“Nothing Quaint About That”
The Formulation of the Amish Country Tourist Experience

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Dozens of tourists pour out of a bus parked outside of Riehl’s Quilts and Crafts in Lancaster, Pennsylvania on a sunny day in November. Exclaiming over the animals, the views of expansive farmland, and the playing children dressed in traditional Amish garb, some immediately take a seat on one of the numerous, welcoming rocking chairs lining the storefront. The rest push in through the small doorway that leads to the store, growing quiet as they enter. The room is large, filled with a wide variety of goods for sale, slightly musty, and dimly lit by the sun. The only sounds are those of murmuring tourists, excited over the novelty of pressurized gas lanterns on the walls, and the flipping of guidebook pages on Lancaster County. A young Amish woman works the cash register, surrounded by replica dolls and souvenirs. After purchasing goods, tourists mill about with shopping bags, waiting to return to the bus to experience the next Amish-themed attraction.

Look again, and the Amish woman whose culture rejects technology swipes your credit card, products purchased in an Amish craft store bear the Crayola brand, and Lancaster County souvenirs are made in China. The Amish family whose fascinating values clash directly with those of consumerism garners a significant profit from selling its own culture to the very people it fascinates. These and other endless contradictions bubble to the surface, blaring yet somehow rendered irrelevant, not disrupting the reverie of the visit to a quaint Amish farm. This phenomenon, playing out in the heart of Amish Country, begins with a Google search for a tourist website.

The future Lancaster County tourist looking for an online resource to plan his or her trip will most likely visit PADutchCountry.com. Advertising hundreds of varying attractions, including Riehl’s Quilts and Crafts, it nonetheless maintains an Amish theme; a human culture that is fascinating for the very reason that it traditionally shuns
consumerism. Here, a paradox is quickly evident; while self-exultation (in this case, as the means to a profit) is the essence of tourism advertising, it is also, in the traditional Amish belief system, the very basis of evil (Kraybill 1989). This resistance to self-exultation is a well-known symbol of the Amish, in turn contributing to their status as a remarkable tourist attraction.

But while this incongruity is as flamboyant as its advertisement medium, it is a contradiction that the Lancaster County tourist industry has so brilliant resolved. Dissonance a visitor should feel while “experiencing” the Amish, consciousness of the paradox of a consumption-shunning, self-isolating people who are for this very reason a tourist attraction, is precluded by the voice of advertising. A very small minority of visitors is indeed horrified by the commercialism that they see in Lancaster. However, even their understandings have been shaped by the rhetoric of tourism, priming them from the first click on PADutchCountry.com. Containing hundreds of useful links, itinerary suggestions, information pages, and coupons for the convenience of the Amish Country traveler, how does PADutchCountry.com, the likely planning tool of almost all Amish Country tourists, work to sell the Amish Country tourist experience? How is it possible to manipulate and overcome the contradictions inherent in the consumption of a people who traditionally avoid all consumption, self-promotion, and even the influence of the outside world?

In this essay, I explore the advertising rhetoric of the Lancaster County tourism website, the tourist experience within Lancaster County, and the inculcation of tourists into this rhetoric. I argue that the online arm of the Lancaster tourist industry uses advertising to form and shape tourist experiences. The advertising of Amish Country Lancaster Pennsylvania utilizes a highly effective, nostalgic Americana rhetoric that plays on a
modern longing for the past. In Lancaster itself, guided by the tourist website, this desire for the “past” is translated directly into consumption of signs and representations (Baudrillard 1983) with the Amish acting as a symbolic figurehead. In this process, tourists of Lancaster County are successfully inculcated into understanding their Amish Country tourist experience within this specific framework, regardless of whether they feel that their experience lived up to the promises made to them by Lancaster advertising.

Background

**History of the Amish**

From their earliest origins, separation has been the main defining characteristic of the Amish people. The development of the Amish faith can be traced back to the sixteenth-century, when a group of young radicals decided that the Protestant Reformation led by Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland was progressing too slowly. Believing that infant baptism should be forbidden because of the infant’s inability to understand and accept the Christian church, they performed re-baptisms that spurred violent conflicts with civil and religious authorities. Staunch in their beliefs and wishing to organize themselves, they formed a church that was to live apart from the world, rejecting violence and military participation. After 1525, the so-called Anabaptists (or re-baptizers) were persecuted for their religious beliefs (Kraybill and Nolt 2004). The nascence of the Amish was wrapped in turmoil and violence. This history is vividly remembered in the community and serves as a consistent influence and reminder of the difficulties that the originators faced for their religious beliefs. For the Amish, every choice is to adhere to the original religious values of their ancestors.
These dissident origins and commitment to separation remain important in every decision made pertaining to the Amish lifestyle. The community follows the *Ordnung*, which is a set of rules that regulate life. This includes taboos about dress, worldly luxuries, and many forms of transportation. Major transgressions of the *Ordnung* are enforced by the *Meidung*, which is the "shunning," or excommunication from the church. This may be reversed with a confession, depending on the seriousness of the crime. Though the *Meidung* may seem at odds with Amish values of community, it helps to keep the Amish community separate and stable. It is used infrequently, and there is much effort made to bring back excommunicated members in order to confess and rejoin the community. At the same time, it allows a banishment of all sinners away from the community, enabling the Amish to remain isolated in their strict belief system and way of life (Walbert 2002). Separation from many aspects of the outside world remains critical to the Amish lifestyle and conscious decisions are constantly made to uphold this separation. This deliberate detachment is at odds with the popular understanding of Amish Country as a tourist destination, and raises important questions about the depiction of Amish culture in advertising.

