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FEELING DIS/CONNECTED

Interweaving Protest in the Online and Onsite Public Sphere

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Abstract

Usually, people gathering locally are (still) constituting the critical embodied element in advocating for social issues. However, the recent pandemic necessitated different pathways to making one's voice heard. In this article, I investigate protesting impacted by the restrictions of public movement in which choreographic means are used as a tool to find new ways of political mobilization: through combining the online and the onsite public sphere. Referring to Bennett's and Segerberg's idea of "connective action," I explore the example of the annual "Sternfahrt" protest of the German ADFC, an NGO lobbying for cycling in Berlin. Due to health and safety restrictions it was impossible for masses of cyclists to gather for a large tour in Berlin. Instead, the organizers decided to create a static "Fahrradstern" (a star formed by cyclists) spreading across the city center (June 2020). Using the app *Critical Maps*, an online tool to organize "critical mass movement around the world," the usual dynamic get-together was reversed into creating an immobile star-shaped silhouette made out of cyclists standing at pre-arranged, physically distanced spots, which could be observed on the online map in real time.

Investigating the emerging problems in this action, I argue that choreography as embodied organization and navigation of spaces onsite and online can help to understand such interconnected actions. Not least, kinespheric and kinaesthetic arrangements and particularly the empathetic involvement in a protest crucially determine whether a campaign, and especially the sense of standing up for a common cause, *feels* successful for its participants.

Keywords

choreography, "collective and connective action," kinaesthetic empath, online and onsite protest, "social kinaesthetic," pandemic

About the Author

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INTRODUCTION

Berlin, 7 June 2020. I am standing with my bicycle in the middle of a street in the center of the city, close to the Siegessäule, all on my own. Despite the season, it is rather cold and windy on this day. From afar, I can spot another person, standing alone with a bike leaning at their side. We both don't move. Nothing is happening—or so it feels.

I am participating in the so-called “Fahrradstern” campaign (a star formed by cyclists). It stretches across the centre of Berlin, rallying for more space for cyclists in the city, in which everyone of us is assigned a particular spot radiating from the Siegessäule as the focal point, where each participant is positioned 100 meters apart in a rather prim attempt to keep the physical distance ordered in this pandemic moment. To enable some kind of connection with fellow protesters, one can use an online tool, the *Critical Maps* app, in which a digital representation of each “post” is visualized and which is supposed to generate a feeling of togetherness. Alas, in this respect, the app fails to do its job.

This roughly sketched example came to my mind when further delving into my ongoing research on choreography and protest and particularly the question of the interconnectedness of onsite and online activism that has been much discussed in research, especially since 2011, the moment of the Arab Spring. The use of social media such as Facebook or Twitter during protests has sparked a debate about the democratic pros and cons of these media—for instance, as to whether they strengthen social movements (Castells), or, more critically, how they may reinstate hierarchical power relations (Tufekci) or even serve governments' attempts of surveillance, facilitated by the vast sharing of (personal) data during situations of upheaval (Milan).

Particularly in the first lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic, in Spring 2020, the online public sphere became even more essential for voicing one's concerns. Many activists had to seek alternative modes of campaigning as physical assembly was either forbidden or had to take different shapes in order to comply with the increased health and safety regulations. In Germany, for example, representatives of the hospitality sector placed empty chairs on central places in various cities to draw attention to the financially suffering industries (*Empty Chairs* campaign in April 2020). In Tel Aviv, the *Black Flag* campaign in April 2020 opposed the tracking of mobile phones to collect data introduced by the government: For a rally, they were gathering on Rabin Square with each of the protesters being placed exactly two meters apart and standing on the spot without further spatial movement. Ultimately, these protests created impressive pictures distributed on

social and mainstream media—for instance, through aerial shots of the places, thus shifting the focus of attention even more to the online sphere.

W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg (2012) describe the intertwining of such onsite and online protesting as “digitally networked.” They differentiate between two “logics”: the “logic of collective action” and “the logic of connective action” (743). Taking the dynamics of conventional onsite protesting and its use of tools such as social media as a basis, they argue that the “action dynamic” of collective campaigning on the streets does not necessarily change as the principles of organizing a protest basically stay the same (748-49), though the message may be shared more widely. On the contrary, connective action engenders quite different effects by being a “dynamic of its own” (748). Here, the digital media themselves become the “organizing agents” in “self-motivating [...] interpersonal networks” as the authors unfold in adopting Yochai Benkler’s idea (Bennett and Segerberg 752). Such media networks would then enhance the very connectedness of online protesting communities—for instance, by furthering levels of transparency, thus supporting the flattening of hierarchies (753) particularly through new modes of “co-production and co-distribution” (760). One could argue that this then also holds true for increasing possibilities of surveillance of such activities, as already mentioned. However, the crucial point made is that digital connectivity essentially changes structure, procedural dynamics, and impacts of campaigns in the so-called post-digital era.

The restricted protests during the first pandemic lockdown briefly delineated above were still following the idea of collective action, although in a rather restricted sense when it came to physical assembly, as described. But what happens when protesters actively engage in the use of digitally networked tools to organize, coordinate, and shape a protest in real-time—as indicated at the beginning of this article? How do the dynamics of collective and connective action unfold when the online and onsite public spheres are interwoven in the very moment of action? What kind of media practices (Couldry) are adopted here and why did they not enable to create a sense of community but rather an overwhelming feeling of desertedness? In this article, I will investigate protest in the realm of such “cultural interface[ing]” (Manovich 86). Taking the set-up of the “Fahrradstern” as an example, I am particularly interested in why the *feeling* of collective action in the live moment of virtual connection did not come about. My hypothesis is that one of the problems lies in the lack of the (conventional) embodied dynamics that one usually experiences when taking part in a protest. To explore this, I will reflect on aspects of the “social kinesthetic,” a term coined by Randy Martin (Kowal, Siegmund, and Martin 9), depicting the body in moments of political action. Also, I will draw on Susan Leigh Foster’s ideas on kinaesthetic empathy (2011) and Gernot Böhme’s concept of atmosphere (2017) to examine the non-affective dimension of

the campaign. Furthermore, I will indicate that the perspective on embodiment can support the analysis of such hybrid protesting in order to understand the opportunities as well as the caveats of interconnected activism today.

