes of commoning which I will introduce now, followed by a more detailed description.

"Seeing like an activist" (mode one) requires the mobilization of administrative and planning knowledge that enables one to perceive infrastructure in the right way. Commoning in this mode involves building a knowledgeable community that masters law, policy, and traffic planning in order to initiate changes, for instance by identifying past construction errors that lead to dangerous traffic routing for cyclists. In the second mode, activists aim to create a community through the experience of a prefiguration. City space gets mobilized to make tangible what it would be like to live in a city that is not dominated by car traffic and is open to all its residents and their political participation. Note that this spatio-temporal vision targets the oversized spatial demands of automobility and seeks to curtail them in favor of more spatial justice. In mode three, activists stage affect by establishing a mourning ritual in honor of cyclists who have died in traffic accidents, and thereby mobilize it. Pointing out the dangers of cycling, a community is created that is threatened by insufficient infrastructure.

These modes are empirical findings and represent activists' mobilizations to make mobility transition a reality. They are specific to the urban and political context of Berlin.[1] However, they do shed light on widely used activist mobilization tactics in various locales. All three modes point to the political process of making infrastructures in an urban environment a common political concern, but vary in their inclusion of actors and non-human elements in the relational commoning processes.

Mode I: "Seeing Like an Activist." Disseminating Knowledge for Intervention

Cycling activists from the *ADFC*, including an ethnographer, met in the middle of August 2021 for a joint tour in the north of Berlin. Together, we cycled towards the city center, along one of Berlin's main highways. A second group started in the south, where highway B96 leaves Berlin. We met halfway. After a few kilometers we stopped and speeches were given. I noted the content of one of them in my field notes:

> *Speaker: Highway B96 does not have any good bike lanes in the northern district of Reinickendorf. We will be following the only piece that has been renewed, only 400 meters to Roedernallee. The rest is rubbish from the 80s, not up to date at all. Cyclists in Berlin will always*

[1] Although there are similar debates in Munich, see Becker and Schwab 2023.

know when they enter Reinickendorf district, because that's the case when the proper bike lanes, painted green, end. (Field notes, August 15, 2021)

The speeches along the way encourage us to pay attention to the infrastructure which is in a patchwork state. The main aim of the tour is to demand continuous and adequate bike lanes across local districts. However, activists find that Reinickendorf is running late compared to bordering administrative zones, as most of the cycle infrastructure dates back to roughly forty years ago when there was less cycling and safety standards prove to be inadequate for today's traffic volume. The speeches educate us about the different stages of infrastructural development, the responsibilities within the administration and alert us to the potential obstacles to developing a proper network of bike lanes.

As we are slowly digesting the information, we have left Reinickendorf, heading towards the city center in Mitte district:

One participant says: "Look, how nice it is!" pointing to the broad bike lane. He remembers the road in the past; there was no bike lane at all. Just two lanes for cars in each direction, side by side, one of which has now been replaced by the new bike lane. The lane is painted green and I think it meets the standards required by the Berlin Mobility Law. (Field notes, August 15, 2021)

With our attention being directed by the speeches earlier, a man begins to examine the structural state of the infrastructure, linking it to his biography. In this sense, he applies his recently acquired knowledge and actively reconstructs his memories. The activist's cue to pay attention shapes our perception of what decent riding conditions are and what the differences to riding the "rubbish from the 80s" might be. Even my own attention circles around the administrative specifications of the Mobility Law, so I reorganize my perception similarly. But the bike tour is not only an opportunity for us to take a look at the new building standards, to see what bike lanes with "sufficient width" look like on all main roads of the city, as the law directs (§43 defines the standard of 2,50 meter for main roads). We all seem to enjoy ourselves, learning to feel good about the law's regulations and the building standards, some of which were actually developed by the *ADFC* itself.

I argue that I and the other participants are witnessing the generative effects of the activist's knowledge practices: We are being educated to see (and enjoy) infrastructures like an activist. The allusion in my wording to James Scott's *Seeing Like a State* (1998) is deliberate, as the aim of the activists is to teach us administrative and technical knowledge and to make us understand knowledge techniques like categorization and abstraction that are used to make infrastructure legible and projectable for those administering them.