**The Amish in Lancaster**

Though there are over 900 Amish communities across North America, differences between these communities are overshadowed by common symbols such as the horse-and-buggy, Pennsylvania-German dialect, bearded men, capped women, plain dress and limited education. The Amish, universally, believe in strong family life and communal values. Pride and emotionality are seen as undesirable in the service of the greater community. Though in many ways the Amish remain separate from the outside world, they are not
impermeable to change. While the Lancaster Amish are thought of primarily as farmers in popular culture (especially since the 1980s) they have turned to cottage industries and small businesses, and this has tied them to a larger economic structure (Kraybill 1994). Furthermore, they must comply with certain governmental codes and regulations (for example, horse-and-buggy taillights). Selective in its portrayal of modern Amish culture, the advertising website promotes and plays on the notion that the Amish are symbolic of the generalized American past, pointedly ignoring any adaptations to modernity as well as a unique history.

The Emergence of Amish Tourism

The development of Amish Country as a tourist destination began in the 1930s. In 1935, an issue of the magazine *Travel* contained an article actively promoting Lancaster County as a tourist destination, relating Amish Country travel stories. Tourist booklets began to be published in 1937, as entrepreneurs began to realize the possibilities of capitalizing on the growing interest in the Amish people. That same year, the Lancaster County Amish refused a $45,000 grant from the Public Works Administration to build a school, because they wanted to retain their traditional one-room schoolhouses. Particularly because the Depression was just then ending, the public was shocked by the refusal of money. News coverage increased, and interest in the Amish grew. The notion that the Amish would make a decision to resist progress and self-improvement was impossible to comprehend, and, as they are now, tourists were fascinated by the Amish refusal of progress and worldly success.

Shortly after, 1940 saw the opening of the Pennsylvania Turnpike, which included an exit near Amish Country. Post World War II prosperity boosted the economic means of
many Americans, allowing people to buy automobiles and travel. Amish tours began to be offered, and more and more people began to regard Lancaster as a tourist destination. Tourism increased, spurring an increased production of tourist materials such as booklets and books about the Amish (Luthy 1994). Apart from materials solely devoted to tourism, the interest of the media played a key role, reaching thousands of people with depictions of Amish life. 1940 saw the beginning of motion pictures about the Amish, but the huge turning point in Amish tourism resulted from the 1985 release of Witness, a Harrison Ford film set in Amish Country and viewed by millions.

Tourism is now integral to the economy of Lancaster County. Since 1981, 3.5 to 5 million visitors both individually and in groups have come to the county yearly. Today, many Amish have become an integral part of the tourist industry by creating products for sale. This is economically necessary for many families, because with the expansion of the overall county population, farmland is no longer available for everyone, and farmland prices have risen. Tourism has put pressure on the Amish to adapt. For example, roadside and craft stands are beginning to include parking lots for the convenience of tourist customers. Furthermore, attractions in Lancaster County have diversified since the 1960s, when tourism boomed. The prime example of this is the creation of Dutch Wonderland, a family theme park. In the 1980s and 1990s, extensive development of factory outlet stores such as Rockvale and Millstream, with horse-and-buggy integrated in the logo and farmstead motif with buildings and silos respectively, were built along Route 30 east of Lancaster. Besides these symbolic nods to Amish Country, neither factory outlet center is associated in any significant way with the Amish (Hovinen 1995).

This diversification has raised concerns. In 2005, the Lancaster County Planning Commission developed a “Comprehensive Plan” after community leaders expressed
concern about future economic returns from tourism in Lancaster, based on the diversification of tourism (www.co.lancaster.pa.us “The Strategic Tourism Development Element”). Some attractions were viewed as disrupting the Amish imagery that Lancaster County tourism depends on (for example, the aforementioned outlets). The increase in tourism, the diversification of attractions, the Amish adaptation to modernity, and, of course, the increasing tourist dependence on the Internet to plan vacations are all interrelated phenomena that have led to the current condition of Lancaster County tourism. The Amish have remained fascinating for decades, but Lancaster tourism is increasingly complex, with many interrelated factors that have and will continue to change and adapt.

