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## BUS RIDING:

### *Community on Wheels*

J E F F N A S H

**B**US RIDING seems an unlikely setting for feelings and thoughts ordinarily associated with communities or stable groups. Keyes' provocative analysis of modern urban life (1973), however, has suggested that within anonymous, impersonal, and lonely environs, "community" assumes different forms; as the context varies, so vary the forms or manifestations of community-like phenomena. Thus, Git and Go's, 7-11's, and shopping centers replace kinship and geographically specific tribal locations. Instead of interpreting the shift from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft* that urban settings with their mobility, anonymity, and estrangement work against the development of a sense of community, the expectation is formulated that *gemeinschaftlich* mentalities and encounters are modified by the urban settings but not obviated by them. This realization, coupled with recent analyses such as Goffman's (1971) description of interguises of the micro-structure of everyday urban life, suggests that settings such as bus riding are often more complex and social psychologically relevant than their specific, rapid, and impersonal surface characteristics would indicate.

By analyzing bus riding as an arena where a high degree of intimate and continuous ambiguity is changed into recognizable

occurrences that involve a mentality of membership, several objectives may be accomplished. The requisites necessary for generating appropriate bus-riding behavior may be uncovered; variation in the contexts of those requisites may appear and some generalizations about factors of the setting that affect the acquisition and character of being a rider may be presented. A portrayal of a peculiar urban form of belongingness emerges, a kind of "community on wheels."<sup>1</sup>

### **Why Study the MTTA?**

The observations for this report were made while riding several bus lines of the Metropolitan Tulsa Transit Authority over a two-year period.<sup>2</sup> During that time the MTTA experienced a dramatic increase both in numbers of people riding the bus and in service expansion. As in many cities, the bus service had declined through the 1960s as the city became more suburban and oriented toward the private automobile. By the 1970s all that was left of the old M, K, and O service was a city-owned and -operated skeleton service used mostly by domestic servants, the unemployed, the elderly, and school children. The buses were few and far between along the routes; the riders were regulars; and the drivers were those whose seniority enabled them to survive the many layoffs and cutbacks.

Beginning in about 1972, interest in the bus line became more pronounced. A new director was hired with an eye to rejuvenating the system. Much of the early impetus for invigorated bus service came from the elderly with whom the new director was acutely sympathetic. Finally, with the "energy crisis" and the subsequent increased cost of gasoline, commuters were lured or forced into riding buses.

This profile indicates a setting where drivers with years of experience and regular riders are rather suddenly inundated with changes. New riders—those riding for the first time, others riding for the first time in years—are now back on buses. The times have changed. Now the city is suburban. Street patterns

are not downtown block and grid. Schedules are complicated, and the lines traverse many miles. Also, there are many new drivers who are equally neophytes in the habits and customs of the world of bus riding. All of this provides a scene which is highly ambiguous, but negotiable. In short, riding the MTTA buses constitutes a strategic arena for social encounters.

### *Finding One's Way in the World of Buses*

For the purposes of ordering a series of observations, the following analytic scheme is introduced. **Those persons who have ridden the bus long enough to have negotiated a routine of riding are called regulars.** They have been riding the bus as a principal means of transportation for several years, although routine knowledge is usually acquired in about six months to a year. **These persons ride the same line, know the drivers, and are generally knowledgeable concerning bus-related matters.** New-comer riders are those people who either have never been on a bus or are returning to riding after a long absence. This type includes commuting businessmen, some students, and occasionally housewives. **The main distinction between these two types is along a competency continuum.** Regulars "know the ropes"; they can "time" the bus, find stops, make transfers, and engage in "bus conversation." Newcomers flounder in a world of "not knowing" what comes next. They often request advice, make mistakes in terms of hailing buses and are generally inept at bus etiquette. In short, they do not have a well-developed bus-riding *lebenswelt*.<sup>3</sup>

**A similar delineation can be introduced for drivers.** The primary focus of this paper is not on drivers.<sup>4</sup> However, it is necessary to introduce a rudimentary distinction between types of drivers so that observations on riding can be placed in a more complete context. The types of drivers that can be found in the employ of the MTTA are old-timers and new drivers. Old-timers are vestiges of earlier days. They are usually males in their fifties. Several have years numbering in double figures of driving services. These drivers remember a day when buses played an

integral part in the transportation of the city. They also drove through the years of skeleton operation, years during which they made lasting acquaintances with regular riders. New drivers, of course, are those added after expansion of service. They are broken in by old-timers, i.e., shown the routes, given instruction on passenger treatment, and so on. However, new drivers can be seen, on careful observation, to possess mannerisms and stances toward the passengers that are obtrusive when compared to those of the old-timers. They don't know the "lay of the land" to the same degree as old-timers. They see their job differently. They have a matter-of-fact, "do my job" mentality as contrasted with the old-timers' service for the rider mentality. Characteristic interaction among the four types will be described with the emphasis placed on riders. These types must not be construed as exhaustive of the phenomena of riding and driving. They are characterizations of these phenomena insofar as the observer is interested in knowing the scene from the rider's vantage point.

### *THE DECISION TO RIDE AND SUBSEQUENT PROBLEMS*

No doubt the enumeration of "because motives" for riding the bus would require extensive cataloging. That task is not pertinent to the analysis at hand. Whether motivated by "civic mindedness" in response to the energy crisis, "ecological awareness" (a theme displayed on the side of MTTA buses), or just "financial necessity," entrance into the world of riding buses presents a set of common problems for negotiation.