Seeing like an activist is not just about acquiring knowledge to understand administrative practices and adapt one's perception. In addition, it means linking this knowledge to an activist agenda as a prerequisite for intervention. I would like to give another example to illustrate the two-fold step of disseminating knowledge to encourage intervention. *ADFC*'s online academy informs its members about current changes in traffic rules. When traffic rules are amended, corresponding administrative regulations must also be altered. The academy's

instructor introduces one of the smaller alterations: the opening of one-way streets to cyclists. This was only a discretionary provision in the old version of the regulation and has been altered to a more mandatory "ought-to provision," he tells us. Cyclists should therefore be able to use one-way streets in the opposite direction in most cases. Our "teacher" later hints at his idea of how we can help to enforce the new rule:

> *One should really try to generate a register of all one-way streets that have not yet been opened. There are some preconditions, but once they are met, you can file a request and refer to the new amendment.* (Field notes, March 24, 2022)

As this entry shows, the dissemination of knowledge ideally results in action. Our lesson was designed to be a blueprint for intervention in infrastructures: we should not wait, but urge the administration to open one-way streets for cyclists, thus helping ourselves to make our city more bikeable. And a list of the remaining one-way streets should be readily at hand, because when cycling through the city and seeing like an activist, you already know where intervention is needed. You know where the main routes end rather abruptly, because one-way streets have not yet been made two-way streets for cyclists. You know where bike lanes lead dangerously from sidewalk to the road, provoking cars not to keep enough lateral distance. And you have comparable locations at hand where planners have implemented much more cycle-friendly solutions. Seeing like an activist means recognizing or knowing these threatening spots in the infrastructural grid when passing them, making a mental note of how to intervene and, in the case of my interlocutors from the *ADFC*, perhaps already having an alternative array of infrastructural elements in mind to prevent danger to cyclists.

There are hurdles to overcome on the way to achieving the *ADFC*'s vision of a city with seamless bike infrastructure across districts. Since urban space for mobility is a scarce resource, clever planning is needed to make cycling in the city comfortable and safe. A wholly different, much less materially pronounced obstacle is the laggard administration that does not enforce the clear-cut political priorities the mobility law and some of the latest regulations bring. A community of well-informed activists putting mild pressure on the authorities to remind them of the latest regulations seems to be a fruitful strategy to speed up mobility transition.

However, doing commoning by relating a community of bikers with technical and administrative knowledges could create internal fissures in the complex architecture of the 20 000 registered members of the *ADFC*, similar to what Raúl Acosta describes as peripheral cycloactivists (Acosta 2020). Acosta argues that activists in Mexico City who rely on mobilization strategies based on mastering the administrative knowledges of law and policy exclude people from the city's peripheries who mostly lack university education. This exclusion reproduces segregated geographies of the city within organization structures.

ADFC is aware that members who did not complete higher education and/or cannot find the time to master the intricate web of rules and regulations may be left out from community building and that this can lead to structural exclusions. Still, the cycling activists rely in their doing commoning on a knowledgeable community, one that is able to discern the material outcomes of the more immaterial aspects of infrastructure (e. g. the rationalities, logics, pol-

icies of infrastructure, or the legal principles of how traffic law is implemented). And they rely on that community to act in the name of a vision for Berlin as a city with an infrastructure that enables comfortable and safe bike traffic across districts.

Mode II: Prefiguring. Experiencing a Spatiotemporal Vision of a Better City

"'Prefigurative politics' refers to how activists embody and enact, within their activism, the socialities and practices they foster for broader society." (Fians 2022) In this sense, mobilization through prefiguration is like a time machine. Although activists' goals of realizing a certain political vision may not be fully actualized at a certain point in time, they still try to make it happen locally through campaigns or demonstrations in order to make their vision of a better future more tangible for everyone. From a Marxist viewpoint, it could be said that experiences conveyed through prefiguration aim at crafting a subject with the powers, needs, and consciousness to organize a radically free democratic society (Raekstad 2018). Although the mobility transition targets mostly more modest aims than a full-blown socialist revolution, the centrality of experience for this mode of commoning should not go unnoticed.