A STAR FORMED BY CYCLISTS

Each year, on the first Sunday in June, the Allgemeiner Deutscher Fahrrad-Club NGO (ADFC/German Bicycle Association) organizes a large protesting event in Berlin, the so-called “Sternfahrt” (a star-shaped rally). Usually, the rally starts at different points in and outside the city to then finally meet up in a huge gathering of cyclists in Berlin’s city center, along with the “Umweltfestival” (Environmental Festival) happening on the road between the Siegessäule and the Brandenburg Gate.

However, due to the pandemic restrictions, this was made impossible in June 2020, and so the organizers decided to create a static set-up instead, the “Fahrradstern” (see fig. 1). To facilitate the creation of this configuration, the organizers requested to use the app *Critical Maps*, an open source online tool to organize “critical mass movement around the world” (*Critical Maps*) by registering and then tracking each one’s movement via GPS. Hence, the idea of a dynamic get-together was reversed with the aim of creating an immobile star-shaped silhouette formed by cyclists. It would be facilitated by each participant standing on one spot of a chosen street for an hour, so the assignment, with each person being 100 meters apart from the next one, using the online map to find and register for an open spot in advance or to spontaneously find one on the day (see fig. 2). Thus, the idea was to, in a way, choreograph a stipulated image of a star by staying on the assigned spot, watching the small circular pictograms “standing” for each protester multiply and grow on the online map, shaping into a star-like silhouette in real time, and perhaps to move to another place to help bring the picture about—or so the plan.

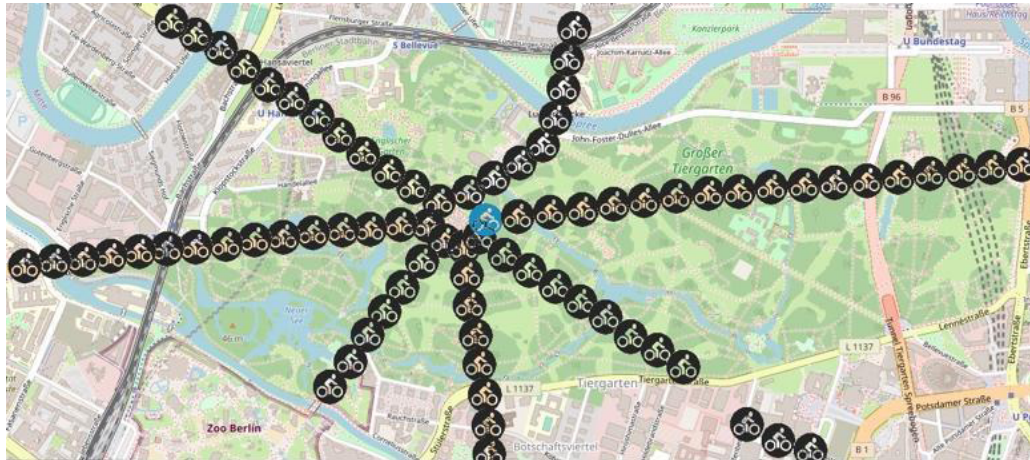


Fig. 1. "ADFC Fahrradstern am 7. Juni 2020: Straßen für alle - #MehrPlatzfürsRad!". ADFC Berlin, 07 June 2020, <https://adfc-berlin.de/fahrradstern2020.html>. © ADFC Berlin.

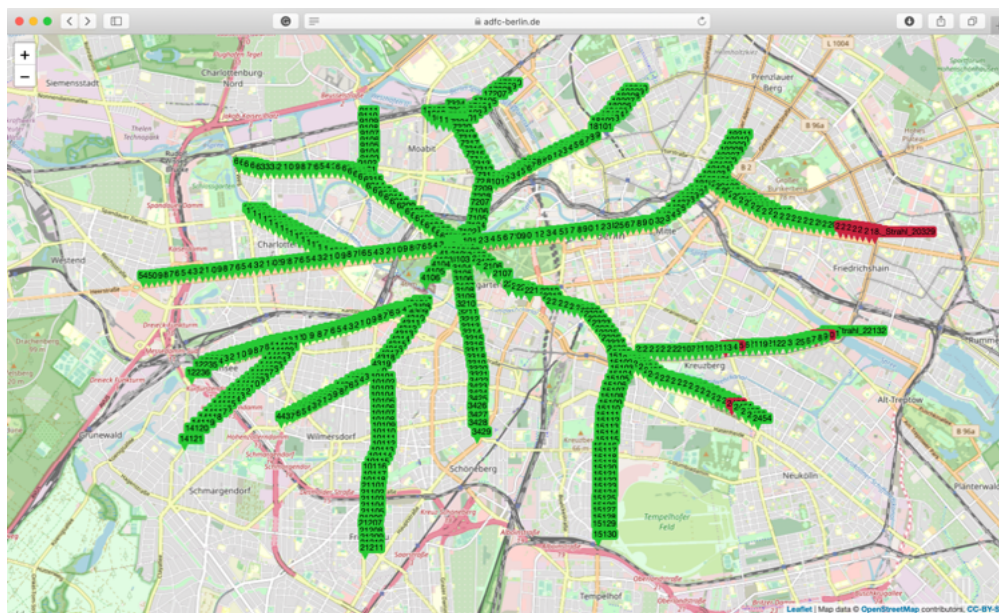


Fig. 2. "ADFC Fahrradstern am 7. Juni 2020: Straßen für alle - #MehrPlatzfürsRad!". ADFC Berlin, 07 June 2020, <https://adfc-berlin.de/fahrradstern2020.html>. © ADFC Berlin.