#### *Timing the Bus*

Regardless of the finer distinctions that could possibly be introduced along a continuum of motivation, **the first problem is to render the schedule recognizable, i.e., learning to read the schedule and its sister problem, timing the bus.** Perhaps **few things are so foreboding on first glance as a bus schedule.** The

MTTA schedule is no exception. A sheet of paper 17 inches by 9 inches is filled with column headings of bureaucratic terms standing guard over mysterious-looking columns of times, e.g., Sub-Acres, leaves 6th Bost 5:40, 5:55, 6:10, 6:25, . . . n.

In addition to activating stocks of knowledge regarding how to read a schedule—find the appropriate heading then read downward—the potential bus rider must bring to a schedule a backlog of information extraneous to the schedule itself, now rendered relevant to the successful reading of the schedule. **The bus rider must know locations along spacial and temporal dimensions. In other words, one must know where the point of initial timing is in relation to where one wishes to catch the bus. Further the rider must be aware of considerations that will affect the movement of the bus.** Some of these considerations are: (1) the nature of the roads—fast or slow, four lane or two lane, (2) traffic conditions—heavy or light, (3) the time of the day and the day of the week, not in a calendar sense, but in the city-scene (what activities take place at that particular time), (4) construction on the roads and crucial places, e.g., intersections that force a detour or a delay for a left turn.

**With these bits of knowledge at hand, the rider hypothesizes an estimated time of arrival: the bus is timed.** The regular rider will be able to explain a missed bus in terms of erroneous timing due to ignorance of some of the above considerations, the particular idiosyncracies of an old-timer driver, or the advent of a new driver. For example, new drivers are often either late or early. If a regular rider knows beforehand of a driver change, then the margin of safety is established by showing up early and waiting. Old-timer drivers are “on-time.” On time, of course, may not be schedule time, but rather the routine or ordinary arrival for that driver; i.e., she is always here at twenty after, and so on. According to how the route is negotiated, the time of arrival will vary within a fifteen-minute “clock time” interval.

The following is an example of a method of timing the bus. East 15th bus leaves 6th and Boston downtown at 3:13 p.m. and leaves 6th and Denver at 3:18 p.m. This means that the bus

makes the downtown loop at the time of day before rush-hour traffic, and with the absence of construction that blocks or slows the route, the bus will head out on 15th Street more or less on schedule. This route has an old-timer driver. He maintains the required 20 mph speed, but only after clearing the downtown area. Since 15th Street is straight with stop lights on an average of every half mile, the bus should arrive at the intersection of Harvard and 15th within 15 minutes, plus or minus 5 minutes, of departure of the downtown area. All of this leads to the conclusion that the bus will arrive at the stop about 3:30 p.m.

Of course, several other options are open to neophyte riders. One is simply to go out and wait. Depending on luck, this could mean anywhere from a few minutes to an hour. Also, if you have co-waiters or co-riders, this may provide the opportunity to act on surface features only; i.e., just ask a co-waiter, a regular, when the bus usually comes by. Such an option does not require the degree of competency being discussed in this analysis. Of course, the results of both options are the same, namely, getting on the bus. However, there is a crucial difference. With intermittance of bus runs there is a corresponding requirement of competency in timing. The obverse of this is that as service improves or the frequencies of buses along the lines increase, less competency is required to successfully ride the bus. This does not necessarily mean that the phenomenon of rider membership ceases to exist. It does mean, however, that some settings are more or less conducive to the knowledge of timing buses, and hence, provide a variable opportunity for "membership" as a bus rider.

### *Where the Bus Stops: Corners or Signs?*

After a sufficient degree of competency at "timing," the next problem involves where to wait for the bus. Of course, most cities offer at least one well-marked central area of bus service. In Tulsa the downtown business district is dotted with signs bearing the MTTA designation. These markers constitute bus

stops. However, out on the lines few if any of these signs can be found. A noticeable exception is South Lewis Street where signs can be observed lining both sides of the streets for about a three-mile stretch. South Lewis in this particular area is quite fashionable and, incidentally, is the general residential area of most city officials. This display of bus stops no doubt has both political and economic purposes, the latter referring to the custom of employing domestic servants from the predominantly black north side who must ride buses to work on the south side.

When out on the line and wishing to stop a bus, the rider must “discover” a place where the bus might stop. There is an official regulation known to all drivers and some riders that the bus will stop at every corner or at designated stops if a rider is standing at the location. In other words, buses do not stop unless hailed. Out of necessity the drivers must make the best possible time in the outer regions of their route. Here there are long stretches of road where they can travel 40 to 50 mph to make up for lost time in the denser downtown and main street traffic. There is a driver practice that should be reported here. Old-timers and new drivers are very much aware of the difficulty of “keeping on time.” The old-timer drivers develop coping tactics. These tactics entail knowledge of who rides and where they wait for the bus. The outer reaches of the routes provide few contacts with the casual or one-time-only rider. Drivers will “know” that no one is ever on a particular stretch of the run. They will as a matter of course, “cut” off that part to make up time. Often, if the bus is carrying several passengers, the driver will ask “Anyone get off between here and 21st?” (or whatever location). With no reply, or a negative reply, from the riders, the driver then proceeds to “short cut.” New drivers often display an unwarranted amount of élan with this practice. For example, they will short cut without adequate knowledge of regular riders waiting at stops and thus leave them stranded. A regular rider who will have a backlog of success at timing arrivals will surmise that “something is wrong.” On occasion the rider will report to the downtown office that a bus did not show along a particular section of the route. Repercussions of