For *Changing Cities* activists, the future to be experienced in the present revolves around neighborhood blocks or *Kiezblocks*. Inspired by Barcelona's super blocks (*Superilles*), the concept refers to banning transit traffic from neighborhoods by blocking side roads to cars, or at least making it more difficult to cross-cut. This forces cars to use the main roads in the area. *Changing Cities* organizes locally. The local activist group in each neighborhood is urged to develop an infrastructural concept that fits the needs of local residents and to collect 1000 signatures. These signatures are a door-opener to take the issue to Berlin's local district parliaments.[2] *Changing Cities* organized a city-wide summit in August 2021 for all their local groups to meet and share tactics. Before the summit, people held a parade to symbolize the arrival of representatives from all over the city. People from each district were holding up a banner and marching through an improvised gate.

> *The districts are announced. Now, it's Lichtenberg's turn. There goes an "Oh!" from all those who identify with the district. From now on, people from other districts follow Lichtenberg's example and cheer for their representatives when they are announced. When Friedrichshain/Kreuzberg gets called out, the subsequent "Hey" is already a bit louder.* (Field notes, August 13, 2021)

After the parade, people sat down on cardboard boxes that were placed in concentric circles in front of Berlin City Hall to network and discuss tactics. What is normally a very busy street was thus transformed into what *Changing Cities* called an "open sky parliament."

[2] Berlin's administration is two-staged. Aside from Berlin Senate as central government, the city's twelve local districts enjoy certain rights of self-administration, including budgetary decisions and votes on land-use.

As my observations show, *Changing Cities* prefigures a twofold vision of a better future for urban mobility. The first aspect concerns belonging and political participation. Like many other social movements, *Changing Cities* claims the right to the city and, thereby, produces it (Lefebvre 1996 [1968]) by constituting an urban citizenship that draws on the city as:

> *a vast collective product that each resident has a part in making. This making is the basis of their claim to have a right to the city, a contributor right to what they have made, a claim that has nothing to do with formal or informal statuses of work, housing, or immigration.* (Holston 2019, 129)

Urban citizenship, or "cityzenship" as Wanda Vrasti and Smaran Dayal (2016) call it, seeks to preserve the emancipatory, democratic dimensions of citizenship, while attempting to evade the hegemonic exclusions associated with the nation-state. *Changing Cities*' open sky parliament mimics representative democracy by mirroring its central forum, but also seeks to replace it in some respects by installing a more local and direct form that draws on affective belonging to neighborhoods. I do not read the actions I have witnessed as an absolute plea for direct democracy or for the open-air parliament constituting a polis. The decision to hold it in front of the city hall signifies in my view rather an appeal to hold "official" politics accountable for governing in the interests of the people. This vision of decision-making constitutes a public that is more inclusive than the one in electoral parliament. *Changing Cities* is assigning civil society and itself a crucial role, thereby redefining the relationship between "official" politics and civil society. By setting up the open sky parliament, *Changing Cities* activists see themselves as mediators to establish an inclusive public, cityzens as the truly legitimate decision-takers and the parliament as the body mandated to work out laws that accord with all Berliners. Although everyone living in the city might be eligible to take part in this kind of decision-making, thus no exclusions based on birth or blood rights would remain, active participation (potentially resulting in new exclusions) is a prerequisite in this vision.

A community of "cityzens" meets and exchanges ideas about one of the city's most valuable resources: urban space, which forms the second aspect of the activists' vision. Kratzwald notes that space is a crucial component of prefiguration, as activists create "spaces for learning and experiencing, in which we can overcome the barriers that we have acquired through the socialization" (Kratzwald 2015, 39). Space gets fashioned in an emancipatory way and is, thereby, subject to processes of commoning. Following Stavrides (2016), the commoning of space is not simply the sharing of a resource, but a conscious attempt to discover the emancipatory potentialities of sharing. For him, space is not only a concrete product of these practices of sharing but also one of their crucial means.