Yet, the intended shape on the live online map did not look like anything like a star but rather resembled a kind of rhizomatic lump (see figs. 3a and 3b). This, most likely, led to people being reluctant to stay on location for long, disappointed

that their co-creative efforts did not yield the desired result—by combining onsite bodies and the online image on the map—and thus messing up the nascent star on the online map even more. Also, a “feeling” of protest, of concerted action of bodies being together just did not arise. Participating in the action myself, I felt rather lonely, standing on a deserted street in ghastly weather, with just one other fellow protester being barely in sight, and sensing a rather overwhelming feeling of disconnectedness (see fig. 4)—and thus leaving the event after a good twenty minutes. Also, I could not help but notice the irony of the slogan given out for this action: “Mehr Raum für’s Rad” (give bikes more space)—indeed, but who took notice and with whom could you share it?

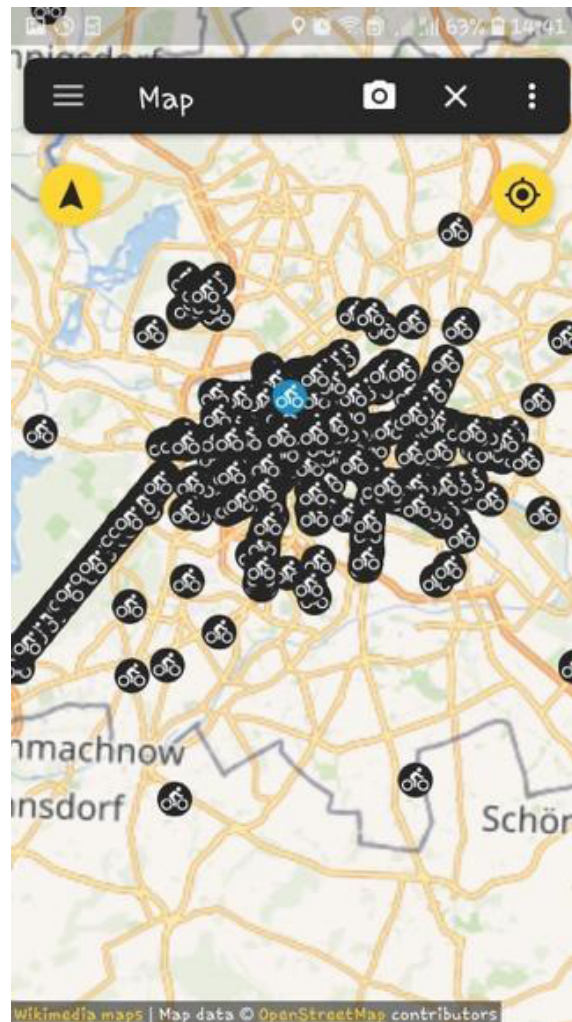


Fig. 3a. Failed attempt to form a star. From Critical Maps app, “Fahrradstern” (mobile phone screenshot, 7 June 2020).

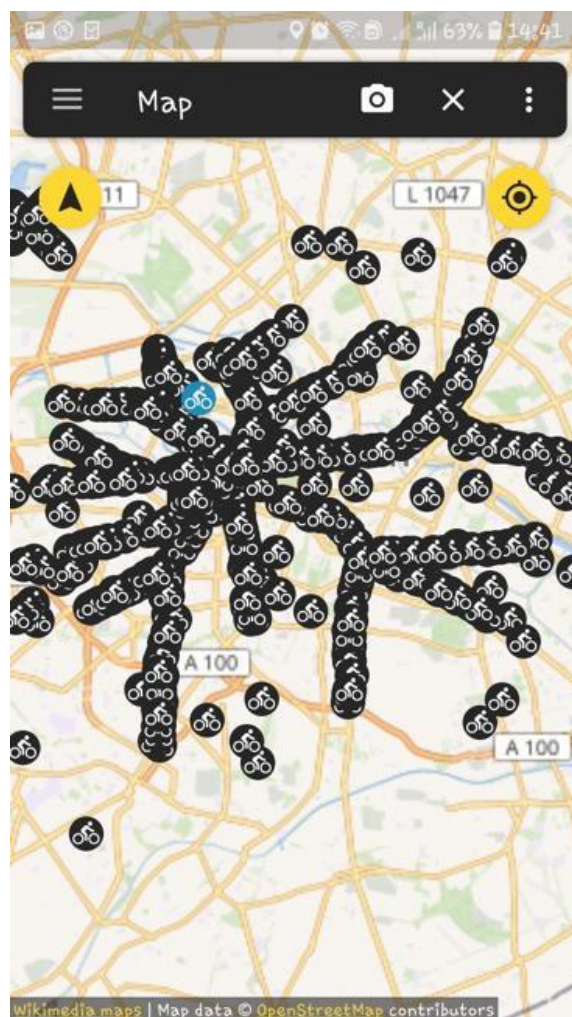


Fig. 3b: Close-up of failed attempt to form a star. From Critical Maps app, “Fahrradstern” (mobile phone screenshot 7 June 2020).



Fig.4. Feeling disconnected. “ADFC Fahrradstern am 7. Juni 2020: Straßenfür alle- #MehrPlatzfürsRad!” ADFC Berlin, 07 June 2020, <https://adfc-berlin.de/fahrradstern2020.html>. © ADFC Berlin.

So, what went wrong? In the following sections, I will reflect upon the dynamics of such a campaign by looking into two paramount aspects of protest and the very sensing of forming a temporary dynamic community: the kinespheric arrangements and the (missing) level of empathetic engagement.