this then get back to the drivers. This can be a serious matter, since the neophyte driver's incompetencies call into question at official levels the entire practice of short cutting. Hence, old-timer drivers are reluctant to inform new drivers of the tactic. Instead, new drivers are allowed to find out for themselves how to stay on time and not to irritate regular riders. Of course, this means learning not only the routes, but also the riders on the routes.

The problematic nature of stopping the bus should now be well established and a full description of "where the bus stops" is now possible. Many regular riders will define a location as a corner. Over a period of time this location will become a stop. For instance, driveways leading into apartment houses, shopping areas, or food stores are not actually intersections of streets, a legalistic definition of a corner. However, a curved curb is present and if a known regular rider waits there, the bus will stop. The problem of what constitutes a corner is subjectively real as is illustrated by the common observance of riders, even regulars, walking several blocks to select an obvious stop, which might be either a clear case of a street intersection or a marked stop. Regular riders and old-timer drivers, of course, may suspend the "corner or stop" rule. If the driver knows the pedestrian to be a rider, he will stop regardless of the presence of a corner, curved curbs, or marked stops. On the other hand, new drivers will run past the regular rider to an obvious stop and force the rider to walk a few yards in order to establish the official recognition of a stop. On a few rare occasions the new driver may pass the regular rider altogether. However, this is an infrequent circumstance, since the regular rider has available a repertoire of "hailing behaviors" which may stop the bus regardless of the corner or stop rules.

### *Hailing a Bus*

Even casual observation of taxi riders demonstrated that a sophisticated array of hailing behaviors exists for "getting a cab."<sup>5</sup> The bus rider, however, faces a different situation since stopping the bus involves interactive outcomes of location

(corner or stops) and hailing gestures. Where stops are designated, e.g., in the downtown area, a rider may hail the bus only to see it pass him and halt at the next bus sign. In unmarked stretches of the routes, the rider may stand motionless at an appropriate location only to watch the bus pass him. Hence, it is the interaction between location and hailing that serves as the sufficient situation to actualize the interpretive procedure on the part of a driver: "this is a rider; stop the bus."

Another way to think about the rider's problem is to say that potential riders must be at an appropriate location and assume the appearance of a rider; i.e., one must look like he wants to ride. There are several typical solutions to the appearance assumption. These may be construed as typical of hailing behaviors. Perhaps the most common is simply to move toward the street. Again, moving toward the street is not always sufficient to stop the bus. One must be at a stop or corner or be a recognized regular rider. Moving toward the street may vary from a slight head-downward gesture toward the street to a gait of several yards. There are slight variations on the basic move. If a handbag, briefcase, shopping bag, or other item is being carried, then it can be placed on the ground while waiting and picked up with a move toward the street on sighting the bus. Coat collars can be manipulated while moving toward the street. A shuffle, step, or just nod—all of these manifestations contain a common element: movement toward the street.

Another common hailing behavior is the raised hand. This can occur in combination with the movement toward the street or independently of any total bodily disposition. The raised hand ordinarily entails an upward movement of the hand not exceeding the top of the head. Some regular riders will indicate this hailing with a slight upward movement of the fingers, a kind of slow "brush-off." Other less confident riders will raise the hand completely over the head in a magnified circle.

One of the most dramatic hails involves a gesture marking the exact stop for the bus. Usually this occurs simultaneously with the movement toward the street. Here the would-be rider points to an imaginary stop on the ground as if to say to the driver,

“stop here.” Needless to say, this gesture is often interpreted by drivers as definite. Although the bus will stop, rarely does it stop at the precise point signified.

The surest way to hail the bus, a hail which can often stop a bus at inappropriate locations, is the obvious display of the “bus pass.” Riders may purchase for \$5.00 a yellow pass, which entitles them to 25 rides. Each ride is punched in the pass by the driver. The card is about 2 inches by 4 inches and usually is carried in a billfold or purse. The card is visible to the approaching driver. The common form of hailing with the card is to simply hold the card up. Also, a gesture in the direction of fetching the card will signify that the card display is about to take place. The actual display of the card is not always necessary to hail the bus. Often the fetching gesture will suffice. A variation of the card display is the mundane fare-fetching posture. Here the would-be rider assumes a posture that will be interpreted by the driver as “getting fare.” A man, for example, will place his hand in his pants’ pocket or a woman will open her purse. Whether fare or a bus pass is retrieved is irrelevant for this hail. On some rare occasions, the display of the fare can be observed. However, since quarters are far less visible than the yellow pass, the display of the fare is regarded by the driver as superfluous and, perhaps, as indicative of overwroughtness on the part of the rider. The display of the card, though, is an effective tactic for hailing whenever the rider is caught in an inappropriate location.