Methods

My research design has three components, chosen to simulate a typical Lancaster tourist experience. First, I explore and analyze PAdutchCountry.com, chosen because it is listed as the first four Google search results for Lancaster County Amish Tourism and is the main Lancaster County tourism website, thus likely the most trafficked of its kind. The Internet is an essential tool for gathering information about future travel. Utilizing the Internet as a travel-planning tool is both convenient and inexpensive, requiring no intermediary such as a travel agent. In a study from 2006, ninety-three percent of people who use the Internet indicated that they had visited a tourism website (Bing and Fesenmaier 2006). Thus, most Lancaster County tourists will find a tremendously extensive resource in PAdutchCountry.com. Advertising amusement parks, restaurants, and shopping outlets, the site is also littered with the popular symbols of the Amish, the famous shunners-of-progress. I analyze the symbols and word choices in order to understand the advertising strategy employed by the tourism advertising website.
Second, I continue to simulate a typical trip to Amish Country as I visit Lancaster and follow an itinerary suggested by PADutchCountry.com. In order to sample randomly, I chose the first viable itinerary choice offered. My website path was “Amish & Heritage,” followed by the first single-day option, “Amish & Heritage Itinerary” (PADutchCountry.com “Amish and Heritage Itinerary”). This, for reasons unclear, was also split into “day” options, but did not include lodging information, so I was able to follow the itinerary precisely. This allows me to examine the translation of advertising rhetoric into on-site consumption that occurs within Lancaster.

Finally, in order to understand the effectiveness of advertising rhetoric, I systematically analyze both positive and negative reviews of Lancaster County tourism on TripAdvisor.com, chosen because it is the first Google search result for Lancaster County reviews. I also do a systematic analysis of every tenth review in order to find thematic patterns in the written understanding of the reviewer experience. This analysis helps elucidate to what extent tourist experiences were framed by the rhetoric.

**Literature Review**

A significant amount of Amish scholarship focuses on the Amish and impacts of tourism on Amish society (Boynton 1986, Hovinen 1995, Kraybill & Nolt 1994, Kreps, Donnermeyer, Hurst, Blair, & Kreps 1997, and Kraybill 2001). However, these and other scholars recognize that the nature of tourism in Amish Country is distinctive because of its main attraction: a human culture. Donald B. Kraybill (2001), prolific scholar of Anabaptism, argues that special issues arise from the tourism of the Amish as a human culture. He draws on Goffman’s front-stage and backstage theory in order to understand the role of commercial tourist attractions in Lancaster as the front-stage of Amish Country. Focusing
on understanding the tourist impact on the Amish, he argues that this works to keep tourists within boundaries in order to stop them from disturbing Amish life, as well as providing services that tourists may desire, such as a venue in which it is appropriate to ask candid questions about the Amish without feeling uncomfortable.

Describing a very different tourist experience, Thomas J. Meyers (2003) argues that it is the Amish *label*, along with all of its symbolic meaning that is being sold in a commoditization of culture. Meyers (2003), studying Amish Country tourism in northern Indiana, uses hundreds of interviews with tourists in order to understand the tourist quest, which he argues is not to understand the Amish, but in order to shop for things that have an Amish brand associated with them. Disagreeing with Kraybill, Meyers (2003) argues that there is no interest in the “backstage” of the Amish, besides a vague desire to bring home the “aura” of the Amish with the purchased goods and souvenirs. Kraybill (2001), on the other hand, does not dismiss the tourist desire to “experience” the Amish culture, even if the tourist is content to remain in the front-stage.

Agreeing with Kraybill (2001), Susan Trollinger (2012) disagrees with Meyers’ conclusion that Amish Country tourists leave with nothing but a surface-level understanding of the culture and shopping bags. In a fifteen-year study of a popular Amish tourism destination in Ohio, she extends the argument that there is value that comes out of a tourist experience in Amish Country. She argues that Amish Country tourism creates meaning for tourists who are “in search of answers” (about how to live a life that is not so consumerist, fast-paced, harried, stressful etc.), and that the meaning it generates is important to those who visit. In her findings, visitors to Amish Country appear to feel influenced in their self-understandings and aspirations for the future because of their
meaningful encounters with the Amish culture. The Amish remain strange, and this stronghold of strangeness allows for a challenge to the tourist’s understanding of the world. The Amish voice is heard through their very existence; the obvious departure of their lives from the lives of the tourists that visit them and the tourist industry that supports the visit.

The vision of the Amish as a potential model for the future, what Trollinger believes affects tourists on a deep level, is echoed in Marc A. Olshan’s (1994) “Modernity, the Folk Society, and the Old Order Amish.” Both Olshan (1994) and Trollinger (2012) neglect a full analysis of the participation of the Amish in tourism, which Donald B. Kraybill and Steven M. Nolt (2004) empirically explicate in *Amish Enterprise: From Plows to Profits*. This involvement in tourism complicates the vision of an Amish stronghold against the rest of America. While the Amish do make conscious, religiously rooted choices about their way of life, Kraybill and Nolt (2004) argue that they are not impervious to change. The importance of the profit that tourism brings to the Amish, many of whom can no longer purchase farmland, is important to comprehend. Even for the Amish, touted as the stronghold of so-called American values, lifestyle changes are made as a result of economic pressures. Even despite the self-imposed limitations on and distance from many aspects of modern society, Amish participation in the enormously consumption-driven industry of tourism implicates them in playing a very key role in the capitalistic society against which they are meant to serve as a model. This role is widely and purposefully ignored by the advertising of Lancaster County.

