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Heritage versus History: Amish Tourism in Two Ohio Towns

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*With its wrap-around porch, extensive spindle work, and asymmetrical design,
Carlisle Village Inn sets the ornate Victorian theme in Walnut Creek.*

Photo by Gerald J. Mast; used by permission.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Heritage versus History

Amish Tourism in Two Ohio Towns

Susan Biesecker

I think we should show a kind, friendly, and meek spirit so that they will want to serve the same God we do. Maybe we can be a good witness and example to them.

—letter from an Amish writer in *Young Companion*

Home to the largest Amish settlement in the world, Ohio's Amish Country is visited by over a million tourists a year.¹ Only Cedar Point amusement park rivals Amish Country in its ability to attract tourists to an Ohio destination. Located in the northwest quadrant of the state about ninety miles southwest of Cleveland, Ohio's Amish Country attracts most of its tourists from elsewhere in Ohio.² However, as options for overnight lodging in the area have increased over the last decade, so too has the area's ability to draw tourists from neighboring and distant states.³ Wherever they come from, tourists to Ohio's Amish Country are a rather homogenous group. Although African American and Asian American tourists are some-

times seen in the area, the vast majority of tourists of Ohio's Amish Country are white, middle-aged (or more), middle Americans who typically drive late-model domestic SUVs or minivans and relax in modestly priced sports-wear often featuring American flags and Harley Davidson motorcycles.⁴

Ohio's Amish Country is blessed with a number of aesthetic advantages, including rolling hills, lush valleys, and clear streams, but the Amish serve as the distinctive draw for the area. As the introduction to this volume points out, the term "Amish" refers to a collection of ethnic-religious sects that take seriously the call not to be conformed to this world (Romans 12:1–2). Seeking to live in obedience to the teachings of Jesus, the Amish have developed a host of countercultural practices—from conscientious objection to war, to untrimmed beards, to four-hour worship services, to horse-drawn buggies—that distinguish them, often very visibly, from the broader culture in which they live.⁵ Their visibility as a plain, humble, and simple people is a primary reason that they have become a major attraction for twenty-first-century high-tech, patriotic, style-conscious tourists.

The way that tourists see the Amish, however, is not uniform throughout Ohio's Amish Country. This is because the contexts in which the Amish appear vary throughout the area. In some towns the Amish appear in the context of a great deal of mediation by the tourist industry. These "touristy" towns typically have many shops and restaurants that cater to tourists, offering them Amish-style food, Amish-made furniture, and images of Amish people and culture on everything from coffee mugs to T-shirts to shot glasses. In less touristy towns, the Amish appear in a context that caters to them more than to tourists. Generally, these towns are smaller and include fewer shops, restaurants, and trinkets.

Judging from the relative number of tourists who visit these two sorts of towns, tourists appear to prefer views of the Amish that are provided by more rather than less touristy venues. In this essay, I compare the views of Amish offered by two towns in Ohio's Amish Country. One town, Walnut Creek, is very popular among tourists; the other town, Mount Hope, is significantly less popular. Ultimately, I argue that Mount Hope is less popular than Walnut Creek largely because its representation of the Amish constitutes the tourist in ways that are less reassuring for middle Americans. But before I offer my readings of Walnut Creek and Mount Hope, I turn first to

some theoretical work on tourism that addresses the question of "authenticity," which is the apparent draw among tourists to the Amish.

Authenticity as Tourist Attraction

In his seminal work *The Tourist*, Dean MacCannell seeks to explain the dynamic of tourist attractions. To understand tourism, he argues, we must first recognize that tourism is always about contemporary culture, and more specifically, it is about the dominant mode of consciousness of that culture. Even when tourism focuses on the past, as in a museum of natural history or rock-'n'-roll, its attraction to visitors lies in the way it constructs and relates that past to the present and to the tourists of that present. For MacCannell, tourism is central to the experience and consciousness of modern people because it tells them about the cultural moment in which they live and who they are as subjects of that moment.⁶ It does so through a process of "differentiation" in which tourists are shown who they are by the ways that tourist attractions show them who they are not.⁷ That is, whenever tourists confront "the exotic," often in the form of persons of another culture, they learn something about who they are as "un-exotic," which is to say, "normal."