There are several considerations of appearance, independent from discrete hailing tactics, that can bear on the driver’s halting the bus. In other words, if certain types of people are viewed along the roadside, the driver will slow, often even stop the bus without any ostensible hailing displays. This phenomenon may be observed mostly on the part of old-timer drivers. For them, the following situations appear sufficient for slowing or stopping: (1) any elderly person at any location along an unmarked route at any time of the day, (2) middle-aged women, black or white, whose manner and appearances are interpretable as “cleaning ladies,” at any location along an

unmarked route at any time of the day in a fashionable part of town, (3) blacks of any age or sex, with the possible exception of young blacks (to be discussed later) at any location in a predominantly white section of town at any time of day, (4) a well-dressed white person in white sections of town during times of morning and afternoon commuting, (5) school-aged children during morning and early afternoon when school is in session, and (6) any regular rider known to the driver. This last category has the effect of superseding all other categories and becoming the taken-for-granted knowledge of the driver about who rides the bus. However, the regular rider usually does conform to categories one through five.

Partial confirmation of the validity of the above characteristics comes from mistakes that drivers make in their judgment of a potential rider. The categories that appear to have greatest likelihood of error are young, male blacks and school-aged children. A driver will slow, but there is noticeable difference in his degree of readiness to brake when these people are involved. School-aged children may look as if they intend to ride the bus, but then wave off the driver or just ignore the stopped bus. Drivers do not like to waste a stop and often comment on the empty-headedness or lack of purpose on the part of youngsters in general. Typically, the children appear surprised or just unaffected by the stopped bus. Sometimes, on unmarked stretches of routes young male blacks can be observed "putting on the man" by working this common sense rendition of where the bus stops. For example, they may stroll along the roadway and allow the driver to stop, but then wave him off without any indication of intention to board the bus. Occasionally, the black may even gesture almost imperceptibly in what might appear to the driver as a hail, and then wave him off as the bus approaches. The most common form of this behavior involves movement toward the street.

### *Where To Sit?*

**On the bus a new field of existential choices is presented to the rider.** The selection of a seat can represent a serious

commitment to a social encounter. There are identifiable aspects of this situation which bear on seat selection. The overriding consideration is the number of people on the bus. If the bus is crowded, as it is during commuter hours, one simply sits where he can. All other rules regarding significance of the seat location are suspended. Thus, a well-dressed business man may sit next to an attractive high school or college-aged girl, a move which on a less crowded bus might be viewed with some suspicion by other riders. The strategic setting for selecting a seat, then, takes place on buses that are less than full passenger capacity.

Where seat selection is virtually unimpeded by crowds, the following patterns emerge: first, sitting behind or close to the driver. Although some old-timers will initiate the talks, ordinarily the rider starts the conversation. Old-timers and regulars converse over a wide range of topics. In fact, topics are secondary to style of conversing. Games of naming and timing the buses that are passing by ("that's the Ridgeway bus and he's on time") are common. Discussion of new buses, problems of transferring, and just small talk frequently occur. Second, if the rider does not intend such conversations, then seat selection in the middle of the bus is made and the double seat is marked as personal space (Goffman, 1971: 41-42) by placing a handbag, briefcase, or other personal item on the opposite seat, or by just sitting close to the aisle with the window seat left vacant. Third, seat selection in the rear of the bus is typical of what Goffman calls "withs," i.e., persons together, usually more than two, claiming a group priority while sitting in the back of the bus (1971: 19-27). Most commonly, the "withs" are school-aged children, male blacks, or co-workers. Regular riders characteristically sit slightly forward of the middle of the bus. This is done to space oneself or to distance oneself from any possible "with" that might board and to close-off the opportunity for conversation backward and across seats. In other words, conversation is rarely initiated from the front to the back of the bus. Rather casual talk is across seats, across aisles, or forward talk to the driver. By positioning oneself slightly forward of the

middle, the likelihood is that anyone sitting forward or parallel to the rider will be a "single" and often another regular. This seating tactic tends to isolate "withs" and newcomer riders and to congregate regulars.

Exiting the bus may be seen as a consequence or correlative with seating location. Sitting forward means exiting forward, and exiting forward means parting ritual exchanges between rider and driver, e.g., "see you tomorrow," "have a nice day," and so forth. Of course, these patterns are not unchangeable. In fact, they are more often than not impeded by uncontrollable events, such as a newcomer having already selected the prime seat without fully appreciating its significance, a "with" that selected the middle of the bus, or the intentional use of the bus for rituals that have meaning wider than the scope of bus riding. For example, an encounter between a white driver and a black rider was observed that glossed the entire domain of seat selection and subsequent exiting. In a sense this episode may be viewed as a denigration ceremony with two distinct, consequent reactions.

A poorly dressed, elderly black woman, a regular rider, tries to exit at the backdoor, an event which must receive approval from the driver since he controls the lock from his panel and an event which is uncharacteristic of regular riders. The woman pushes repeatedly at the door without success. The bus driver refuses to release the lock. He states in a typical toward-the-back-of-the-bus official tone, "I believe you owe me a nickel." He is referring to the woman's purchase of a transfer. Apparently, she was allowed a transfer without paying on the expectation that she would pay on exiting, an option sometimes allowed regular riders. After the driver repeats himself a few times without recognition from the woman, a white woman moves forward and pays the nickel. The driver releases the lock and the woman exits. A black "with" consisting of two adult males is located in the back of the bus and observes the entire scene. A few blocks further down the line they move to exit from the backdoor, standing turned toward the driver in anticipation of his action. Ordinarily, back exiting does not

entail this posture. A person usually would stand facing the door as if waiting for it to open. By facing the driver, the members of the "with" indicate that they have full knowledge of the mechanism for the control of the door and that a challenge is being offered. In effect, "try that on me, honkey." The driver, in this case, released the door, and the blacks exited, thereby reestablishing that backdoor exiting is appropriate and does not involve the necessity of exchanging parting amenities with the driver.