Much scholarly work on tourism in Amish Country is focused on the tourist experience: in what ways the tourist gains valuable insight in or desires a real understanding of the strange, fascinating human culture of the Amish (Kraybill 2001,
Trollinger 2012), or is simply interested in purchasing the Amish label (Meyers 2003). The debate that exists in current Amish tourism literature is based around how the tourist experiences Amish Country, be it having a valuable encounter with the strange or enjoying a unique shopping experience. However, this approach leaves questions to be answered. From where has the belief that the Amish have the answer to living a better life come? Would these surface-level interactions create “meaning” without prior ideas of what the Amish should represent? What image and values do the Amish represent, and how is this constructed?

Unlike the aforementioned scholars, I will approach these questions from the origin of this experience for many contemporary tourists: the tourism website. I will then position myself as a tourist and experience how advertising is translated into consumption within Lancaster County. Finally, I analyze the end product: the language of personal tourist experiences as described by the patrons of the online travel forum. This approach allows me to understand how tourism, framed by online resources, plays out on and off-site. I choose to examine Lancaster because it has one of the most developed tourist industries in any Amish area of the United States (Chabra 2010). How does the symbolism and language of the Lancaster tourism website play on nostalgia? How does it mediate the Amish tourism experience within Lancaster? Is the rhetoric of the tourism website adopted by the tourists who visit? These questions are all facets of the main question that I explore in my essay: what does online advertising, coupled with the fulfillment of the typical advertised itinerary, reveal about the Amish Country tourist experience?

I. PADutchCountry.com: Rhetoric

The rhetoric of PADutchCountry.com employs symbols and carefully selected vocabulary to frame the Amish Country tourist experience as a foray into heritage and the
past, standing in opposition to the speed and technologically advanced present-day. Urry (2002:14) writes, “Tourism necessarily involves daydreaming and anticipation of new or different experiences from those normally encountered (...) But such dreams are not autonomous; they involve working over advertising and other media-generated sets of signs.” Today, this daydreaming often begins on the tourist website, accessible from any Internet-capable device, where signs are established and heavily reinforced. Daydreams about travel are based on desire, and the tourist website determines and promotes the specific symbols that appeal to its audience, in this case, the symbolism of Americana.

While traditional Amish dress, rural farmland, lack of electricity, quilts, and handmade items are all symbols of the Amish represented on PADutchCountry.com, the main symbol associated with Lancaster County advertising is the horse-and-buggy. While PADutchCountry.com advertises multifarious attractions of Lancaster, Amish-themed tourism is the central theme and driving force of all advertisement. This is immediately obvious from the logo, which features the words “Lancaster County”, written in script despite being positioned on a website. The script symbolizes Amish resistance to modern technology, and evokes a past without keyboards or even the printing press, ironically, because the printing press allowed for the widespread availability of the Bible. The logo is in white script, with a horse-and-buggy silhouette juxtaposed in-between the two words. The horse-and-buggy is an especially important and potent symbol, and is accordingly incorporated six times into the front page of the website. Trollinger (2012:60) argues, “As the archetypal sign of Amish life, the horse-and-buggy signifies a slow pace of life in which nothing is or can be rushed.” The proliferation of horse-and-buggy symbols and images on the front page of the site is more than a reminder of a possible activity in Lancaster. As the “archetypal sign” of Amish life, it acts as a symbolic object. Exploring the implications of the
semiotic paradigm on tourism research, Echtner (1999: 49) writes, “(O)bjects are also commonly infused with symbolic meaning. For instance, the Statue of Liberty is used to symbolize freedom and the American way of life (...) when used extensively... they can become symbols.” In the repetition of this symbol, especially on a website devoted to tourism, the horse-and-buggy comes to represent not only Amish life but also slowness, relaxation, family, and lifestyles of the past.

There are several ways in which the horse-and-buggy acts as a successful symbol. First, it is a rare sight today, and can thus retain novel symbolic status. Second, it is a very literal symbol, because buggies move slowly, and this slowness is one of the most important tools of Amish tourism advertising. While a recognizable feature of technology is that it gets faster and faster, horses do not. Thus, while our cars may have gotten significantly faster over time, the buggy moves at the exact same pace that it did many years ago.