The quarter where *Changing Cities* assembles an open sky parliament is known for its large recreational areas as well as for its immense highways. The summit is held on a highway that is blocked off by police, making sure that four lanes usually devoted to moving car traffic, two lanes normally used for car parking and two narrow bike lanes are available for activists' prefiguration. It is one thing to juggle naked numbers that car traffic takes up more than half

of all the traffic spaces in Berlin, while not even a third of all journeys in 2014 were made by cars (Strößenreuther 2014). It is another thing to have what is usually one of the busiest streets in Berlin at one's disposal and to realize how much space this swath of automobility takes up. Using space for prefiguration is a widely used strategy in activism for mobility transition and other prefigurative politics, be it for feminist football (Faust 2019) or humanitarianism and welcoming refugees (Sutter 2019). In my case, I read blocking the road and letting the impression of the vastness of spaces usually reserved mainly for car traffic do its mobilization work as a conscious strategy. Being there, experiencing it yourself gives a tangible example of how much nicer and safer the city could be without traffic noise, exhaust fumes and congestion that come with automobility. Mobilizing space therefore sets in motion a process of commoning by relating cityzens with city space that is reworked and free of the impositions that result from automobility and its' infrastructures. The method seems to be so convincing that even urban planners have taken up and discussed it. Under the rubric of strategic urbanism, planners are currently experimenting with new ways of using public space and activating local residents before actual long-term planning decisions are made and implemented (Meinharter and Krammer 2023).

Changing Cities stresses political and spatial aspects in their doing commoning. To describe their mobilization as prefigurative politics, I would like to add a temporal dimension, as spatial and temporal aspects get interwoven in prefiguration. For an analysis that is directed towards futurity, I find Rebecca Bryant and Daniel Knight's book *The Anthropology of the Future* (2019) helpful. They propose several specific orientations towards the future (e. g. expectation, speculation, or hope), thereby delineating how to analyze vernacular time-space and its teleological structuring. The authors discuss potentiality as an alternative version of the present, as an otherwise-than-actual that resides virtually alongside actuality: the "potential always exists alongside the actual as its possible future in the present. Potentiality may remain dormant, unrealized, or unrecognized [...] The oft-used metaphor of a present pregnant with the future captures potentiality's present absence" (Bryant and Knight 2019, 130). The potential is thus easily overlooked, making it suitable for activists' intervention.

Mobilizing futures with less car traffic and more direct political engagement of the city's inhabitants can, therefore, be seen as teleoaffective work that enacts potentiality, or rather turns potentiality into actuality for an afternoon. The activists hope that this temporary actualization will give their version of the future an advantage in the competition over other potential futures. After all, as Bryant and Knight point out, potentiality harbors multiple, sometimes competing, versions of the future. Choosing between them is the subject of societal debate and, thus, a political act. In their doing commoning, *Changing Cities* commits those present to their political agenda by enacting a version of the future, mobilizing space and notions of time. *Changing Cities* creates a community by a common experience that illustrates a city with less car traffic and political decisions made by local residents. Prefiguration is therefore a mode of commoning that relates time and space through experiences that aim to craft cityzens as an inclusive political collective with a common understanding of what the future of the city should be like.

Mode III: Affecting. Mobilizing Vulnerability to Build the Un-Commons

Infrastructures yield affect, as their envisioning and planning are deeply intertwined with the political promises of infrastructure (Anand, Gupta, and Appel 2018). By focusing on affect, I emphasize the centrality of emotions, the body, and bodily sentiments for the mobilizations of the mobility transition. Of course, most, if not all, commoning endeavors involve some kind of affective dimension. But in what I am about to discuss now, affect is staged and exploited politically. In order to understand this staging of affect, it may be useful to delve a little deeper into the broader debates about mobility.

On the one hand, mobility promises freedom of movement and thus the possibility to participate in life, a trope on which so many car commercials feast, when two tons of steel are depicted riding smoothly through pristine landscapes or the landmark bridges of metropolises that are miraculously devoid of traffic. In short, mobility can be described as a way to individual fulfillment. In the case of disability movements, mobility constitutes a basic human right for equal social participation. In this way, driving a car, riding a bike or using public transport can be an affirmation of social life itself. On the other hand, mobility infrastructures are material arrangements that provision the city and its inhabitants unequally, leading to fierce political debates about their undesirable effects in unjustly differentiating the city. Both dimensions of the mobility debate are fueled by affect. The following example in the field of mobility transition shows how the lack of provisions for cycling is criticized for making cycling not only less comfortable but also more dangerous.

