Kelsey Frey

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Nicole Williams

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The “Culture Transit”

The not so soft hum of the engine vibrates below my feet as a gust of chilly air whips through the opening doors of Tom’s Creek B bus. Causing both a compulsive shiver down my spine and an eye watering sting as the jaw like doors allow yet another passenger in; yet another person to take up space. Of course, there were no seats when I got in, so standing or rather scrunched back to back, front to front, hand to hand, backpack to backpack, I grip the overhead bar for dear life as the bus makes an abrupt jolt to life as it pulls away from the sidewalk of Burrus Hall. Looking around, it’s a sea of Northface fleeces and a rainbow of Uggs. Some chat amicably through chapped lips and rosy cheeks while others seem to be turning their iPods up just a little louder, clutching scarves more tightly around their necks. For me, it is just another ten minute bus ride to the math emporium though for other students, it could be a bus ride to grocery store for some much needed supplies or a bus ride home to their apartment, but no matter the final destination we are ultimately similar in one aspect of our lives.

Despite our background, culture, gender, or age, we have all ventured aboard the same bus at the same moment for the same common purpose, to get somewhere. And for those few moments are lives will coincide and many of our choices will be the same: when to get off, where to sit or perhaps where to stand, or when to pull the cord. Ultimately, the decisions we make can result from our past culture, traditions, and experiences as well as the new surrounding atmosphere. I intend to examine and observe interactions of individuals on the bus as well as the group in order to understand how our past can affect our decisions today and how a new atmosphere and new people can mold our decisions for the future. Furthermore, my experiences have created biases and opinions of the bus system that reflect in my interactions and decisions, and I believe through this project I can both perhaps break through some of my previous biases and even more so learn a little more about the people around me through observation of the bus system.

Relatively speaking, I am a newbie to the world of the bus system. Mostly chauffeured by my mother growing up and the occasional bus ride to and from school, I am what some would perhaps consider pampered and lucky. I can, of course, remember a few specific memories of the bus. Once when I was around five, my mother took me downtown to visit my father at work. While I cannot remember the names of the streets we took or where I got on and where I got off or even where my parents and I had lunch that afternoon, I do remember what I heard, smelled, and saw aboard the bus in the small downtown of Roanoke, Virginia. My senses seem to be on high alert that day; I remember the stirring of the engine and the creaking of the breaks as well as the women in their “dressy clothes” and a somewhat, in my young mind, elderly woman getting off the bus dressed in not much more than rags holding a few grocery bags that appeared to house her entire life. These people, while only seeing them in passing, had an irreversible impact on my life. It was perhaps my first experience with a homeless woman and even more so a woman that was mostly likely the bred winner of the family. My mother was a stay-at-home mom for most of my childhood, and thus I was not used to seeing a woman at work in “daddy’s clothes”. While obviously none of this registered with me at that moment, it was definitely a cultural experience. It was definitely one of my first encounters with new people, new cultures, and new ways of life.

 And now, within my first semester at Virginia Tech, I am already the typical college student: broke and carless but happy and of course, free. Dressed on most days in baggy sweatpants, a t-shirt, and my hair slung up in messy ponytail, I am lucky to make it to class on time and even luckier to be early. Despised in elementary school, naps have now become my favorite past time-everyday without fail. Five fifteen, yoga class to find my uncoordinated yet very centered “chi” and then an all at sprint to D2 for dinner where I can’t help but find my true inner soul: food. My life is undeniably different than ever before, and I certainly wasn’t prepared to rely on a bus for practically everything including to get to the emporium, to go grocery shop, to go shopping, to go to the movies, basically to escape this campus at all, and there is much to learn when riding the bus and much to learn from riding the bus. Fairly organized and enjoying my own personal, the bus system pushed those boundaries. Again, I was not used to or prepared to enduring tight spaces and smashed tightly against other sweaty individuals.

Within the first few weeks of the beginning of the term, it was immediately evident who my fellow freshman were as I crossed the drillfield towards Burruss Hall. Maps gripped in hand, the slightly dazed, slightly confused look spread across nervous faces, sweat glistening or rather perspiring from the heat and anxiety; finding the correct bus was just one of my worries and perhaps it was that of others that day too. As time progressed, mistakes answered questions as did asking questions, a lot of questions. Questions including which door to enter from, which door to exit from, bus times, and when to pull the cord, and perhaps even where the bus was going to take us. Even in the chaos of my first few experiences of riding the bus, I noticed the wide array of people with different cultures, backgrounds, and well hairstyles.

Aboard the bus, I will admit, I judged a few and dismissed a few others; I was intimidated by some and amused by others. And as the assignment asked for the student to address and assess their own culture in respect to the place they have chosen and propose questions and biases about this place, I have drawn this conclusion: I am a daughter, a sister, a friend, a girlfriend, a Saint’s fan forever, an artist, a talker, a shopper, a reader, a Christian, a complete fan of eating ice cream, and an undecided and free college student. Am I different from anyone else on that bus? Do our final destinations matter? Does the way we dress, talk, or act make someone better or any different from another? Who rides this bus and why do they ride this bus? Are some nervous like me? And ultimately, does my background, culture, and biases actually matter? So in respect to the this assignment, I see this bus system as a channel of never ceasing movement of people coming and going, and as our lives coincide, I see it as an opportunity to hopefully understand the many cultures and backgrounds of my fellow peers, teachers, and faculty. Raised in a fairly small town, sheltered by my parents, this experience will open my eyes and serve as an opportunity to observe and hopefully understand the many different cultures, backgrounds, and traditions.