Third and perhaps more importantly, it is reminiscent of the American past in a way that another Amish symbol, such as the Martyr’s Mirror (the book recounting the persecution faced by early Anabaptists, an item even more explicitly Amish), might not be. The horse-and-buggy stands not only for an Amish past, but also an American past. While PAdutchCountry.com emphasizes the Amish as its central theme, a theme that colors any and all other attractions that may otherwise be unrelated, the actual experience being sold is the experience of the nostalgic past. In truth, the Amish have long been different, always a minority, even at a time when horse-and-buggy was a common form of transportation. Lancaster tourism advertising largely ignored this dissident history. Instead, manipulating better-known Amish symbols and cultural values, it actively links the Amish with the American past in order to construct the Amish as a nostalgic signifier of Americana, a
culture that is somehow preserved in time, despite the changing of the world around it. Writing about the Ohio Amish, Trollinger (2012:110) argues, “(T)he Amish appear to visitors as innocent technologically, socially, and politically. They seem to be living proof that it is possible, even in this (...) twenty-first century high-tech culture, to regain innocence in the United States”. However, the Amish make conscious lifestyle choices based on religious beliefs; they are not magically separate from the rest of America. Advertising does not push the possibility that the Amish are living an innocent lifestyle that is an actual option, a lifestyle to emulate forever. Instead, the Amish are constructed as a pleasant oddity to visit in order to experience, for a short time, the nostalgia of the past. The Amish are both strange, to be visited and then left behind, and comforting, representing the American past with which tourists are so familiar. Echoing this sentiment and using poetic yet digestible language, the front page of the site reads, “Escape from the stress of a fast-paced life and linger in Pennsylvania Dutch Country, where there’s no fast lane.” (PADutchCountry.com “Homepage”). Tourists are made to understand their own lives as stressful, with life in Amish Country as a foil, a place unlike any other in modern America, a place with “no fast lane”. Roy Buck (1978) in his analysis of tourist brochures argues, “Publications aimed at tourists portray visitors as world-weary products of soul-deadening work, idle fun, and amusement fostered in artificial urban surroundings. Seized by languor and longing, they come to Amish Country for a glimpse of a way of life lost or forgotten” (164). Though Buck analyzes brochures in the 1970s, PADutchCountry.com uses this exact tactic to entice tourists to visit a place stuck in the past, claimed to be a short-term solution to the unhappiness of the present real world.

The words chosen to describe various aspects of Lancaster County by the website further reinforce the possibility of escape from modern life, and create a myth of Amish
tourism that is produced before a tourist steps foot in Amish Country at all. This myth is bound up in illusions of authenticity and heritage. The vocabulary utilized by the website includes, from the homepage: *heritage (twice), getaway, families together, small-town (twice), homemade, tucked into rolling Amish farmland, oldest, history, quaint.* From the specific itinerary of my Amish Country tourist experience: *handmade, transported, family-style, pass around heaping platters, long tables* (PADutchCountry.com “Homepage,” “Amish &Heritage Itinerary”). These terms signify family values, such as the sharing of a family dinner, as well as a “getaway” to the past where items were handmade and time passed slowly. Any specific values of the Amish culture that might conflict with nostalgia for the generic American past are left out. There is, after all, no mention of *limited education, shunning, Ordnung, or even religion.* Vocabulary of oldness, of heritage, slowness, simplicity, countryside, family, and craft frames the Amish Country tourist experience as an escape from the modern-day urban life with technology, speed, individualism and progress, and plays on the nostalgia for the past, a past that is not specifically Amish at all. As Bryan S. Turner (1987) argues:

(T)he nostalgic paradigm is a persistent and prevalent feature of western culture, in literature, art, medical history and social theory. The nostalgic mood is of particular importance in contemporary cultures in association with the loss of rural simplicity, traditional stability and cultural integration following the impact of industrial, urban, capitalist culture on feudal social organization (P.152)

Through its rhetoric, PADutchCountry.com offers a tourist experience that is capable of fulfilling nostalgic desire, if only for a short period of time. Rural simplicity and traditional stability are desires for the past packaged neatly into the symbolism and vocabulary of the website, which promises an escape. As Buck (1978:165) argues, “(T)he Amish country provides nostalgic retreat. Manufactured and staged nostalgic attractions and attendant services intermix with the local agriculture and village landscape providing a convenient
and efficient change of pace." However, this image of a nostalgic retreat is deftly developed long before the tourist steps foot in Lancaster County.

The use of the Amish as an umbrella symbol allows this advertising technique a human referent, which makes the message all the more powerful. One’s nostalgia for the past is literally embodied in people: real, authentic humans, whose old-fashioned lifestyle is supposedly not at all lived for the benefit of an audience. PADutchCountry.com works to capitalize on this notion. At the top of the page describing the “Amish Lifestyle” in large print reads, “The PA Amish lifestyle has remained largely unchanged since they settled in Lancaster County 300 years ago.” The page ends with the suggestion, “Learn more about the Pennsylvania Amish Lifestyle by (hyperlink) visiting our Amish attractions” (PaDutchCountry.com “Amish Lifestyle”). While this page might seem to give the website depth in the form of facts, it primarily works to establish the Amish as a real community of people who live this way outside of the influence of tourism or other social forces, uncontrived and impervious.

While many films, artworks, and even historical reenactments might come close to accurately depicting the life that modern Americans are nostalgic for, the notion of the Amish as a community of real people going about their lives is enticing, allowing for a feeling of authenticity that fulfills nostalgic desire more effectively. This imagination of the Amish begins with the rhetoric of advertising, which in utilizing specific symbols and vocabulary is deliberate in creating a frame through which to understand the Amish Country tourist experience of Lancaster as a fulfillment of this desire, offering the pleasure of Americana as a short escape from the stresses of modern life. This framework of the past as manufactured by PADutchCountry.com creates an anticipation of a new and different experience for future tourists, but this new experience is steeped in the familiar.
II. **Amish and Heritage Itinerary: The Transition from the Virtual Resource to On-Site Tourist Experience**

My understanding of the translation from advertising to consumption in Lancaster uses PADutchCountry.com as an authority. Choosing a itinerary featured on the site and following it completely, I am able to experience Amish Country tourism as guided by its most important tourism website. The itinerary is a list of three activities that are meant to fill a single day in Lancaster County. The activities are a visit to a store called Riehl's Quilts and Crafts, a meal at Plain and Fancy Farm Restaurant, and a viewing of *Jacob’s Choice*, a film presented by the Amish Experience Theatre.

