

# Cupcake Cosmopolitanism

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I have been working on a paper on cosmopolitanism, so I have been reading and reading about the various connections that theorists have made between propinquity, public space, urbanity, and cosmopolitanism. I've struggled with reconciling city centers as they are portrayed in theory with what happens in the cities in which I immerse myself: rather than the crowded, lively places of social interaction envisioned by urban theorists, I regularly experience my city and the others I visit as indeed crowded and indeed lively but where people rush past each other with their earbuds screwed into the side of their heads, eyes cast to their feet—rushing rushing past each other not wanting interaction one little bit.

Well, today, I think I may have found a vitalizing factor—cupcakes. This was a participant-observer ethnographic analysis that occurred between 16:30 and 18:00 on March 19, 2008 in the geographic space of Beverly Hills to downtown Los Angeles.

1. Friend is a producer at Food Network. Friend comes by to pick up Schweitzer up and has in his possession two dozen cupcakes from Hansen's Bakery in Beverly Hills. Friend insists Schweitzer take one package of Red Velvet Cupcakes (with jolly sprinkles atop white frosting).

2. Schweitzer knows that six Red Velvet cupcakes are not among the many things her diet could use (like, say, nutrients). Nonetheless, cupcakes are accepted on the notion that Schweitzer's skinny husband will eat most of them.

**Multi**

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3. Friends drop Schweitzer at Metro Rapid Bus Station; 720 bus experience uneventful.

4. Schweitzer proceeds to Red Line station at Wilshire and Western. Train is inexplicably 25 minutes late. Young woman approaches Schweitzer: explains to Schweitzer that she is angry with the apartment people where she lives because they labeled her "disabled." Her eyes move repeatedly to the cupcakes. "Can I have one? I am really hungry." She says. Schweitzer says: "You really shouldn't take food from people you don't know, but of course you may have a cupcake."

Remaining cupcakes: 5

Social interaction: 1

5. Cupcake is crumbly and young woman gets much of cupcake on self and floor. Schweitzer does not notice this: Metro worker, however, does and gives Schweitzer a hard look. "Do you see this mess?" She says. "Oh my. I am too." (Schweitzer is from the Midwest, the land of Shy People, and thus is easily cowed by assertive types). Metro worker says: "Oh well, let's just clean it up." She helps Schweitzer clean it up with some Kleenexes in her purse. Schweitzer asks: "Um....would you like a cupcake?" "Yeah, thanks, I would, now you mention it."

Remaining cupcakes: 4

Social interaction: 2

6. Train finally comes and Schweitzer gets off at 7th street and Metro. Mr. Miller and Schweitzer are supposed to meet at Hope and 7th but he's not there (he is instead waiting at Flower and 7th). Schweitzer waits and waits, cupcakes in hand. Young boy comes up to Schweitzer: and says "Hola." She says, "Hola." His eyes lock on cupcakes. "Those look really good." "I suppose they do at that." "Yes, they suuuuuuuure look good." Schweitzer nods. "Can I have one?" Schweitzer: "You REALLY should not accept food from people you don't know. Is your mom or dad here?" He nods and points.

He points. Schweitzer: "May he have a cupcake?" The response comes in rapid Spanish. Schweitzer, incapable, points to cupcake, points to child, points to mouth. Parent responds: "Sí, Sí."

Remaining cupcakes: 3

Social interaction: 4

7. Man using a wheelchair nearby notes that child received cupcake. Says: "Those look yummy." Gives meaningful look. Schweitzer: "Would you like one?" "Sure" he says.

Remaining cupcakes: 2

Social interaction: 5

8. Schweitzer gives up on Mr. Miller and begins walk home alone. Smiles at the guy who sells magazines and candy out of a plywood box on Broadway and 9<sup>th</sup>; "Heya" he says, "where are your dogs?" Schweitzer: "I'm just going home to get them now." "What have you got there?" "Cupcakes. They're red." Awkward silence. "Would you like one?" "Sure thing!"

Remaining cupcakes: 1

Social interactions: 6

### **Conclusion**

Social interaction per cupcake ratio is greater than 1. This research suggests that the way to engender incidental interaction in the built environment is to walk around with baked goods in a transparent container. Effect of jolly sprinkles unclear. Could confound studies on connections between urban density/transit use/obesity.

### **Further Research**

Repeat experiment during similar time-space geography with carrot sticks in transparent container.