KINAESTHETIC ACTION

The *Critical Maps* app is made for the assignment and distribution of people (bodies) moving, or standing, in real-time as well as providing the option to simultaneously monitor and interact with the process. Considering these features, there is a striking similarity to the modes of choreography as a concept of both devising and recording organized movement in space, to introduce the term from a rather conventional perspective, for now. Susan Leigh Foster (2011) further develops the connection between mapping, map reading, and choreography. She elaborates on the way 18th century geographers, such as John Essex, used Raoul Auger Feuillet’s method

of the choreographic notation of dances to graphically and pictorially document regions and landscapes, translated into two-dimensional maps (76-79). Apart from adopting a bird's eye perspective to map the movement, such as in Feuillet's method of recording choreography (77) (see fig. 5), the question then of how bodies move, orientate, and, thus, physically navigate within the space depicted by a map was (and still is) crucial (74). Foster points out the explicit interrelation of bodily movement and landscape in the development (and use) of maps—describing, for instance, the influence of ancient theory of the humors on map design (80-82). She thus adds an important perspective by placing the emphasis on corporeality and kinaesthetic experience needed by both creators and users to make sense of the generation and handling of maps, highlighting the “paradigm of corporeality, the kinaesthetic sense of one's orientation in space and movement through space” (82).

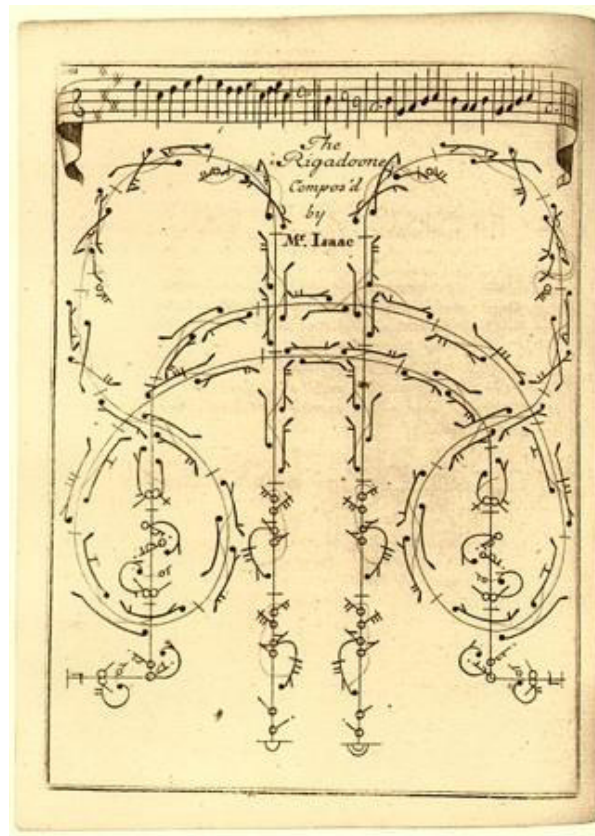


Fig. 5. Raoul Auger Feuillet's dance notation for a rigadoon by Isaac, first published in *Orchesography; or, the Art of Dancing ... an Exact and Just Translation from the French of Monsieur Feuillet*. By John Weaver, Dancing Master. Second edition. London, ca. 1721 ("Feuillet notation").

In understanding how the *Critical Maps* app did—or rather did not—work in the case described, that is, how it tried to connect protesting bodies in an act of joint choreographic effort, a further theoretical perspective is helpful. Randy Martin (2006) frames the way social movements temporarily appropriate the public spaces they are acting in by introducing the idea of a “kinesthetics of protest.” His main argument sets out that protest “repertoires” such as standing, lying, or sitting-in are generating an “alternate social kinesthetic” for the duration of the event (796). Along with Martin, Rebekah J. Kowal and Gerald Siegmund (2017) argue that the bodies involved in protest then may rearrange and rearticulate (public) spaces in a novel manner, thus allowing for “different experiences of the social” (13). In order to do so, the authors emphasize Martin’s idea of a “social kinesthetic,” that is, a bodily predisposition that forms the basis of “organizational rule or logic” (9).

Hence, the close interrelation of embodiment and/as mapping as well as the idea of protesting bodies as kinaesthetic actors—gathering to express discontent or to rally for certain rights and for social and political change—are both significant when looking into the “Fahrradstern” example of hybrid action. In this respect, its most striking feature on location is the massive distance prescribed and adhered to between each protesting person. One may wonder why the organizers did opt for such vast gaps (of 100 meters) between each participant in the campaign as this was not needed from a pandemic point of view, thus massively exceeding the distancing guidelines assigned by the government. However, what actually caused the sense of loneliness and thus the problem of a felt lack of togetherness on location was in fact needed to create the designated star-image online: without a certain distance between the protesters, there may have been too few of them to reach the goal of a sufficiently spread star to qualify as such on the online map.¹ As said, this target was not reached on the online public level anyway. So, what remained was to simply stay put on location, literally standing for more space for bikes, in the bleak emptiness of Berlin’s streets, and thus standing-in for the onsite public sphere of this protest.

Again, enduring to stay almost motionless for an hour to be part of a greater goal proved to be dissatisfactory not only because of the failed use of the app, but also in the very moment of being present on the street. To view this now from a corporeal, choreographic perspective, it is useful to rethink the idea of the “social kinesthetic” as suggested by Martin, and to start off from a rather literal account, that is, the moving body in space.