That this exiting scene was embedded with this meaning was further evidenced when, not more than two miles down the line, the driver stops to pick up two young black boys. They are not standing on an appropriate location, nor do they hail the bus. However, this area of the route is in a white section of town near a number of schools. The time is early afternoon, and blacks, regardless of other factors of appearance, are potential riders under these circumstances. One boy has a Coke in a paper cup in his hand. The driver remarks after coming to a stop, "boy, can't let you on with that." A few moments of uncertainty pass while the hopeful rider decides what is meant. (There is an official rule, frequently violated, that no eating or drinking of any kind can take place on the bus.) The driver comments, "I will wait." This sentence has the general meaning that if you can drink the Coke fast, i.e., this instant, then you can board and thereby avoid a long wait for the next bus. The boy comprehends and gulps the drink discarding the cup on the street as he boards the bus.

The driver is able to renegotiate his control over passengers on the bus by selectively enforcing a rule of bus behavior. On this occasion racial undertones are obvious. The driver, who on other occasions with white riders has been observed relaxing the eating and drinking prohibition, was able to recoup his domain as controller of the bus after having been outruled by the "with."

## ENCOUNTERS

Once on the bus and riding, the bus can become a stage for the enactment of dramatic exchanges among drivers and riders, and riders and riders.<sup>6</sup> The following are characterizations of some of these exchanges.

### *Regular Riders and Newcomer Riders*

Not knowing the rules of the setting, the newcomer rider will often inadvertently position himself within conversational proximity to a regular rider. The first few rides are often accompanied by a kind of wide-eyed innocence that leads to engagement of anyone in talk. The scene is "Oh, I haven't been on the bus in years," or "This is little Jimmie's first ride ever; isn't this exciting?" "I used to ride when . . ." If the newcomer is lucky, one word or short answers will be elicited, such as "that's nice," "a fine boy you have there," "okay," "fine," and so on. However, **some riders use the bus not only for transportation, but also for the opportunity bus riding affords for conversation. The observer has the impression that perhaps no one will listen to them anywhere else.** For example, a long-haired young girl in blue jeans gets on. She takes out knitting, smiles the wide-eyed first-timer's smile, and soon has the little old lady behind her rolling yarn. An Indian woman with three children in tow offers suggestions and the hitherto quiet man across the aisle watches with great interest. The newcomer asks the man, "do you knit?" Now any regular knows that that sort of question is an extremely dangerous leading utterance to address to a rider who has caught your eye, especially if you had observed that he rides the bus to and from the library. The man is a regular, dressed in used khaki with old black lace-up shoes, and a crewcut in military fashion. "Do you knit?" is an opener for the biographical unveiling. The man proceeds to unfold his life for all to hear. He was a marine, is now retired, and his story begins with boot camp. The girl, after an uncommonly short ride within the downtown loop, usually



not considered worth the fare, gathers up her knitting and exits with a strange look of one who is older but wiser.

There are tactics available to the newcomer or to one who wishes not to become a regular for avoiding this sort of exchange. To avoid life stories, never sit on the wall seats near the driver, one is far too accessible; never sit on the first seats facing the wall seats; never sit in the back of the bus, the place for community gatherings; choose a seat one or two seats behind the first ones and never catch anyone's eye. Sometimes this requires techniques of direct avoidance because the life-story teller or bus story teller are often persistent and will stare at you for long periods of time, hoping to catch you off guard. Then it is probably best to stare out the window for the rest of the trip.

### *Newcomer Riders and Old Drivers*

In addition to encounters between riders, rider-driver encounters can constitute major portions of the drama of the bus. The old-timer driver is a pivotal character to entrance into the world of bus riding. In a sense, he is like a gate keeper who can simply operate the bus or provide information and background knowledge essential to one becoming a regular rider. If a first-time rider is fortunate enough to ride with an old-timer driver, then opportunities for expanded horizons are available. The driver can offer information on schedules and tips on how to make a transfer. Which lines are likely to connect and which are not is crucial information to transferring successfully. However, connection depends on being on time, which, as already indicated, depends on many extra-schedule factors. An old-timer driver knows the routes, the drivers for the day, and the road conditions along the line. He also knows which lines belong to other old-timer drivers. Thus, if a neophyte rider wishes to transfer, an old-timer driver can be immensely helpful. For example, he will know if a new driver is on the route of transfer or if an old-timer has chosen that route. (Drivers select routes on the basis of seniority. The attractive routes, i.e., the

most direct or ones with many regular riders, are usually selected by the old-timers.) This kind of information is readily at hand to the old-timer.