What counts as exotic within tourism is that which is most different from what is modern. A key characteristic of modern Western cultures, says MacCannell, is their relationship to reality, which is different from the relationship that premodern cultures have to reality. According to MacCannell, premoderns simply take things as they are. By contrast, moderns assume that there is always more than what meets the eye. Whereas premoderns are content to accept what they perceive on the surface of things, moderns are always looking underneath the surface for the deep structure or meaning of any phenomenon. For instance, while a premodern would be inclined to accept the words of another as a statement of, say, their intentions, a modern would tend to look beneath the explicit text of their speech for hidden motives, whether of conscious or unconscious origin. In this way, MacCannell argues, moderns have lost a simple relationship to the real. For moderns the real is always obscured by some mediation—words, an image, a set of behaviors, and so forth.

What tourism always offers, MacCannell argues, is a kind of return to that premodern relationship to the real through what he calls "the authentic." For MacCannell, the authentic is some phenomenon to which a modern can imagine having an unmediated relationship. In other words, the authentic is some person or thing that appears to present itself in a manner that hides nothing. So-called native peoples are often seen in this way—as authentic because they do not attempt to appear as other than they really are.⁸ According to MacCannell, then, what attracts modern tourists is the promise that a tourist site will provide what modern times cannot—namely, an unmediated experience of the real.

We might imagine a tourist experiencing unease in the face of the authentic, since the authentic could evoke dissatisfaction with modern life. But this is not so, says MacCannell, because tourism always *mediates* the authentic. Like all meaning-making systems, tourism never simply presents the authentic. Instead, it always re-presents the authentic in some particular manner.⁹ In modern times, tourism represents the authentic as always developmentally inferior to the modern.¹⁰ Compared to the modern subject who "knows" that reality never simply exists, the authentic is always represented as primitive, naive, or childlike. This representation of the authentic is reassuring for the modern tourist since it positions that tourist as more civilized, worldly, or mature.¹¹ Thus, the tourist's encounter with authenticity is rendered safe and pleasurable.¹²

If MacCannell's theory of tourism holds for Ohio's Amish Country, then the following would seem to be true. First, millions of middle Americans visit Ohio's Amish Country in order to see Amish who are visibly different so that they can better understand themselves. Second, when these modern middle Americans encounter the seemingly premodern Amish as exotic, they come to understand themselves as normal. Finally, in the context of tourism's representation of Amish as authentic (primitive), these middle Americans are confirmed in their self-understanding as comparatively advanced. Again, if MacCannell's theory is correct, then middle Americans who visit Ohio's Amish Country experience a pleasing reassurance about the superior character of their own lives.

MacCannell's explanation for the pleasure visitors experience at tourist sites is helpful for at least two reasons. First, it teaches us that we should

approach tourism as a complex system of signs that is significant for human beings insofar as it makes meaning of their world for them. Second, it alerts us to the value of studying tourism as a way to understand what makes sense or what shapes consciousness in contemporary culture. If we can understand the dynamics of tourism, MacCannell shows, we can better understand ourselves, our culture, and our world. With respect to tourism in Ohio's Amish Country, MacCannell's insights help us understand why the towns that appear to be most authentic (e.g., Mount Hope) are actually less popular with tourists than towns that offer the most obviously mediated experience, Walnut Creek being a prime example.

Walnut Creek's Victorian Theme

Walnut Creek, located just off the main east-west highway through Ohio's Amish Country, is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Ohio's Amish Country.¹³ Throughout the spring, summer, and fall, tourists can be seen waiting in long lines for a table at the "Amish-style" restaurant, filling up large parking lots with their vehicles, and keeping shopkeepers busy with their purchases.¹⁴ In addition to its popularity among tourists, Walnut Creek is distinguished by another feature: its Victorian theme. A bit like Main Street in Disney World, Walnut Creek has taken on a "look" that calls to mind a late-nineteenth-century Victorian-American town.¹⁵ Through architecture, interior design, landscaping, and merchandise, an environment has been constructed in Walnut Creek that invites the tourist to experience a selective memory of another time. In a book-length study of three popular tourist towns in Ohio's Amish Country, I write extensively about the construction of Walnut Creek's theme, the story it tells, and how that story may resolve key anxieties in the lives of middle-American tourists.¹⁶ For the purposes of this essay, what is needed is only a general sense of the theme and how that theme constructs Amish and positions tourists.

