

WALKING BODIES OF HITCHHIKERS

Despite the same term being used, hitchhiking a ‘lift’ from a pedestrian is radically different from riding in a car as a passenger. Not only does it seem functionally less vital—as a lift is not really being provided unless someone helps to carry bags, for instance—but, when walking, one is not in a cocoon as when in a car. The cocoon provides a sense of distance from the world in which one could, for instance, freely listen to music or even sing (Bull 2001), and also a sense of power that the speed and mass entail. It is interesting, then, that in some responses to their urban hitchhiking, the authors of the paper experienced similar responses as when one hitchhikes lifts in cars: the associations based merely on the word ‘hitchhiking’ evoked the dangers of the activity, anxiety which, indeed, is part of its history (Packer 2008). While Packer (2008) highlights the anxiety about safety on both sides of the interaction—including on the part of drivers, who might pick up someone dangerous—it has mainly been associated with being a hitchhiker. The difference in the experiences of walking and getting a ride results not only from the lack of metal and glass capsule but also the ways in which the ‘mobile with’ (Jensen 2014) is mobilised. On the one hand, the lack of the automobile cocoon means one is indeed immersed in the surroundings and part of the social body. On the other, there is also a sense of control over the situation that is not only a result of the absence of material encasing but also of interaction with the path taken and with surrounding humans while being ‘mobile with’. The body-space assemblage is an important element of walking, and within hitchhiking there are significant ways in which

the ‘mobile withs’ shape the meaning of the walking assemblage (Kärrholm et al. 2017).

The authors note that hitchhiking is not just about getting from one place to another, but also about what takes place during the movement. In this way the practice is very close to the principal refrain of mobility within the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller and Urry 2006; see also Cresswell 2006): the importance of what takes place while on the move rather than merely seeing movement as just about getting from point A to point B. No movement is meaningless and eventless; this also applies to hitching a ride in a car, as Malla et al. note. Hitchhiking is about getting from one place to another with the help of the mobility provided by others. But there is more to it than the fact of movement as such. There is also the particular embodied interaction with surroundings that perambulatory hitchhiking generates.

When we think about hitchhiking, we should not only think about it in relation to cars but also to the kind of social activity walking itself is. Does it differ from other types of ‘being on the move’ that depend on bodily mobility and interaction with other human and non-human elements? The ‘walking with’ in urban hitchhiking sits between walking with a friend, acquaintance, or family member and walking in a crowd where one is not really ‘walking with’, but, rather, walking alone in a mass. It is like the somewhat uncomfortable situation of finding oneself walking with a person who has simply asked for directions, when it turns out the paths apparently coincide. Compare it, for instance, to having a chat with a seatmate on a bus, train or plane which is similarly social

but quite differently mobile. In walking, there is more possibility for the 'mobile with' to become disassociated, which is not possible in a vehicle in the same way.

The sense of disassociation is also present in micro-interactions of bodies in which people need to negotiate barriers, kerbs, and so on, with the concomitant possibility of disassociation. Walking through a revolving door, for instance, exemplifies relations with an urban material element that shapes social interactions by disassembling and necessitating the additional effort of re-assembling (Weilenmann, Normark and Laurier 2014): traffic lights can split groups; different posts and poles in a pavement need negotiating within the maintenance of flow and conversations; the distance between bodies while on the move fluctuates and can also result in contact being cut off.

Thus, walking with others is a practiced negotiation with the environment. The socialisation-environment assemblage in Urban Hitchhiking sits between other—and more commonly understood—ways of walking together, playing out through interaction with the environment, speed of mobility, and the position of one person in relation to another.

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TAURI TUVIKENE
CENTRE FOR LANDSCAPE AND
CULTURE,
TALLINN UNIVERSITY
tauri.tuvikene@tlu.ee