The concept of the kinesphere itself has been famously depicted by dancer and choreographer Rudolf von Laban. In his book *Choreutics* (1966), he elaborates on the theoretical foundations he developed to describe the shapes and expressions of German Ausdruckstanz and, in it, the way the body is organized as well as how it

organizes the space the dancer moves in. Central to the idea is the understanding of the body's motions in the so-called "kinesphere" (18-26). This concept depicts the space surrounding the body and is marked by the margins that can be reached with each limb. According to Laban, the body is moving on the various vertical, horizontal, and diagonal levels within this kinesphere (see fig. 6), and the kinesphere is moving with the body in space. Related to this basic concept is the "dynamosphere" which delineates the intensity and directionality of the movements happening in the inner space of the kinesphere, such as speed, spatial orientation, or force (27-36). However, the dynamosphere does not only adhere to the movement qualities happening within the space that encompasses the body but also relates to the conditions it is surrounded by—for instance, light, sound, or other varying dispositions of the given environment: "All that we perceive through our eyes consists of objects or movements arranged in space. So it is with our aural perception, or hearing [...] [perceiving] [...] different kinds of excitement through vibrations" (28-29).

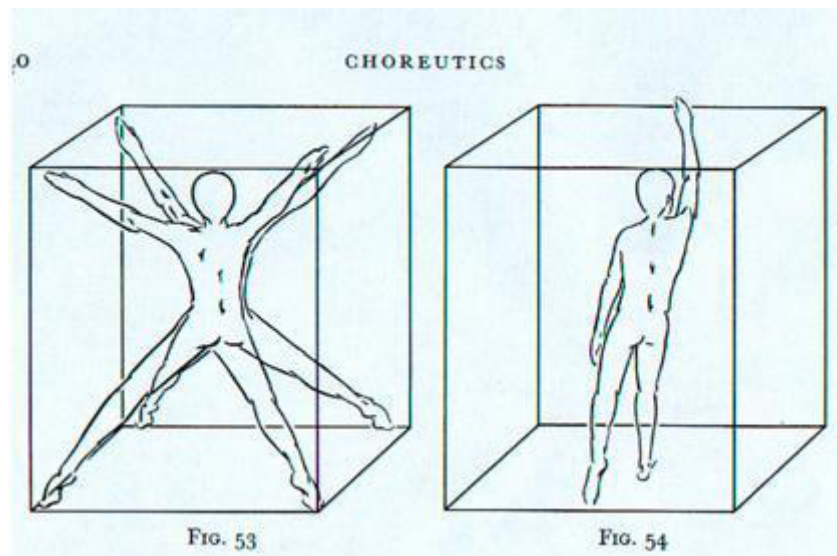


Fig. 6. Rudolf von Laban. *Choreutics*. Macdonald and Evans, 1966.

Looking back to the onsite constellation of the "Fahrradstern," one could now say that something clearly went wrong in assigning such a huge physical distance between each person as the very feeling of protesting, of standing together for one goal, just did not come about (setting aside the idea that the distance was devised to create a well-designed picture online). Certainly, the space surrounding each

one's kinesphere had to be enlarged during the pandemic, sometimes by 1.5 meters (Germany) and 2 meters in other countries (such as in the UK), which was deemed an adequate protective measure between each personal bodily sphere. However, when it comes to the feeling of togetherness during the campaign, of sensing the vibrations of other bodies joining the claim for better biking conditions in the city, the dynamosphere was severely disrupted in a kind of over-delivery of the measures ordered by the authorities. The extreme isolation of each participant led to an interruption of the usual kinaesthetic protesting dynamics, of the density and corporeal connectedness one usually experiences during a rally, often gathering in very close proximity to others, listening to speeches or marching along the streets—the more people and the fuller the streets, the better.

Focusing on reformulating the concept of kinaesthesia—forming an important aspect of analyzing for instance, modern dance—Foster promotes “kinesthetic experience” as an indicator that is not exclusively reserved for dance but can be adopted to examine events in everyday life, too (8). Foster follows the argument of Deidre Sklar and emphasizes the value of “kinesthetic analysis [to] attend to the qualitative dimensions of movement, the kind of flow, tension, and timing of any given action as well as the ways in which any person's movement interacts and interrelates with objects, events, and other people” (8). In the case of the “Fahrradstern,” the campaign failed to create the very conditions to allow for such perceptions. After all, this was not the aim, however, due to the extreme separation of each protester, the initial goal to create a star online did fail and many people did not muster the patience to spend significant time on location in order to make this happen. The action simply did not provide the atmosphere and thus, the empathetic involvement on location to endure the assignment in rather cold conditions (given the season). The evocation of the feeling of participating in a greater goal, even if only a virtual one, did not come about.

Having laid out the examination of such a “failed” choreography of protest by taking its conditions of embodiment into consideration, I now want to further reflect on the contexts of the (missing) feeling of involvement and ask what it may need to experience a sense of community in a protest setting.

EMPATHY, CHOREOGRAPHED?

Paolo Gerbaudo's research on the use of social media in protest camps such as the Indignados movement in Spain or Occupy Wall Street (both from 2011)—and thus in “collective actions,” to re-quote Bennett and Segerberg—emphasizes the “intense communitarianism” in these settings which the author conceptualizes as “choreographies of assembly” (12). Here, social media such as Twitter or Facebook serve as choreographic instruments, so goes Gerbaudo's main argument, that do not create an alternative online space unrelated to the various protests, but actually facilitate or at least support the organization (that is, the “choreography”) of the campaigns as such (12). In this respect, social media would serve as “vehicle for the creation of new forms of proximity and face-to-face interaction,” engendering a new form of “social centrality” and “emotional attraction” to and within the respective campaigns (13).