In the last decade or so, buildings in Walnut Creek have been demolished, constructed, expanded, and renovated so that a Victorian style has emerged throughout the town. Now nearly all of the buildings that house tourist businesses, whether they be inns, restaurants, or shops, display architectural features typical of the Queen Anne Victorian style that was pop-

ular during the last two decades of the nineteenth century in the United States.¹⁷ Thus, throughout the town can be seen asymmetrical building designs, walls set on angles, large gables, wraparound porches, and extensive spindle work. The interiors of these buildings further develop the theme, featuring saturated wall colors, floral wallpaper patterns, crown and dentil molding, lace window treatments, wicker furniture, and silk flowers. The prominence of flowers continues outdoors in extensive gardens through which curving footpaths meander around white gazebos. Finally, merchandise sold throughout the town includes elaborate tea and china sets; lace tablecloths, table runners, and valences; silk flower arrangements; garden statues; Thomas Kinkadee framed pictures, calendars, and throws depicting romantic village and garden scenes; and reproduction "Oriental" rugs. Thus, nearly everything that a tourist may see, smell, or touch around Walnut Creek, whether indoors or out, contributes to an experience of a Victorian-American setting.

Mount Hope's Jarring Juxtapositions

Mount Hope, which is located six miles north of the main east-west highway in Ohio's Amish Country, is not as popular among tourists as is Walnut Creek.¹⁸ Although the food is excellent at Mrs. Yoder's Kitchen, a line is rarely seen extending outside.¹⁹ In addition, Mount Hope has only two moderately sized parking lots at the restaurant as compared to the multiple large parking lots in Walnut Creek that were constructed to accommodate tourist buses and recreational vehicles. Moreover, unlike Walnut Creek, which supports two inns, Mount Hope offers only a few rooms for overnight lodging. Given the difference in tourist traffic between Walnut Creek and Mount Hope, it is not surprising that Walnut Creek recently installed a new traffic light to manage tourist traffic, whereas in Mount Hope a few stop signs at the main intersection continue to do the job.

Mount Hope differs from Walnut Creek not only in its lower volume of tourists but also in the fact that it does not convey a theme. Unlike Walnut Creek, Mount Hope displays no unifying architectural style. Although the architecture in the town is generally attractive and sometimes even award-winning, it does not call to mind a particular historical period as does Wal-



The Mt. Hope Fabrics and Gift Shoppe, which largely serves Amish customers, features a combination of colonial architecture and Victorian details.

Photo by Gerald J. Mast; used by permission.



nut Creek's.²⁰ Instead, Mount Hope features a wide variety of styles, the juxtaposition of which is sometimes jarring.

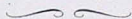
At the central intersection of the town sits a large, two-story building that is home to Mt. Hope Hardware. This vinyl- and cedar-sided building has a partial drop porch, a few small windows on the second floor, and two large display windows on the first floor. Catercorner from the hardware store sits a Victorian-style building that houses the Mt. Hope Fabrics and Gift Shoppe. Built in 1995, this two-story building features red brick and white siding as well as shutters, dentil molding, bay windows, dormers, and spindle work. By contrast, the post office across the street is housed in a simple nineteenth-century folk house that is painted white and has a drop porch.

About a block off the main intersection sits the distinctive Country Mart with its Swiss chalet-style white trim on the front gable and balcony. Just behind the Country Mart is the Mt. Hope Auction, which consists of a col-



Suggesting a Swiss chalet style, the Country Mart caters to Amish customers, offering basic groceries and an ice cream shop.

Photo by Gerald J. Mast; used by permission.



Mrs. Yoder's Kitchen displays relatively simple architecture—one story and cross-gabled, with shuttered windows and brick accents.

Photo by Gerald J. Mast; used by permission.



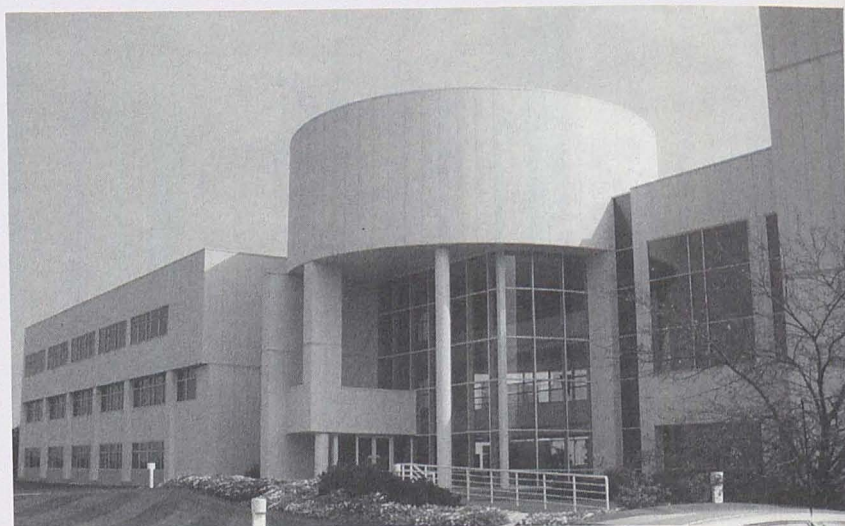


Some of the older buildings of the Mt. Hope Auction, like these stables through which animals are received for auction, are of simple wood construction.