The rider, however, must be minimally congenial with the driver before this aid is rendered. For instance, initial exchanges of greeting may suffice for acceptance and subsequent aid. The rider will be recognized by the driver on the second or third ride. This recognition can manifest itself in stopping the bus without necessary hailing. On one occasion, this observer, who had just begun to ride but who was on good terms with a particular driver, was waiting for the bus at a location used several times before. Standing back from the street, under a canopy, reading a book at an unmarked location, he easily could have been passed by the bus. However, the bus pulled to an stop unnoticed by the rider. The driver opened the door and remarked, "almost didn't see you standing back there."

The relationship between old drivers and new riders, however, can be tenuous. On one occasion this observer was the only passenger on the bus. The old-timer driver was busily narrating all sorts of details about buses he had driven, commenting on the quality of the newly purchased buses as compared with the old ones he had operated for years. Along an industrial stretch on the line, he stopped the bus, picked up his water jug and walked to the rear door. He urinated out the back door, washing the urine from the doorway with water from his drinking jug. He casually commented that the SOB's downtown have the route timed so tightly that there is no time for "restroom stops." He then continued evaluating the relative merits of new versus old style buses.

On later rides with this driver he began to peddle tickets to a square dance exhibition in which he and his wife were to participate. No matter what was the subject of conversation, the square dance tickets emerged and a pitch was forthcoming. I used the excuse of being short on money and repeatedly declined the tickets. The date of the event passed, and over the next several rides there was only mention of the dance exhibition to the effect that "you really missed a good show."

However, after this the driver became less and less helpful. Before, he had saved new or discarded copies of schedules for me, and had offered to sell me bus passes. (Drivers do not ordinarily sell passes. In fact, there are official prohibitions against doing so.) Failure to purchase a ticket affected all these practices, and thereafter conversation stayed pretty much at the level usually reserved for first time or nonregular riders.

### *Regular Riders and New Drivers*

Undoubtedly, one of the most strategic encounters takes place between regular riders and new drivers. Here it is the rider who is a member of the bus community and the driver who is a fledgling. Of course, the driver has operating control over the scene in the sense that he can stop and start the bus and vary speed and direction. Nevertheless, often the rider exerts surprising influence on even these matters. These events were observed in this setting. An old lady rang the buzzer to indicate intent to exit at a general location known to all regulars on this line as a place where old people board. The location is an elongated stop of about 300 yards fronting on apartments that are exclusively for the elderly. Normally, a bus will stop anywhere along this stretch. On this occasion the driver passed the place where the lady buzzed to what appeared to be a driveway entrance into the street. The lady had to walk approximately 20 yards to return to the location signified by the buzz. She was obviously irritated. "I thought you were supposed to stop back there." The driver replied, "I didn't know that was a stop." The old lady: "Oh, I will call to see if I can get a bus stop back there. It's awfully hard on *us* to walk that far when you carry *us* past."

When the driver demonstrates that he either does not have sufficient knowledge of the nature of the route or refuses to behave like an old-timer, the regular rider's advantage over the ordinary or casual rider disappears. There is no recourse except to formal procedure. A sign, in this instance, would equalize riders, i.e., relieve the necessity for knowing that this is a

location for elders. To date, no signs have been posted along that stretch.

Another similar episode involved a lady known to be a veteran of fifteen years of bus riding in this town, a fact announced during the encounter. The woman is obese. She and I were co-waiters at a stop. We boarded. The driver was obviously new. His uniform was not complete and he was known to neither of us, both regulars on this line. The woman had difficulty navigating the doorway and the steps at the front-door entrance. She commented, "You should have helped me; most drivers do." No response came from the driver, just an expression of disgust. Aiding passengers to board is clearly not "part of the job." After all, remarked another new driver on a different occasion, "we are not operating a taxi here."

### *Newcomer Riders and New Drivers*

The resort to formal procedures is most pronounced when strangeness characterizes the situation of both parties, a point made many years ago by Toennies. Here there can be no presumption of common sense knowledge of an intimate or special nature. The only commonly available, shared information is the formal rule. However, this situation is actually transitory. No bus line operates exclusively at this level. When untoward events occur, their accounting is usually outside the scope of the formal procedure. An "exact change" rule encounter illustrates this point.

During the years of skeleton operation and active years prior to the 1960s, drivers customarily made change for riders. However, an innovation recently introduced and one that is fairly standard throughout transit systems is the exact change rule. Drivers will not provide change, and the rider must have a quarter or smaller denominations of coins to equal 25 cents. Of course, regulars often use the bus pass. Newcomers, however, use money as fare. A girl who had already ridden on this bus for a while wished to buy a transfer and asked the driver for change. He invoked the exact change rule. The girl explained

that she must have a transfer or be stranded miles from her destination. The driver said nothing; the girl stood motionless. The bus was stopped in the middle of a busy street at the entrance to a busy intersection, and there was a green light. After what seemed an interminable period of time, a regular rider came to the girl's rescue and paid the extra fare for the transfer. The girl quietly exited to make connection with the other bus. A few blocks farther down the line another regular rider offered to pay half of the extra fare to the rider who purchased the transfer for the girl. The driver said nothing throughout this entire episode. Repeated observations of the behavior of old-timer drivers in similar cases provide interesting contrast. Most old-timer drivers have developed tactics of coping with the consequences of the exact change rule. First, they will routinely invoke the rule, and then ask passengers on the bus if they have change. If no one volunteers from among the riders, most drivers carry two to four dollars worth of quarters with them for the purpose of making change, which they will do as a last resort.