The first stop on the itinerary is Amish-run Riehl’s Quilts and Crafts. Demarcated by a modest wooden sign, it is located down a narrow road, on the premises of a farm. I entered Riehl’s at the same time as a tour bus, and the medium-sized one-room store was quite crowded. This indicated that Riehl’s, filled with tables of goods, is a destination that has a tie to organized tourism beyond the tourist website. While the store is on an Amish farm, one of whom was very visible at the front of the store working as a saleswoman, the diversity of products sold stands in sharp contrast to the description of the store in the online itinerary. The itinerary reads, “Be sure to include a stop at an Amish-owned and operated quilt shop where you’ll see a beautiful display of Amish-made quilts, wall hangings, pillows, "quillows" and other handmade items.” (PADutchCountry.com “Amish and Heritage Itinerary”) Significantly, while Riehl’s does indeed sell all of these things, the itinerary pointedly ignores the other items available for purchase. These include but are not limited to the Amish-themed romance novels (for example, *Accidently Amish* by Olivia Newport), Crayola crayons, natural soaps, and even a book about the Amish by leading scholar Donald B. Kraybill (cited in this essay). However, this diversification of products,
some having little or nothing to do with the Amish, does not hinder the smooth translation of advertising into consumption. Urry (2002) describes the tourist as a semiotician, whose interpretation of a given sight is based on pre-established signs. Buying Crayola products from a store run by an Amish woman, highly visible in her symbolic clothing, does not hinder the experience and landscape of the store as a place to buy beautiful handmade items as inscribed by the itinerary, because the correct interpretation of the sight is pre-established before the tourist enters the door. As long as the pre-determined symbolism and rhetoric exists in the tourists mind (the Amish clothing, the sprawling farmland, the small wooden sign, the quilts), the diversification of products does not contaminate the perceived “authenticity” of the experience. The rhetoric of PADutchCountry.com has done its work, and the success of the Amish Country tourist experience of Riehl’s transcends its diverse, often non-Amish wares because it is the context of the shopping experience that is most important. The tourist can enjoy a foray into the attractive, historical-seeming lifestyle of the Amish, and never think twice about the fact that Riehl’s accepts all major credit cards. Surrounded by farmland, shopping in a building lit with pressurized gas lanterns, and served by traditionally-dressed Amish, the products and incongruencies become irrelevant as rhetoric triumphs.

I continue on my Amish Country tourist experience to the Amish Experience Theater and Plain and Fancy Farm Restaurant. Both of these locations are part of an “interpretive and touring center” (PADutchCountry.com “Amish & Heritage Itinerary”) called the Amish Experience, which is a complex that includes an Amish-themed “homestead,” experiential theatre, restaurant, store, and hotel (called the “AmishView”). While the so-called Amish Country Homestead on the center has been designated as the only “heritage site” in Lancaster County by the Lancaster County Planning Commission, an honor that is meant to
“highlight sites and people that authentically interpret the special traditions, culture, building and crafts that exemplify Lancaster County” (TheAmishExperience.com “Heritage Site Status”), there is no physical Amish presence consistently on the site.

The Amish Experience Theatre is an intimate room filled with benches to simulate Amish church pews, but made with backs to allow for greater tourist comfort. The “show” is a film projected into imitation barn doors, allowing the cinematic technology that the Amish would so obviously reject to be effectively negotiated by the symbolism of the barn doors as a farm-related, Amish themed object. The sign of the barn doors belies the blatant irony of the show as a representation of the “Amish Experience,” while portrayed in a technological medium that the Amish reject. The rest of the room is decorated with various Amish-themed items, such as a clothesline hung with Amish clothing. The tourist is led into the theatre, introduced to the plot of the film, and receives a warning about some of the special effects (smoke, lighting). The film, called Jacob’s Choice, is about a young Amish man named Jacob who must choose whether or not he wishes to be baptized, starring, of course, non-Amish actors. The main Amish symbols are visible either within the film or in the theatre as part of the set.

This is the only point in my tourist experience where Amish history and culture is an explicit focus. However, while the film details some of the history of the Amish by briefly relaying the religious persecution they withstood, it focuses on the ship journey to America: a history that is reminiscent of the colonial journey to America and tied to the relatable, nostalgic past. This journey is a climax of the film, the place with the most theatrical effects, such as smoke and dramatic lighting. The rest of the film is a love story and a story of familial conflict that is resolved by Jacob choosing to reject the outside world
and live an Amish existence: a decision that is made in a fit of emotion after his grandfather is killed by a car while driving his horse-and-buggy. Coming closest to explicitly elucidating Amish history, values, and culture, this segment of the Amish experience is also the most jarringly contradictory. Aspects of the film, even the film's existence, challenge many cultural Amish values. Examples include traditional Amish shunning of most technology, photography, and the emotional, individualistic plotline; all critical components to the enjoyable show. Still, many Amish symbols, the barn doors, the horse-and-buggy, and the traditional clothing, are highly visible aspects of the show, overcoming the problematic discordance with numerous Amish values. Sitting on altered Amish-style church pews, the tourist can be entertained by the attractive selected symbolism of the fascinating Amish culture while feeling in-touch with the familiar, comfortable American past.