Photo by Gerald J. Mast; used by permission.

lection of early-twentieth-century wooden barns and mid-century cement-block storage buildings. Across the street from the Auction is Mrs. Yoder's Kitchen, the "Amish-style" restaurant in town. First opened in 1994, this large, one-story, cross-gabled structure appears to mediate the differences between folk-style buildings and the Victorian-style fabric store with its beige vinyl siding accented with a bit of red brick, large windows, and gray shutters.

In sharp contrast to all of the other buildings in Mount Hope is the postmodern structure that is home to the corporate offices of Wayne-Dalton, a manufacturer of overhead garage doors.²¹ Constructed in 1992 of white panels manufactured in the plant next door, this 50,000-square-foot, three-story building consists of two large rectangular structures reminiscent of modern architecture that are disrupted by a two-story cutout in the back of the building and an almost cylindrical, three-plus-story entrance in the front. Like the cutout in the back, the entrance suggests both



Set in the context of a predominantly Amish community, the corporate headquarters of Wayne-Dalton provide a surprising example of postmodern architecture.

Photo by Gerald J. Mast; used by permission.



the solidity typical of modern architecture and the play of absence in post-modern structures as three-story columns break into the cylinder to create open space, and walls of windows suggest absence. As if to raise a question about its own identity, the structure's reflective windows mirror images of the houses, barns, and horses of Wayne-Dalton's Amish neighbors.²²

The diversity that characterizes the architectural styles in Mount Hope is echoed in the interiors of these buildings and the merchandise sold within them. The interior of the hardware store consists of large, brightly lit rooms. But the feeling of the store is cozy, with fairly narrow aisles of merchandise (including everything from kitchen utensils, to gas lamps, to hand-crank ice cream makers, to nuts and bolts) breaking up the space. The interior of the Mt. Hope Fabrics and Gift Shoppe is similarly spacious yet full and displays a mix of Victorian and modern features including dark cherry woodwork, floral print wallpaper, fluorescent ceiling fixtures, and

modular shelving. True to its name, the store offers many bolts of solid-color fabrics. In addition, it serves as a general store to the Amish, who can buy prayer coverings, felt hats, locally made broadfall trousers, and black bonnets there.

Just off that main intersection sits Marty's Shoes, which is housed in a simple two-story building that is lit internally by only the occasional bare light bulb powered by an outside generator. This store is tightly packed, with shoe and boot boxes stacked from floor to ceiling. Mrs. Yoder's Kitchen, which sits next to Marty's Shoes, seems huge by comparison, with its two large dining rooms separated by a long salad bar. Warmly lit with ceiling fixtures and decorated with floral prints, this restaurant offers hearty meals consisting of baked ham, roasted chicken, roast beef, real mashed potatoes, egg noodles, warm bread, and fresh-baked pie. Also just off the main intersection, but on the other side of the hardware store, sits the Mt. Hope Country Health Food Store, which is housed in another simple, one-story structure. The simplicity of its exterior is repeated in its interior, which is clean and plain, with its white ceiling tiles, fluorescent lighting, white metal modular shelving, and white vinyl floors. Inside can be found not only a wide variety of bulk foods such as flour, breakfast cereal, and nuts, but also aisles of vitamins and every sort of dried seed, leaf, and root.

Going beyond plain to almost primitive is the Mt. Hope Auction, which includes four areas: the livestock barn, the livestock auction room, a produce and egg auction room, and a diner. Throughout these spaces, interiors consist of a great deal of well-worn wood that was long ago fashioned into stalls, stepped seating areas, and walls. Little appears on the interior walls of the Mt. Hope Auction except a few advertisements for local businesses. Within these walls auctioneers sell a wide variety of animals—from horses, to calves, to camels—as well as produce, eggs, and baked goods.²³

In dramatic contrast to the livestock auction, the interior of the Wayne-Dalton corporate headquarters is sun-drenched, immaculately clean, and contemporary in style. The three-story entry space, for instance, consists of two three-story walls of windows at the front and the back of the building. On the ground floor, low-slung contemporary furniture forms a seating area, and indoor trees offer a bit of shade. Unlike the Mt. Hope Auction, which sells a mode of transportation from another era—namely,

the horse—Wayne-Dalton manufactures state-of-the-art garage doors and openers for residential and commercial customers.