### *STRUCTURAL FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BUS SCENE*

That lack of competency or the absence of detailed and mutual lebenswelten results in reliance on formal or institutional procedures has already been discussed. The same point should be presented now in a different context. There are certain features of the bus riding scene that produce structures variably conducive to rider membership. New lines, crowded buses, new riders, and new drivers combine to produce an eyes-straight-ahead or gazing-out-the-window/no-talking riding posture. Encounters that take place can be analyzed without reference to membership concepts; i.e., the mentality and action of a *gemeinschaftlich* nature are not ordinarily observed. What is typically observed under these conditions might be termed the "commuter stance." The commuter stance is highly

institutionalized and involves the negotiation of private space or territory within the public domain (see Goffman, 1971). The commuter, by preference, shares a physical environment, but he does not intentionally go about displaying through his behavior the communality of his action. Rather his task is to preserve his individuality against great structural odds. Even if the bus environs are not structurally conducive to the commuter stance, the absence of competency on the part of either participant in the scene is sufficient to elicit this behavior.

The MTTA has routes during rush hours that are “standing room only,” punctuated by frequent stops and highly standardized with regard to verbal and paralinguistic encounters. However, a theme of this paper has been that even these scenes, under certain conditions, may admit of *gemeinschaftlich* characteristics. There are three interrelated structural conditions that bear on the character of action in the bus-riding scene: (1) the degree of competency possessed by the actors as riders and drivers, respectively, (2) the number of people on the bus, and (3) “riding time,” which refers to the clock time duration of the ride.

None of these conditions should be interpreted as determining the emergence of bus membership. Rather, they are structural states of affairs, interrelationships among some objective features of bus riding, that set scenes or stages which vary in conduciveness to mental states of membership. No single condition or combination of conditions necessarily precludes membership. Lack of competency on the part of one participant is transitory and often a prelude to full membership. The competent member can serve as guide or teacher, thereby providing entrance to competency. In fact, as already discussed, such encounters are ordinary means of entrance. Thus, the last two conditions are more salient with regard to impeding or enhancing membership.

All of the observations reported so far were made on buses with two to fifteen occupants (including the driver). Few riders allows for maneuvering for seating placements and is conducive to conversation with the option of engaging the driver. MTTA

buses are ridden infrequently between rush or commuter hours. The world of regular riders primarily exists in this lull. At these times there is room for interaction even if the ride is relatively short. Talking throughout the entire space of the bus is possible. However, when the bus begins to fill and the stops are often and regular, across-aisle talk, talk with the driver, and the maintenance of "withs" becomes difficult. Often a "with" will dissolve when its members are forced to take available seats. The business of opening and closing doors, watching traffic, and spotting potential riders occupies the attention of the driver. Repeated observations have confirmed that major shifts in the character of the interaction on the bus occur when the number of passengers surpasses fifteen. There is a transformation from the intimate world of the rider to the stance of commuting. Buses that are crowded and have a rapid turnout of passengers simply provide no time for sociability other than the formal and routine variety.

There is an extenuating circumstance. Crowdedness is apparently not sufficient to obviate the intimate world of riding, provided the ride's length of time is enough to allow patterns of behavior that include the scope of the bus to emerge. The crucial consideration is whether or not what transpires on the bus is segmentalized into pairs, co-occupants of seats or standers and sitters, in short adjacent interactions and encounters or bus-wide patterns. Before the intimate world of riding can emerge, all on the bus must enter into interactions that have parameters encompassing the revelation of biographies, feelings, and knowledge, i.e., displays of competency in emotions and knowledge that can be judged by others on the bus as appropriate to a bus rider. This circumstance is structurally possible when the rider is in the company of other riders for a long time.

Such a setting exists on the commuter express runs. The MTTA, in an effort to serve the outlying suburban areas of the city, has several routes that operate only during the rush hours and are express, meaning that they do not stop at locations between the suburbs and downtown. These buses depart the

downtown area empty. They have a direct route to a suburban area, usually using a freeway. A load of passengers is picked up within the suburban region, and then the bus heads directly for downtown. These express buses are started only when sufficient interest is shown in such service. The impetus for the express often comes from a single business located downtown or groups of such businesses that are all centered in the central city. Many employees, in fact most, reside in the outlying areas. They are often centralized in a few suburbs, which makes the express bus a viable alternative to car pooling or single-car commuting. Many expresses began experimentally and continued only after the MTTA was convinced that there is demand enough to justify the expense of the express. Some expresses have been markedly successful, with typical runs of full or near capacity. These buses provide the setting in which a bus rider lebenswelt may develop.

One such express recently received newspaper notoriety. The No. 1 Broken Arrow Express is a standing-room-only bus and apparently is quite ordinarily commuter in the quality of the interactions on the bus. The No. 2 Express of the same line is less crowded, but still near capacity, and has a regular set of passengers and an old-timer driver. The No. 2 bus has a social organization *gemeinschaftlich* in nature. For example, there is the "Green Dragon Crew," men who wait for the No. 2 bus in a bar from which they derived their name. The "Green Dragon dirty dozen divided by three" is strictly men only. After boarding the bus and after several beers, they sit in the back of the bus and constitute the nucleus of the X-rated section, so rated on the basis of the jokes told there. The front of the bus, G-rated, is composed of women. The middle of the bus is a GP group. Over a period of time, however, there was a shifting of membership in these groups. Some women started as G and slowly worked their way back, or down depending on perspective, to the X-rated section.