Gerbaudo understands choreography in a rather traditional sense, as an assigned organization of activities in (social) movements, that he frames as “symbolic” (13). Choreography, in this respect, furthermore serves as a structural processual tool that also supports the analysis of particular power relations inherent in so-called leaderless movements—albeit often not visible at the first sight—thus facilitating criticism of the digitally networked “horizontalism” that scholars such as Manuel Castells promote (13). Gerbaudo uses the concept of choreography to delineate the sense of community and the dynamics of coherence of a protest, not least achieved by “core organisers, or ‘choreographers’” in the analyzed campaigns—which would actually work against the idea of a leaderless movement (104). One could now argue that such an account of choreography has been heavily contested particularly in the realm of contemporary dance, suggesting, for instance, the unruliness of choreographic processes (Brandstetter; Cvejić and Vujanović 66).² However, for the context of this article, the described dynamics of social media as emotive and organizational (choreographic) facilitators is of interest as they do not only enhance a sense of community by connecting activists globally—steering movements' participants away from the perception of being isolated when rallying in one single spot—but also further the feeling of common action for one specific cause on location as well, according to Gerbaudo's argument (12).

Applying the purpose of social media in movements depicted by Gerbaudo to the “Fahrradstern” then sees the movement failing in two respects. It misses out on disseminating the message in a way that strengthens the campaign on the day of action (the turnout fell significantly short of the years before, which may be due to the pandemic. However, the action was hardly visible on social media such as Twitter as well). Moreover, the online tool did not manage to create a sense of togetherness, thus lacking in emotional engagement and the activist “glue” needed

to get a movement going. The difference in the use of the choreographic principles adopted is remarkable, though. While Gerbaudo rather argues from a traditional choreographic concept bestowing a certain amount of authority to a person or a group, the “Fahrradstern” actually rather used a principle known from post-modern dance: assigning a movement task to each participant, thus passing on the responsibility of the creation of the star to each protester involved. Certainly, the organizers initially acted in a choreographically traditional sense as they arranged for a fixed script that then had to be executed by way of seeking one’s own position in the image onsite. However, participants had the opportunity to play with the task, that is, to shift position to make the image happen, which involves a certain amount of shared responsibility and authority. In the end, that, however, prevented the star-shaped image from being properly created in the first place.

More important, though, is the fact that the real-time connection of onsite and online protesting did not manage to beget the emotional glue that a campaign apparently needs to be successful, or in this case, to motivate the participants to play with the rules assigned and to hold on to the task until the desired goal is accomplished. One reason may lie in the fact that the empathetic engagement of those involved in the action was missing. Foster emphasizes the interrelation of kinaesthesia and empathy when watching dance. Derived from the aesthetic concept of “Einfühlung” (10) which depicts the embodied involvement, that is, the corporeal perceptive resonance of a beholder of an art work, she aligns the concept with kinaesthetic experience when watching movement.³ A compelling example is spectators watching a dancer on a rope, hence emotionally and corporeally engaging in the suspense of the what-if-something-goes-wrong, which entirely captivates the audience’s attention (131). Foster now detects a similar connection in more recent performances that are situated in the interstice of the online and onsite sphere. The production *Call Cutta* (2005) by performance collective Rimini Protokoll serves as an example to delineate the interconnectedness of kinaesthetic empathy even in the digital realm. *Call Cutta* is a “Mobile Phone Performance” (Rimini Protokoll) in which each spectator is walking through a city (the production premiered in Berlin), being tracked via GPS and guided by a remote host in real-time who is located in an Indian call center involving the spectator in a narrative over the phone and tailored to each location passed by. Foster uses this performance to emphasize her argument that knowledge and world apprehension are generated through embodied motion, even more so within the interrelated navigation of and in the online and onsite sphere (194). However, she also shows that, after all, the performance left the various audiences rather unimpressed on an emotional, that is, an empathetic level which she partly explains by the fact that it is not easy to put oneself in the shoes of a distant dialogue partner in such a hybrid, non-physical set-up (195).

Returning to the “Fahrradstern”, one of the problems hence seems to lie in the missing—or too distant—co-presence of the event, or to specify: the situation of seeing, meeting, and sensing other bodies in physical proximity.⁴ Co-presence is happening, though, on the level of hybrid connection; however, it is mostly delegated to the online “stage” of the app. I am now asking myself whether there would have been means to enhance the emotional attachment of each protester to the task? How would an online tool such as *Critical Maps* have to be designed in order to achieve an emotional involvement similar to that in a protest in non-pandemic times? Would it have been helpful if protesters are given the opportunity to chat in real-time—for instance, connecting the app to Twitter or providing a chat function, that is, to allow for a more personal connection? For example, to exchange tips where to go to fill gaps in the star image, sharing impressions of the event and thus, allowing for another level of interpersonal communication? Or did the action fail because it was still meant to be a protest on site, with people being physically located in several public places? If so, then what does it need for a protest to effectively feel as one? How much distance between protesters is too much to call an event a protest, a march, a rally, and to sense being a part of it?

Elias Canetti (1962) expounds on the dynamics of crowds, of mass gatherings. One of the main characteristics is the abandonment of the taboo of touch: “the crowd [...] is the dense crowd, in which body is pressed to body” (15). Density, growth, moving into a particular direction, and rhythm constitute further aspects to qualify as a crowd, as Canetti elaborates (29-30). Of course, the pandemic situation prevented the formation of such assemblies, especially those that would make its members truly feel being part of a mutual cause. However, I am asking how much proximity (or distance) it needs to create empathetic involvement in such an event. If we think, for instance, of the action by the “Duran Adam” (The Standing Man) on Istanbul’s Taksim Square in June 2013—in which the dancer and choreographer Erdem Gündüz was standing on his own, immobile on one spot, facing the Atatürk Cultural Center in order to stand against the cracking down on the protest camp in Gezi Park by the government—it did not take long for people to spot the action, share it on social media, and join him in his silent protest. The people connecting to the action were literally standing for a common goal, distributed and enhanced via social media which then again led to the impromptu group “choreography,” delivering even more powerful media images to be shared, to remind of Gerbaudo’s concept. Albeit not facing one another but gazing towards the Atatürk Center, the protesters were standing closely together, feeling united in their condemnation of the governmental action. Why was such a sense of community not put into effect in the “Fahrradstern”? Is a distance of 100 meters between each protester simply too far to create a *sensus communis*?