Every few weeks, a fatal accident claims the life of a cyclist in Berlin. What follows is a vigil as a ritual of mourning. Activists from *Changing Cities* and the *ADFC* gather at their headquarters and ride together to the site of the fatal accident. Once there, speeches are given, often in the presence of the family and friends of the deceased. Activists speak about the course of events leading to the death, provide some personal details to honor the life of the deceased, and comment respectfully on how infrastructural changes might prevent a similar accident. After a minute of silence, a white-painted bicycle (called a "ghost bike") is placed at the site.

One of those ghost bikes was set up in March 2022 when a bike courier was hit by a car at an intersection. Both were turning left when the car hit the cyclist, who then crashed into a bollard. The cyclist was a well-known professional athlete in race cycling back in the former (East) German Democratic Republic. He was well connected in Berlin's bike courier scene. Activists, friends, and fellow couriers decorated the ghost bike in his honor with flowers and lit candles. The vigil is a ritual held to deal collectively with feelings such as shock, sadness, consternation, and anger. It creates a community of cyclists who care about each other and for Berlin's system of traffic regulation in general.

Commoning can be seen as a set of relationships that need to be constantly re-enacted, hence, a relational process that may involve more-than-human entities, i. e. infrastructure (Nightingale 2019). The affective dimensions of commoning are vital, as affect, itself a relational process, links commons, commoners, and commoning (Poderi 2020). In my example, affect links cyclists to the infrastructure they use, marking them as particularly vulnerable.

Conversely, cycling infrastructure is marked as exposing its users to unacceptable dangers. Commoning, in this instance, means coming together, denouncing inadequate infrastructure and demanding Vision Zero.

Accidents are inevitable to some extent, but fatal accidents from an activist point of view are mostly preventable. The message activists want to convey is that such accidents are the result of neglected mobility infrastructure for cycling. In their opinion, proper infrastructural design should be able to absorb errors and reckless behavior to a certain extent. By linking all participants to the potential dangers of cycling by affecting vulnerability, road safety becomes a concern for everyone, not just those who suffer from accidents. Doing commoning by holding a vigil shows that cyclists are not protected well enough by the current bike infrastructure.

The vigil and the formation of a collective of vulnerable cyclists is walking a fine political line. On the one hand, there are urgent demands for safe cycling infrastructures, which might be read as an underpinning of how dangerous it is to ride a bike. This urgency invokes a sense of immediacy, creating an atmosphere of crisis that is centered on the present (Ticktin 2016). This runs counter to motivating more people to use their bikes, by promoting cycling as easy, fun and liberating. Potential users should not be intimidated by too much talk of danger and death. Therefore, mobilizing the cyclists through affect as a vulnerable group is a process that requires careful navigation and precise dosage. However, commoning by affect also holds beneficial effects (aside from the sense of urgency mentioned above), which I want to discuss with my next selection of field notes.

> *May 2022: Activists gather at Berlin City Hall for the Ride of Silence. Most of them are wearing white shirts with a black drawing of a bike and the words "Vision Zero." The few who came without may purchase one from a cargo bike. A woman attached a sign on the back of her bike saying "Please don't kill me." Before we start riding, 10 activists hold up a sign each with the date of birth and death of a person. All of them are cyclists who have been killed in traffic accidents in recent years. Our route today links the sites of these accidents. We start riding. At each site there is an activist present holding the sign with the date of birth and death, guarding a white ghost bike that was placed there immediately after the fatal accident. When we pass a site, we start ringing our bicycle bells as a sign of solidarity. Such a short route, so many rings, I start to feel somber.* (Field notes, May 18, 2022)

The Ride of Silence creates a somber and grave atmosphere that affects and is affected by solidarity. The political demands fall flat in some ways because Vision Zero is not a well-articulated concept. The common claim that the administration should stop the deaths by paying more attention to cycling infrastructure can remove the focus from divergent ideas within activist groups of mobility transition on how to achieve Vision Zero more concretely. What structural means and devices serve the goal best and what should be prioritized? The Ride of Silence brings together allies for mobility transition, but allies who fight for it by their own means. In my earlier analysis, I already pointed out the different approaches and political goals of *Changing Cities* and the *ADFC*. Easing traffic strain by installing local *Kiezblocks*

through participatory democracy does not necessarily lead to city-wide infrastructural changes favored by the *ADFC*, i. e. a more bikeable city across districts or an administration that systematically removes dangerous or inconvenient segments of cycling infrastructure.

