

## Micro Mobility by hannah\_g

The physical and intellectual navigations of the places in which we live impact our relationships to them. Participating at various levels (driver, diner, pedestrian, visitor, worker) in a variety of locations (for leisure, health, entertainment, work) within a city influences the experiences we may have. These experiences are often access points to people and communities that have the potential to raise aspirations, bring inspiration, transformation, and participation on a personal and infrastructural level. This chain of events/access points is part of what I have termed “micro mobility”.

There are, as we know, a variety of types of mobility: physical, geographical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and so on. And there are as many barriers to these movements. Art can traverse, or at least bring attention to, these obstacles and thereby revive or create structures that feed a city’s vitality.

These mobilities are “micro” because:

- 1) they frequently involve small journeys from one location to another within the same city, and
- 2) they are often internal (a shift in a perception or a personal paradigm) and therefore involve movements which are usually imperceptible at first.

I’d like to give one subjective and one objective example to illustrate the concept.

### Subjective

Between May 2009 and July 2010, I directed an artist residency at the Tallest Poppy restaurant in North Point Douglas, Winnipeg. I wanted to create a space where, instead of money, food and communication were related to the making of art. (See <http://poppythetall.wordpress.com>.) The residency was free from prescription: complete trust was placed in the artist and his/her process.

The residency incorporated micro mobility in the following ways:

- **Geographic: exploring your own neighbourhood and city.** The artists came from within the North Point Douglas community, the rest of Winnipeg and beyond. Roughly half had not spent time in this part of town before (for some time the neighbourhood has been perceived as dangerous and/or undesirable). Approximately half of the restaurants’ patrons were not directly involved in the arts community.
- **Status: artists were not segregated according to an objective definition of who or what an artist is, discipline or time committed to practice.** Participants were emerging artists, mid-career artists or non-artists. Several were wishing to re-engage with their practice. Several had not done an artist residency before.
- **Intellectual: I am not an artist. I am an artist.** Many of the participants described a shift in their perception of their practice and self. After observing and interacting with the artists, several of the restaurant staff felt an increase in confidence about their own creativity and a desire to make artwork themselves.
- **What is work? What is value?** Value was based on participation and the process of making work. Great care and imagination is employed in the preparation and

presentation of food in this restaurant. The exchange of artisan cooking for artistic work involved intimacy and mutual respect.<sup>1</sup>

### **Objective**

*First Fridays* is an initiative that started in Winnipeg last year. Businesses and the numerous contemporary art organizations in the Exchange District are invited to remain open until 9 pm on the first Friday of each month. The F.F. team makes a list of participating organizations that they send to people who have signed up to the listserve. The info is also posted on their website (see <http://www.firstfridayswinnipeg.org>).

The impetus is to increase pedestrian traffic and trade in the Exchange. Over the last six months the artist-run centre in which I work has recorded a steady rise in audience numbers on those Fridays. The people who come are often first time visitors to *aceartinc.* and do not seek out contemporary art ordinarily. The majority travel from the suburbs, especially for this evening. They have not spent much time in this district, having perceived it as unsafe and lacking in amenities.

The Exchange (or Cultural Quarter as the municipality now refers to it) receives external positive reinforcement via people temporarily moving from one place in the city to another. This contributes to the vitality of a key area in Winnipeg that has been steadily rejuvenated by artists and arts organisations over the last 30 years despite poor urban planning. The place of art in the above geographic and perceptive mobility is clear: it is an essential ingredient to a real urban experience, supplying ambience, ideas and visual stimulus as well as access to artists and cultural workers.

...

An important question is how do we preserve the positive changes effected by micro mobility? Micro mobility often highlights absence. In Winnipeg, this absence is the lack of an integrated municipal art strategy, dedicated to sustaining and growing our nationally recognized art scene. Such a policy should influence building owners, tenants, businesses and other stakeholders for the good of the downtown core. But it requires “journeys” between many private and public agencies.

Winnipeg is a city in which micro mobility has been a true force. Art City, MAWA, *aceartinc.*, Platform, Plug In ICA, Young Lungs, Cre8ery, Martha Street Studios, La maison des artistes, GroundSwell, Natural Cycle, The Bronx Community Centre, The Bike Dump, Cakeology, Border Crossings, The Spence Neighbourhood Association, Video Pool, The Tallest Poppy, Winnipeg Film Group, The Black Sheep Diner.... These are but a few organizations that have initiated, been born from or propagate micro mobility. It is not an overstatement to say that individually and together they have changed hundreds of lives and contributed to numerous communities. I plan on investigating this concept further. But even at this point in my research one thing is absolutely clear: there needs to be micro mobility within the very institutions that

---

<sup>1</sup> By describing the above, I am not proposing this type of exchange as an ideal or that art should not be fiscally compensated or that respect and intimacy are not involved in financial/art transactions.

shape and fund a city such as ours, or our journeys will start feeling like so many circles skated on uncomfortably thin ice.

This article was published by Mentoring Artists for Women's Art in June 2011  
<http://mawa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Godfrey.pdf>