I would argue that kinaesthetic empathy, as outlined with Foster, is an essential prerequisite of protests happening onsite (of course, this is not to say that concerted action cannot be felt when, for instance, petitioning, collecting signatures, and seeing the numbers of names increase on an open letter online). The dynamics of crowds gathering, of the squeezing of each one's kinesphere is, up to a certain extent, necessary to create an atmosphere of togetherness. Such a community is hence, inevitably, an embodied one. However, I am not trying to re-essentialize the necessity of touch to make my argument. Embodiment is rather generated through a specific atmosphere created in moments of public assembly, of standing or marching for a joint cause. It also includes other non-human factors such as sound, light (as stated by Laban), temperature, weather conditions, and so forth, and, of course, media tools being used. Thus, besides the concepts of the kinesphere and the empathetic involvement enforcing this sense, another modality is of importance: atmosphere.

Clearly, a protesting atmosphere was missing in the "Fahrradstern" action on location. Even more so, the atmosphere encountered created a dominant part in effectively hindering the protest to both feel as one and to achieve its goal accordingly. Gernot Böhme (2017) depicts the concept of atmosphere as a phenomenon that does not just happen randomly but that is experienced and produced. He argues against the perspective of classic aesthetics that restricts itself to the entity of the artwork and its alleged unaffectedness by historical or cultural contexts, thus lending it a sense of eternity (29-30). Instead, he places the emphasis on the concept of atmospheres in aesthetic encounters that first and foremost involve the perceiving body: "Atmospheres are [...] experienced in bodily presence in relation to persons and things or in spaces" (17). Such situations, then, can also be produced. The art of scenography is a prominent example, that is, its use of light, sound, and the like, creating so-called "'tuned' spaces" through the "art of staging" (32). Examples given for such spaces are, for instance, the Olympic Games or the staging of political events (33).

While it is not very difficult to create an atmosphere of standing for a common goal in a conventional protest in non-pandemic times, it looks like further efforts have to be made if physical distancing is a must. Assigning people to stand 100 meters apart evidently did not help in creating an atmosphere of rallying for a joint idea—in this case, to create the star image in order to make a strong media impression supporting the claim to provide more space for cyclists. Other means would have to be found to provide a protesting atmosphere that makes one feel part of acting for a mutual cause—some have been considered above. Otherwise, the hybrid collective attempt to choreographically create and share a strong pictorial signal can prove ineffective.

However, earlier, I was indicating contemporary accounts of choreography that dismiss the idea of authorial structural control. And thus, not surprisingly, some strange events happened further up north on the map, at Tegel airport.

RECLAIM THE MAP

As I am standing on the street with my bike, not quite knowing what to do other than to experience a strong sense of drabness, I am scrolling the *Critical Maps* app to see whether anything is happening or changing, and whether the star-shaped image is going to be realized, at least. Moving further up northwest on the map, I suddenly spot an unusual shape in a location that turns out to be Tegel Airport: a precisely cross-shaped structure is placed right on the runway (see fig. 7). Tegel airport did not operate during the first lockdown (except emergency flights),⁵ however, I am surprised that people are allowed to enter the airfield with their bikes. This seems rather unlikely. Curious whether anyone is posting messages about the “Fahrradstern” campaign, I consult my Twitter feed. It looks like no one found it worth to report about the event yet, except the organizers themselves. They apologize in a tweet, explaining that the *Critical Maps* app has been hacked which is how the cross-like shape at the airport came about.

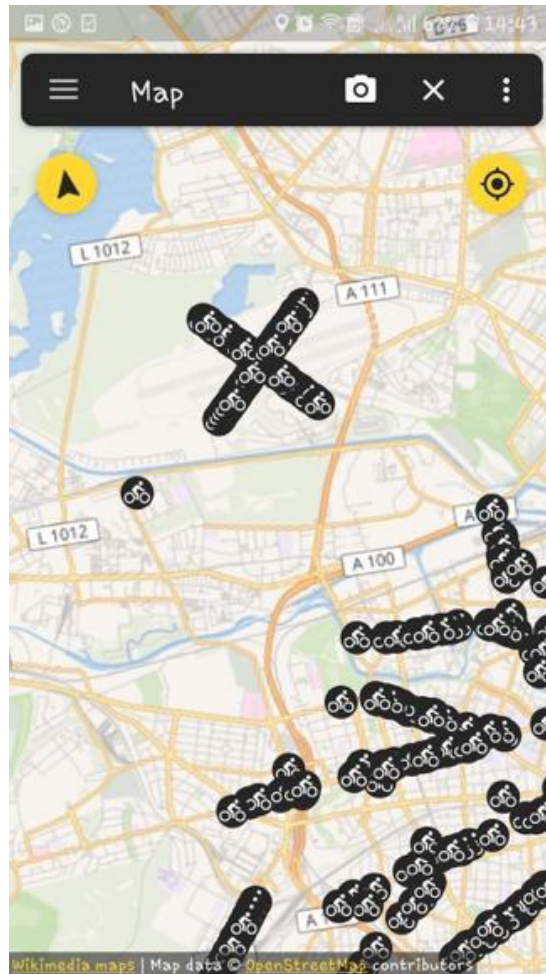


Fig. 7. Cross-shaped structure at Tegel airport. From *Critical Maps* app, “Fahrradstern” (mobile phone screenshot 7 June 2020).