One might say that both activist initiatives are united by their uncommons, a "positive divergence as they symbiotically come together [...] while also remaining distinct" (Blaser and De La Cadena 2017, 191). The uncommons raise the question of who is included (or excluded) in the commons in a new way, their key being equivocation. Activists in mobility transition may commonly agree on a strong moral appeal to stop needless deaths. They even dress themselves in white as a unified collective for the occasion. The Vision Zero shirts stand out and not the emblems of the two initiatives that would visually separate the crowd. But what to do about these deaths, what measures to take and on what scale and scope remains in the realm of the equivocal, as it is not voiced for the occasion. I read the vigils as a process of uncommoning. One might say *Changing Cities* and *ADFC* fight together for their political goals and form a strategic alliance by uncommoning without claiming to be a unified collective or promoting a common sense of identitarian belonging.

Atmospheres, such as those created for the Ride of Silence, are transmitted (and felt) through affect. They can create an uncommons, that is, a mode of commoning that actively seeks to include differential political goals, and therefore does not use atmospheric walls to shield off or make others leave seemingly voluntarily (Vrasti and Dayal 2016; Ahmed 2014). I would argue that mobilizing affect is much more suitable to building politically viable uncommons than other mobilizations I described. Uncommons are supported by equivocations (i. e. what exactly does mobility transition entail?). After all, it is much easier to agree on the importance of road safety when retracing fatal accidents – possibly even in the presence of crying friends and relatives – than to delve deep into planning details of Berlin's mobility law (Do all main roads really need 2,50 meter wide bikes lanes or would less be enough?). Doing commoning by affect may support the proponents' diverse political claims as the comprehensive implementation of the latest technicalities of traffic planning or to demand car traffic-calmed neighborhoods. However, it does not lead to an active engagement with the potential conflicts that lie within those very different visions for traffic transition in the city. Uncommoning may even cover up these differences.

Conclusion

Rather than constructing commoning as a theoretical perspective that analyzes the interplay of methodologically presupposed elements – resources, a community of commoners, and their institutions of commoning – I took a relational perspective on the empirical field of Berlin's mobility transition as a political struggle that produces the city. A relational perspective of commoning insists on a close look at the actual social practices and strategies of mobilization without making prior methodological decisions about which elements of the commons to scrutinize. My goal was to portray commoning as a process of relating between human and non-human elements within activist's mobilizations to reveal alternative visions of mobility in cities and of urbanity more generally.

In the field, I came across three different modes of how activists' mobilizations foster visions for alternative urban mobility infrastructures. The vision of seamless cycle infrastructures (mode one) across administrative districts involves a knowledgeable community that is educated enough to intervene in the implementation of law and policy. Educating cyclists to "seeing like an activist" ideally leads to intervention. The prefiguration of a city with less public space devoted to automobility (mode two) mobilizes notions of time, space, and inclusive political participation to craft a common experience of what the future city should look like. The commoning by enacting vulnerability forms a community that is threatened by potentially fatal accidents and exposed to inadequate cycling infrastructures (mode three). This points to a vision of adequate city's infrastructures that do not produce needless deaths. As I have argued, the mobilization of affect may come with equivocations that obscure differential approaches to mobility transition but it allows the uncommons to thrive.

As I have shown in all modes, non-human elements play a crucial role in processes of commoning, be it the importance of disseminating newest rules and regulations, the mobilization of space, or embodied sentiments that are spurred by cyclists-endangering infrastructures. Methodologically more rigid theorizations of the commons would lead to definitional conflicts: The non-human elements in the three modes of mobilization outlined blur the line between resource and community. Would space for example be considered a resource or a non-human part of the community that takes an active part in commoning? But instead of deciding around which resource activists for traffic transition mobilize (city space in a concrete or abstract sense? Or mobility infrastructures?) and instead of focusing on commoning as a process of managing this material good, a relational perspective allowed me to consider divergent roles human and non-human elements might play in the political struggle of making urban mobility infrastructures a common concern.

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