Heritage versus History

With a sense of Walnut Creek's theme, on the one hand, and the preceding "virtual tour" of Mount Hope, on the other, a crucial difference between these two towns comes into view. Not only does Walnut Creek offer tourists a theme, but it also gives them a reassuring heritage. By contrast, Mount Hope offers no theme, instead providing indications of the complexities of history. In the remainder of this essay I want to explore the significance of this difference for the relative popularity of these two towns, for the way these towns are perceived as more or less authentic, for the way these towns figure the Amish, and finally, for the manner in which they position the tourist.

To say that Walnut Creek presents tourists with a theme is not only to say that it offers a unified look or style but also that it represents an alternative time and culture. Indeed, to move around Walnut Creek amid the restaurants, shops, inns, and gardens is to enter a well-planned and beautifully executed cultural memory of an era. All cultural memories are selective about what they include from the past, and Walnut Creek is no exception.²⁴ What is "remembered" in Walnut Creek about late-nineteenth-century American life is what is most pleasing, not just to the noses, eyes, fingers, and mouths of twenty-first-century tourists, but also to the psyches of those tourists. Thus, Walnut Creek's theme "remembers" charming architecture, quaint interiors, shaded porches, homemade food, and a slower pace. It does not "remember" other characteristics of late-nineteenth-century American life like labor disputes, mob lynchings, or war. Moreover, because Walnut Creek offers a cultural memory of an earlier time within American culture, it offers its middle-American tourists "a heritage." That is, it gives middle-American tourists a coherent and beautiful way to think about where they came from and thus who they are. As a people of such a beautiful and good past, middle-American tourists may be reassured of their own goodness.

In the context of Walnut Creek's theme, the Amish are figured as part

of this heritage. Many Amish work and live within or near Walnut Creek, so they regularly appear in town. Amish women can be seen waiting on or busing tables at the "Amish-style" restaurant; selling bread, pies, and cookies at the restaurant's attached bakery; or hand-dipping chocolates at the chocolate shop. Amish men can be seen passing through town on tractors hauling hay or in vans on their way to work. Amish families are often seen pulling their buggies up to the hitching post outside the local general store. Thus, Amish are seen in Walnut Creek doing the kinds of things that late-nineteenth-century Victorian Americans might have done—serving up comfort food, baking bread and pies, engaging in agricultural work, and riding around in horses and buggies. Figured by the context of Walnut Creek's theme, then, Amish appear to confirm the cultural memory that is constructed by the theme. If this is so, then the Amish people that move about Walnut Creek may appear to tourists more as cultural relics of a bygone America than as living contemporaries. Indeed, tourist comments confirm this possibility when they say that the Amish in Walnut Creek do not seem real.²⁵ Of course, Amish people in Walnut Creek *are* perfectly real. But figured in the context of an American heritage, they primarily signify as historically prior versions of middle-American tourists.

In contrast, although the various shops in Mount Hope offer tourists pleasant sights, interesting merchandise, and tasty food, they do not come together to form either a unifying theme or a heritage. They do not convey anything like a coherent sense about some prior cultural moment. They do not coalesce into a "memory" of who Americans used to be that may transport the tourist from the uncertainties of their everyday lives to a memory of a wonderful bygone era. To the contrary, the architecture, interiors, and merchandise of Mount Hope constitute a hodgepodge of visual references to nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century architectural styles; to agricultural, industrial, and post-industrial economies; to Swiss, Amish, and Victorian-American identities; to primitive, low, and high technology. To move through Mount Hope is not to enter into an experience of a coherent, beautiful, prior kind of life. Instead, it is to pass through a collage of contrasting cultural moments and styles that are not only different but perhaps even opposed to one another.

What tourists experience in Mount Hope, then, are the vivid signs of a

variety of human responses to the contingencies of history. For instance, they see efforts to sustain agricultural life alongside strategies for attracting tourists to "Amish Country," both of them nearby a successful enterprise in post-industrial manufacturing. In this way, Mount Hope's jarring juxtapositions signify, not as a memory of a shared heritage, but instead as reminders that the present is defined by tensions between older and newer ways of doing things that are responses to ever-changing exigencies. Importantly, then, what Mount Hope makes available for tourists are signs that, in fact, U.S. culture is not on a progressive trajectory from a primitive past to a developed present. Rather, it consists in a complex mix of economic and cultural factors that we all are obliged to negotiate. In sum, Mount Hope may be less popular among tourists because it has no unifying look, charming theme, or well-executed cultural memory and offers instead vivid references to a multiplicity of contrasting cultural moments. To put it another way, Mount Hope may see fewer visitors because it offers tourists precisely what they are *not* looking for: the contingency of history instead of the reassurance of heritage.