In their critique of Andrew Hewitt’s account of “social choreography,” Bojana Cvejić and Ana Vujanović (2015) oppose the idea of choreography as an orderly, regulated system and highlight its unruliness and its intrinsic potential for rupture (66). Apparently, some of the rally’s participants just did not want to remain immobile on their designated spot for an hour, thus feeling rather inactive and without even managing to get the star-shape going in a joint, albeit distanced, effort. Hence, some (or one) of them must have decided to re-appropriate and re-articulate the choreographic task given by the ADFC and to take matters in their own hands, hoaxing a star in an unlikely location, thus sabotaging the embodied task in co-presence on site by finding a choreographic solution online.

Apart from this anarchic joke and the subversive—because, in this case, non-embodied—choreography (by someone who must have had the technical skills to do so), a problem inherent in the hybrid and connected action comes to the fore: the question whether all of this is happening after all. If this cross can be just made up, then who guarantees that all the other participants, marked with a small black circle on the screen, are really there, on site? I start to move to the next designated spot (albeit I should not), just to see whether the symbol assigned to me is moving. It does. Still, the effect of the whole action becomes questionable. If I am standing alone on a street, hardly seeing my fellow protesters, and the goal is not even achieved after all, why not simply just go online in the first place, create a star-shaped image, and claim that this has happened “live”? Of course, this would undermine the whole event. Also, the hybrid set-up of the map would not have been used had it not been for people on the streets. However, I am wondering whether the very idea of the directly connected action between bodies onsite and recorded movement online in real-time causes another problem, for not only was the experience of standing on the street utterly isolating and preventive of feeling part of the protest: the very question of whether the embodied action yields results—or can be hacked and hence fabricated at any moment—can cause further discouragement.

CONCLUSION

I would like to end with two concluding thoughts: one on the action and the other one on the analytical level. Thinking about the disrupted connection between bodies standing on the streets and the producing and recording of the choreographed star in real-time, one of Bruno Latour’s ideas in the context of his actor-network-theory (2005) comes to mind. Reflecting on who actually acts, and how and where action is taking place, Latour emphasizes that action is never happening within the control of individual human beings but is always already dispersed within “assemblages”: “[w]hen we act, who else is acting? How many agents are also present? How come I never do what I want?” (43). Action is hence always happening in relation to other agents, to others being active. This idea would indeed stand in favor of the plan to join forces and create a star-shaped image over the prescribed distance. Anyhow, the assumption is that everyone is pulling together. As depicted, this did not happen, and the assignment of the organizers had its flaws as well in suggesting that one could go and change places when it looked like the requested image did not get completed on the map. However, without having the possibility to agree in person on who goes where and when (the app did not provide for this option), this

attempt was doomed to failure. “[A]ction is other-taken,” as Latour concludes (45), which also means that action is not the sole refuge of human beings, and so he asks “who and what is acting when ‘we’ act” (45).

In the “Fahrradstern” example, I would conclude that this other-taking of action is one of its issues, as the tool did not work the way it should. That is, in an evenly connected flow of protesters mapping and creating the shape, action was “overtaken” (Latour 45) by the map, enforced by the loneliness on the street, and, finally, by hackers, giving the map a little boost. In opting for the *Critical Maps* app, the organizers may have underestimated these agential flows—and the possible “mis”-use of the online tool itself, as obviously it did not serve the needs of physically distanced protesters in helping them to create the desired outcome. By flagging the position of each participant, assigning a spot, and at the same time allowing for changing places, the tool developed a dynamic of its own, one that has been described by Bennett and Segerberg as “connective action” (743). It seems as if the ADFC (and perhaps the creators of the map as well) has underestimated the extent to which such apps do operate, not just being a simple live recording tool of a “collective action” but going beyond this remit. The question, then, would be how apps like these could take such anarchic dynamics into account in order to allow for a shared agency to happen—reflections that, however, would exceed the scope of this article.

On the analytical level, the example of this dis/connected protest demonstrates that examinations of collective and connective action and assumptions of choreographed protest need to take the very embodiment of the described processes into account. Gerbaudo shows that beyond the feeling of connectedness and thus proximity through social media, the physical action on the streets often was paramount in the examples depicted. Just briefly, he mentions the importance of “immersion and corporeality” (96) in creating a co-present sense of joint action. Hence, beyond the idea of a symbolic function of choreography in such situations, as he argues, it is important to take the very protesting bodies into account, and to more closely examine what happens in situations of political activism and in its embodied dynamics of solidarity—or its disconnectedness. As said, I am not arguing for a return to an essentialist account of embodied-ness but I want to highlight the importance of exploring the explicit inter-relatedness on all levels, that is, in this case, of rallying bodies on location and in online protesting tools. Choreography as embodied organization and navigation of spaces onsite and online can help understand such interconnected actions. In this article, I presented some brief analytical ideas on how such an investigation could be undertaken: particularly, kinespheric and kinaesthetic arrangements and an empathetic involvement are aspects which crucially determine whether a protest, or at least the sense of standing up for a common cause, *feels* successful.

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Notes

1. The ADFC later reported a participation of 600 protesters. See <https://adfc-berlin.de/fahrradstern2020.html>.
2. Unfortunately, Gerbaudo's adoption of choreography as an organizing principle leaves dance study's significant body of research in this realm largely unnoticed. Rudi Laermans (2008), for instance, argues that choreography always already incorporates particular modes of distributing power, even in post-human (artistic) set-ups (12).
3. Foster (2011) critically reflects and then redevelops John Martin's theory on empathetic involvement related to kinaesthetic concepts when watching Modern Dance (1936), and in which he coined the term "metakinesis" (155-62).
4. See also Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008), arguing for co-presence as one of the basic prerequisites of theater performance, that is, the assembly of spectators watching performers (on stage) (38).
5. In the meantime, Tegel has been closed for good, replaced by the new BER airport further outside of Berlin's city center.

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