Plain and Fancy Farm Restaurant, located through a gift shop, is made of wood and furnished by wooden tables and chairs. Upon entering, the hostess at the front gives the tourist an option of two types of meals: one Amish “feast” with family-style food sharing, and one more typical dining option that is a la carte. The “feast” diners sit in a back room with long tables. Some “feast” foods are traditional and symbolically Amish, such as Shoo-Fly Pie and Chow Chow, a relish-like dish. The a la carte menu is mostly typical American-style dining with options including vegetarian meals and salmon fillet. The servers are outfitted in a theme that very clearly represents Amish dress without exactly replicating it (the women wear pants, for example), with black slacks, suspenders, and shirts of the purple color associated with Lancaster Amish clothing. Besides those explicit symbols of the Amish, the restaurant is not explicitly Amish-themed. Rather, it is farm and family themed. The music that plays is country, or Christmas music, and the atmosphere is homey, reminiscent of a log cabin. Once again, Americana is the true theme behind the Amish
symbolism. The nods to the Amish are enough to attract and appeal to tourists visiting Lancaster, but the patriotic and secular Christmas music, family-style dining, and general farm/cabin theme is comforting and appeals to nostalgia. The Amish menu items allow for the all-important human referent, while the overwhelmingly non-Amish dining options are comfortingly familiar to the modern tourist. The Amish theme blends seamlessly into Americana, becoming one and the same.

The Amish food items on the menu of Plain and Fancy Farm Restaurant are an example of an attempt at “authenticity” which ties the experience, having little to do with the Amish, to its location and status as a tourist attraction. Jean Baudrillard (1983) argues that representation precedes reality, that signs of the real are substituted for the real. In this case, the Amish Country tourist experience center is a representation that precedes reality. While the “homestead” is touted as a site of authenticity in its precise replication of a true Amish home- indeed, the only one to receive the prestigious title of “heritage site”- it exists on a center that does little more than reference the Amish in the selling of something bigger: the past, family values, and an enjoyable tourist experience. As Donald Kraybill (1989:228) writes, “Commercial tourist attractions provide a front stage portrayal of Amish life which simulates an encounter.” Just as Baudrillard’s original and copied Lascaux caves, existing in close proximity with one another, ensure that both caves are rendered artificial, so too do the heritage house, the Amish “feast” and the wooden pews of the theater render the Amish origin of these simulations artificial in reproduction. Simulation becomes inextricable from reality. While the Amish Country tourist experience constantly reminds us of its “authenticity,” it does not signify reality. It is just another element of the representation that precedes reality. This representation facilitated on the Internet and translating into the Amish Country tourist experience, serves to encapsulate Lancaster as a
place of hyperheritage. Baudrillardian hyperreality exists and is shaped by an emphasis on heritage, which is, in the end, a simulation just like everything else.

III. TripAdvisor.com: The Tourist Understanding of His or Her Experience

On Tripadvisor.com, a tourism advising website that allows and encourages ratings and commentaries of tourist experiences, Amish Country is awarded an average rating of four and a half out of five, with rating description choices “excellent”, very good”, “average”, “poor” and “terrible.”, with reviews overwhelming “excellent” or “very good” (TripAdvisor.com “Amish Country”) While these are all reviews from people who have experienced Amish Country firsthand, as Tripadvisor.com users and thus, travel website users, they have very likely been influenced by online tourism advertising. In her discussion of Amish tourism, Susan Trollinger (2012:148) writes, “To be sure, Amish Country tourism does not give the tourist the Amish as such. Instead, it offers representations of the Amish that largely serve the interests of Amish Country tourism.” These representations are replete with signs and symbols that act to commoditize Lancaster and the Amish people who inhabit it. While perhaps Amish life is, for example, less technologically dependent and thus, “simple,” by the volition of the Amish themselves, the appropriation of this descriptor works to frame the Amish Country tourist experience as desirable in a rhetoric of nostalgia. Advertising necessarily translates places into images (rolling hills of farmland), symbols (the horse-and-buggy), and slogans (“slow-paced” life.) Tourism forums allow a glimpse into whether this rhetoric and thus, this framework of understanding, has been incorporated into the thinking of visitors to Lancaster County. Of course, it is impossible to know whether every Lancaster reviewer visited PADutchCountry.com before the trip. However, as Tripadvisor.com and PADutchCountry.com are the most popular Internet searches for “Amish Country Reviews”
and “Amish Country Tourism” respectively, and also both come up in the first few links under a general search of “Amish Country Lancaster,” it is quite likely that most of the reviewers were exposed to both the websites. Analyzing negative and positive commentary as well as overall trends allows for insight into the way in which rhetoric works on tourists that begin their Amish Country tourist experience on the Internet.