Many Amish live in and around Mount Hope, just as they do in Walnut Creek. Moreover, they can be seen doing many of the same sorts of activities in Mount Hope as in Walnut Creek, such as serving "Amish-style" food, selling bread and pies, and riding around in buggies pulled by horses.²⁶ But they may also be seen doing a fair number of other things like taking their livestock to auction, walking to a manufacturing or management job at Wayne-Dalton, picking out herbs and roots at the health food store, selling cowboy boots at Marty's Shoes, selecting a pair of broadfall pants at the fabric store, getting a slice of pizza at the Country Mart, and hauling their fruits and vegetables to a produce auction just outside of town.²⁷ In Mount Hope, then, it is not merely the case that there is no theme, no cultural memory, no heritage. Moreover, it is not just the case that the town offers visible indications of cultural tensions in the present. In addition, Amish seem to confirm those complexities as they are seen involved in activities associated with those many complexities. They are seen participating in tourism as they wait on tables, in agriculture as they auction their livestock and produce, and in post-industrial manufacturing as they go to work at Wayne-Dalton. Furthermore, throughout all this they are seen

maintaining an alternative lifestyle that involves buying prayer coverings, running generators, and driving horse-drawn buggies. Engaging in activities like these in a context that underscores the contingencies of the present, Amish people in Mount Hope do not signify as cultural relics. Instead, they figure as living contemporaries who, amid the exigencies of the present, are nevertheless living otherwise than middle Americans. This may explain why tourists are heard to say that the Amish in Mount Hope seem real—or at least more authentic.²⁸ Again, Amish people in Mount Hope are no more real than those in Walnut Creek. However, in a context that conveys a strong sense of the contingencies of history, which is to say, the conditions of the present, Amish people moving about Mount Hope may seem more authentic in the sense that they signify as a contemporary alternative to the lifestyles of middle-American tourists.

To confront a living alternative rather than a past relic may be less reassuring for middle-American tourists. Again, in Walnut Creek the differences of Amish life signify as part of a larger “memory” of middle-American heritage. Thus, the Otherness of Amish in Walnut Creek’s context is apt to represent a prior stage in the development of middle-American life. If this is so, then tourists may understand themselves as superior to Amish people, who are different only because they have not come as far along the road of cultural development. But Mount Hope does not offer a larger “memory” or story in which to situate both Amish and tourist. Instead, what tourists see in Mount Hope are their contemporaries, who are responding to the same exigencies of the present that middle Americans face but do so in markedly different ways. Thus, rather than reassuring tourists that they are not only normal but superior to the authentic Other, Mount Hope seems to offer a visibly viable alternative to middle-American life. Such an alternative may raise disconcerting questions for tourists as to whether their lifestyles are good by comparison. That may be especially true as tourists of Mount Hope enjoy themselves while observing an auction underway, browsing the hardware store, or eating a piece of fresh fruit pie. It is possible to live otherwise and with pleasure, Mount Hope seems to say. In the context of a seemingly intractable middle-American life, in which we are increasingly hard-pressed to get through the day without our mobile phones, this proposition may be unsettling indeed.²⁹

Conclusion

As I noted at the beginning of this essay, MacCannell argues that modern tourists want access to authenticity because the unmediated real is precisely what modern culture renders unavailable. To the extent that MacCannell remains right on this point, he helps us to understand that Ohio's Amish Country is such a popular destination for middle-American tourists because it offers authenticity, albeit mediated. But authenticity is not simple. Walnut Creek and Mount Hope attest to the fact that there are multiple versions of authenticity. Moreover, as we have seen, the differences between these two versions of authenticity are constructed by the context in which tourists encounter the Amish. In the case of Walnut Creek, tourists encounter Amish people as their predecessors from a past heritage. By contrast, in Mount Hope tourists encounter them as their contemporaries in a present alternative.

However premodern Amish people may appear, whenever they intersect with tourism they are mediated by the systems of signs that construct the tourist environment. Whether amid Walnut Creek's Victorian theme, or Mount Hope's jarring juxtapositions, or some other more or less touristy town in Ohio's Amish Country, Amish cannot help but be figured by the specific content of those environments. Thus, tourists never encounter Amish *as such* but only ever come into contact with *particular mediations* of Amish for the present.