The driver of this bus once started the route early in order to purchase coffee and donuts for the passengers. This practice has since been institutionalized into a sharing of this function, with



each row purchasing on a rotating basis, e.g., first row gets donuts today. The driver will stop the bus so that a representative from the row of the day can get off and make the purchase. One passenger, known as the "hostess with the mostess," serves as the purchasing coordinator.

The camaraderie extends to the driver. On his birthday a radio (prohibited by bus regulations), out of a corner of the bus, reports that No. 2 has just suffered a flat tire. Then the radio broadcaster announces "happy birthday" to the driver and plays the birthday song. At the same time, outside the bus, a regular rider who had "missed" the bus that day rides past on a motorcycle carrying a banner bearing birthday wishes (*Tulsa Daily World*, December 16, 1973).

Of course, the level of community on this express is not usually equaled on other buses. However, its existence and perseverance are noteworthy. In a less dramatic fashion encounters of an intimate nature are common on buses throughout the city. Bus riding can be considered a strategic arena and can reveal a great deal about the taken-for-granted knowledge and membership feelings of participants within a particular urban setting. Often the quality of lebenswelt is much more *gemeinlichshaftlich* than previously thought. Depending on the interrelationships among objective conditions of the scene, there is a degree of conduciveness to the acquisition of community in the phenomenon of bus riding.

## NOTES

1. Ethnographic descriptions of similar phenomena include Cavan's analysis of home-based bars (1966: 205-233). Although the bus rider's territory is much more flexible than the bar's location, claims of a public area as belonging to regulars occur among bus riders. The defense and management of the territory are less dramatic on the bus since crowdedness and "unfocused gatherings" (Goffman, 1961: 18) are common; nevertheless, riders do claim bus space as personal space and subsequent social organization around that space is documented in the present analysis. Henslin's (1972: 23) discussion of cab drivers notes that some riders become known to drivers and mutual trust characterizes this relationship. The relationship then often becomes the basis for further encounters such as contacts with prostitutes and gamblers.

"Charge customers" and "personals" are examples of regular riders (1972: 410). Spradley and Mann (1975) have identified the way in which language used to order a drink in a bar has meanings that vary with the degree of "belongingness" or "competency" in the social world of the bar. Bar behavior and cab riding, among regulars, appear to have many community-like features.

2. The field work for this paper was conducted from fall 1971 to spring 1974. Notes were taken in a systematic fashion. While on the bus, I took no notes. This was done to avoid drawing attention and affecting the ongoing interaction. Efforts to stay out of encounters were made, but in some cases this was impossible. Nevertheless, most observations were made from the vantage point of passive involvement, i.e., riding on the bus and observing the encounters of others. Immediately after getting off the bus, I took notes in as complete a form as possible. The length of the rides was usually short, 15 to 30 minutes, and recall was a relatively simple matter. Some observations in the present analysis were second-hand, through interviews with other bus riders and, in one case, as reported in the local newspaper. The study is, however, primarily participant observation.

3. *Lebenswelt*, or life-world, is used here to refer to the sphere of experiences that characterize a set of individuals circumscribed by objects, persons, and events encountered in the pursuit of the pragmatic objectives of bus riding. It is a world in which an individual is "wide awake" and which asserts itself as the "paramount reality" of his life associated with this particular activity. Schutz provides examples of analyses of such *lebenswelten* in his book on strangers, homecomers, and Tiresias (all can be found in Schutz, 1971).

4. Slosar (1973) has written an ethnographic account of bus drivers. He identified features of the drivers' behavior and attitudes through a detailed analysis of the language of the "society of bandits." He notes the designation of "old-timer" in reference to a driver's seniority and ability to run "hot," meaning the ability to manipulate conformity to transit authority rules to stay ahead of the schedule (Slosar, 1973: 344-346). Some of the practices identified by Slosar do affect the riders. For example, timing the bus depends on knowing whether the driver is "hot" or not, and the hailing of the bus will be more or less dramatic depending on the schedule time of the driver.

5. Henslin (1972: 22) treats how the driver determines whether an individual can be trusted to become his passenger or not in terms of interaction among three sets of considerations: (1) settings, (2) appearance, and (3) the manner of the performer. Bus drivers do not exercise as much discretion in the decision to stop or not as do cab drivers. The focus of the present analysis is on the riders' efforts to get the attention of the driver and to appear as a potential rider. Although there is a degree of "trust" in this decision, it is much more limited than in the cab-riding situation. The buses observed in this analysis operated only during the daylight hours and were highly visible in the sense that they traveled on or near heavily trafficked roads only. Thus, the problem of stopping the bus is not so much one of winning trust, but of getting attention and assuming a rider's stance.

6. Encounters on the bus refer to types of social arrangements that occur when persons are in one another's immediate physical presence. They involve a focus of attention and "'we rationale' is likely to emerge, that is, a sense of the single thing that we are doing together at the time. . . . Such encounters provide a communication base for a circular flow of feelings among the participants as well as corrective compensations for deviant acts" (Goffman, 1961: 18).

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