This being so, we might be tempted to conclude that within tourism, the Amish are merely objects represented by others (like tourist business owners) to others (tourists) and never subjects in their own right, shaping the manner in which they will be understood or challenging the way middle Americans receive them. Tempting as such a conclusion may be, I think it is far too simplistic. I think that the Amish do signify beyond the figurations of tourist environments even within those environments. I argue that the Amish witness to an important alternative to middle-American life even within the context of tourism, especially when tourist environments encourage tourists to see Amish as contemporaries. When tourist environments allow tourists to see Amish people negotiating their particular commitments to community, humility, defenselessness, and discipleship

within the complex dynamics of contemporary culture, then the Amish speak to middle Americans out of their witness to the present reign of God. Such witness is, in fact, possible, even in environments that are a good deal more touristy than Walnut Creek. To be sure, such witness will be harder to see or hear whenever Amish are figured largely as relics from the past. Thus, the challenge to tourist business owners, many of whom share similar religious commitments with the Amish, is to construct tourist contexts that encourage the visibility and audibility of that witness—that enable tourists to see Amish people as living out a contemporary alternative.

If we think of the Amish only as objects constructed by a tourist environment, then we cannot see their potential for witness within tourism. Similarly, if we think of tourists only as passive receivers of the representations that tourism offers, then we oversimplify the relationship between tourists and that witness. It is all too easy to imagine that the middle-American tourist of Ohio's Amish Country happily and unwittingly accepts the representation of the Amish as a quaint and primitive sect. Moreover, it is all too easy to think that the Amish within the context of tourism can only remind us of the fine origins of mainstream American culture and help us to see that middle Americans are developmentally and culturally superior to those origins and are thus on a progressive historical trajectory. To be sure, this reception of a common representation of the Amish in Ohio's Amish Country occurs and may even be dominant. However, I think it is also the case, as media theorists have argued, that popular representations of American cultural life—whether they appear in a television show, an advertising campaign, or a tourist environment—only connect with an audience to the extent that they touch on some tension within the cultural experience of that audience.³⁰ If this is so, then even the tourist puzzled by the “peculiarities” of the Amish may be seen as available to the witness of the Amish—a witness that proclaims through daily visible actions the possibility of living in the contemporary world as a nonconformist people following Jesus' way of humble and defenseless service to one another.

Notes

Epigraph: “Let's Talk It Over,” *Young Companion*, September 1978, 257. *Young Companion* is published for an Amish readership by the Pathway Publishing Corporation in Aylmer, Ontario. For more information about Pathway, see chapter 9.

1. Estimates vary on the numbers of tourists that visit Ohio's Amish Country annually. According to one 1997 article, over a million tourists visit the Holmes County area every year, and tourist traffic increases by about 13 percent a year (George M. Kreps et al., "The Impact of Tourism on the Amish Subculture: A Case Study," *Community Development Journal* 32 [1997]: 360). However, based on a 1998 unpublished study of tourist traffic conducted on behalf of the Holmes County Chamber of Commerce, Pat Brown, executive director, estimates that around four million tourists visit the area annually; see George Kreps and Shirley Lunsford, "1998 Holmes County Traffic Count Survey" (1998). For purposes of comparison, I note that the Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, settlement, which has a smaller Amish population but a longer history of tourism, sees about four million tourists annually. See Donald B. Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 10.

2. Of all the cars that pass through Holmes County that are not from either Holmes or Wayne counties (two adjacent counties considered to be part of the Ohio Amish settlement), 88 percent are from other Ohio counties. See Kreps and Lunsford, "1998 Holmes County Traffic Count Survey."

3. License plates indicate that visitors come from Pennsylvania, Florida, Michigan, West Virginia, and Indiana.

4. By "middle American" I mean Americans who are probably middle class, but might also be working class, and who think of themselves as belonging to the large group of Americans who, to borrow from Bill Clinton's rhetoric, "work hard and play by the rules."

5. For an account of Amish theology as lived in daily practice, see John S. Oyer, "Is There an Amish Theology? Some Reflections on Amish Religious Thought and Practice," in *The Amish: Origin and Characteristics, 1693–1993*, ed. Lydie Hege and Christoph Wiebe (Ingersheim: Association Francaise d'Histoire Anabaptiste-Mennonite, 1996), 278–99.

6. In this sentence I use "modern" to designate people of the contemporary moment—twenty-first-century people. I am not trying to mark a distinction between, say, modern and postmodern people. As indicated in his introduction to the 1989 edition of *The Tourist*, MacCannell was theorizing tourism for the modern subject—that is, the subject of modernity specifically. More recently, John Urry and others have sought to theorize tourism for postmodern subjects. Both MacCannell's theorizations about the modern and Urry's and others' postmodern revisions come into play in this essay since postmodernity includes modern features. See Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), ix–xx. See also John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage Publications, 1990), and Jonathan Culler, "Semiotics of Tourism," *American Journal of Semiotics* 1 (1981): 127–40.

7. See MacCannell, *The Tourist*, 13.

8. As Dirk Eitzen shows in chapter 2 of this volume, this distinction between premodern and modern consciousness may be easier theorized than seen. Although this distinction may not ultimately hold, it remains helpful for thinking

about tourism because it clarifies what draws many tourists: the promise of an unmediated relationship to the real.

9. Of course, as MacCannell notes, inherent in tourism is a paradox: tourism promises what it cannot deliver (unmediated access to the real). This is a paradox, since tourism is, precisely, mediation. Nevertheless, that is the promise and that, according to MacCannell, is what attracts the tourist (*The Tourist*, 105–106).

10. *Ibid.*, 83.

11. *Ibid.*, 7–9.

12. *Ibid.*, 3.

13. According to the traffic study, on a spring day in 1998, 1,872 cars, 16 buses, and 11 recreational vehicles moved through Walnut Creek. Those numbers are second only to those of Berlin, a town just west of Walnut Creek (1,924, 17, and 10). See Kreps and Lunsford, “1998 Holmes County Traffic Count Survey.”

14. Der Dutchman can seat five hundred people in the restaurant and another five hundred in dining facilities located in the lower level of the nearby inn. At the peak of the season on a Saturday, Der Dutchman serves between 3,500 and 4,000 customers in a day, according to the office manager of Der Dutchman (interview with author, 18 January 2005).

15. For scholarly treatments of Walt Disney World's themes, see Project on Disney, *Inside the Mouse: Work and Play at Disney World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

16. I am describing a work that is nearing completion and that is tentatively titled *Tourist Attraction: The Visual Rhetorics of Tourism in Ohio's Amish Country*.

17. For a description of the Queen Anne style of Victorian architecture popular in late-nineteenth-century America, see Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 262–87.

18. The traffic study indicated that only 683 cars, 10 buses, and no RVs passed through Mount Hope—about one third of Walnut Creek's numbers. Interestingly, the traffic study also indicates that about three and a half times as many buggies pass through Mount Hope as pass through Walnut Creek. See Kreps and Lunsford, “1998 Holmes County Traffic Count Survey.”

19. Mrs. Yoder's Kitchen can serve up to 225 people at a time, and on a Saturday during the peak of the season, about 2,000 customers are served in a day. This is obviously a large number, but it is only about half the number served at Der Dutchman in Walnut Creek on a similar Saturday (Gloria Yoder, interview with author, 3 January 2005). Gloria Yoder is owner of Mrs. Yoder's Kitchen.

20. Wayne-Dalton, a manufacturer of garage doors, won an award for the architectural design of its corporate headquarters located just a block off the square. See Eli H. Bowman, *Mt. Hope: A Pictorial History, 1824–1999* (Walnut Creek, OH: Carlisle, 1996), 319–20.

21. Bowman, *Mt. Hope: A Pictorial History*, 320. See also Wayne-Dalton, *Tradition* [web page] (2005 [accessed January 4, 2005]); available from www.wayne-dalton.com/AboutUs.asp. For a description and analysis of postmodern architecture, see Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas*:

The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

22. For photographs of postmodern architecture displaying these characteristics, see Mary Ann Sullivan, *Digital Imaging Project: Art Historical Images of Sculpture and Architecture from Pre-Historic to Post-Modern* (2004); available from www.bluffton.edu/~sullivanm/index3.html (accessed January 17, 2005).

23. The animals sold at the weekly Wednesday auction include the more typical horses, calves, and rabbits. At regular exotic animal auctions, camels, llamas, and ostriches are also sold, according to Steve Mullet, owner of the Mt. Hope Auction (interview with author, 30 December 2004).

24. See Kendall R. Phillips, *Framing Public Memory: Rhetoric, Culture, and Social Critique* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004).

25. Gloria Yoder, interview with author, 3 January 2005.

26. According to Gloria Yoder, the town is not centered on tourists but focuses on serving local customers, most of whom are Amish.

27. A longtime Amish employee of Wayne-Dalton informed me that while most Amish employed at Wayne-Dalton are involved in manufacturing, some are in management (Amish informant, interview with author, 30 December 2004).

28. Gloria Yoder, interview with author, 3 January 2005.

29. To be sure, there are multiple causes for the relative popularity of Walnut Creek and Mount Hope. The fact that Walnut Creek sits just a stone's throw from State Route 39 is one of the more obvious explanations. In this chapter I have offered an additional explanation—one that pays close attention to the dynamics of cultural representation in the context of tourism.

30. For an example of this theoretical view, see John Fiske, *Media Matters: Everyday Culture and Political Change* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).