In analyzing trends, I sorted commentary by date in order to disregard the rating given. Based on my analysis of the rhetoric of PADutchCountry.com, I determined which categories I would look for in the comments. These categories are: oldness and heritage, escape, slowness, simplicity, countryside, alternative lifestyle, peacefulness, craft/home-cooking, references to displeasure with urban/fast-paced life, and finally, the horse-and-buggy, as it is the main symbol of PADutchCountry.com. I then analyzed the wording of every tenth comment, whether it was one sentence or a full paragraph long. I found that in twenty-four of the twenty-five reviews I gathered, no matter the length, at least one category was mentioned. In the one review where no category was mentioned, the reviewer had only gone to Dutch Wonderland, the Lancaster County amusement park. The breakdown of categories mentioned is as follows:

- Countryside: 44%
- Horse-and-buggy: 28%
- Alternative lifestyle: 28%
- Nostalgia/displeasure with urban or fast-paced life: 24%
- Peacefulness: 20%
- Craft: 20%
- Simplicity: 16%
- Slowness: 12%
- Escape: 12%
- Two or more categories: 72%

There was no mention of the Amish as a changing, adapting people, no mention of dissident history, and no mention of the specificities of the supremely important religion. This is
evidence of a particular understanding of the Amish Country tourist experience. Regardless of satisfaction with the experience as indicated by the numerical rating assigned, the randomly sampled reviewers all understood their experiences through the same specific framework pushed by PADutchCountry.com, with nearly no distinctiveness in description of the experience.

An analysis of the most negative commentary (i.e. the people who rated their Amish Country experience as “poor” or “terrible,”) reveals the ways in which Lancaster failed to live up to the promises made by tourism advertising for a minority of reviewers. However, while the visitors who wrote these reviews did not enjoy their experiences, they still view them through the lens of advertising. Thus, they base their evaluations in the language of tourism established by the very same advertising rhetoric of tourism that the top Amish website employs. One reviewer, rating her experience as a one out of five, wrote:

We went on a buggy ride to amish(sic) farms- our horse was dodging oncoming minivans, tractor trailers and tour buses- nothing quaint about that (...) I feel bad for the amish (sic)- all this commercialism(sic) and they just want to live a simple life... we went to strasburgh(sic) thinking it was going to be this quaint town (TripAdvisor.com “Amish Country”) 

While ironically the reviewer mourns what she feels is the commercialism of Lancaster impeding on the simple life of the Amish, she as a tourist is in fact a key element in what she observes. She alternately wishes that what she experienced was more “quaint” and complains on behalf of the Amish, who she sees as correctly described by advertising as “simple,” and thus, victimized. In fact, her use of “simple” and “quaint” is quite significant. This is evidence that her dissatisfaction stems from the fact that she was not given what tourism advertising promised her, in those exact words: quaintness. Commercialism was so blatant that the real world was noticeable, and that shook this reviewer out of the reverie of the authentic, simple Amish life that tourism advertising promises. Jeffrey
Hopkins (1998:78) in “Signs of the Post-Rural: Marketing myths of a Symbolic Countryside,” argues, “Perhaps the predominant meaning of ‘rural’ signified in the symbolic space of these advertisements (tourism advertising) is alterity: the rural is represented as some place other than urban, as some time other than the present, as some experience other than the norm.” In the case of this reviewer, the “alterity” is disrupted by minivans, tractor-trailers, and tour-buses. Even as she participates in the consuming of Lancaster by taking a famed horse-and-buggy ride, she is shaken out of the promised alterity of the situation by surroundings that are very much part of the norm: vans, trucks, and buses.

Another reviewer wrote, “Why would you ever build up a tourist attraction around people who want to live life simply and quietly?” (TripAdvisor.com “Amish Country”) The adverbs “simply” and “quietly,” fall precisely into the dominant Amish tourism advertising rhetoric. While this consumer did not believe that she was given the experience that was marketed to her, she just as clearly reveals the successful framing done by tourism advertising, contributing to the same rhetoric. Hopkins (1998:20) writes, “This rhetoric suggests that the commodified countryside signifies several historical myths (...) In an age of intense, rapid and uncertain change, the countryside purports to offer a return to a less hectic, constant and secure place”. This reviewer has not been able to completely “suspend her disbelief” and imbibe her surroundings with the aid of the uncomplicated lens of the advertising rhetoric of the countryside. Nonetheless, she speaks in the voice of tourism advertising, describing the Amish as wanting to live life “simply” and “quietly.” These descriptors are uncomplicated and palatable, fitting right in with PADutchCountry.com’s framing. Regardless of the truth of her description, it is not surprising that she chooses the exact vocabulary that advertising uses to promote the Amish as a tourist novelty- these key words have been digested and incorporated into understanding.
In comparison, one exemplary positive (or “excellent”) review reads:

I happen to spend this weekend at a B&B in the Amish Lancaster, and it was excellent from the views to the Amish homes, their hose(sic) carriage, the way of life amazing to see how they live peacefully and humble. I felt relaxed and enjoy being away from the loud and busy city for a change. I strongly recommended (TripAdvisor.com “Amish Country”)

This reviewer successfully views and understand her experience through the semiotic lens, feeling pleasure based on the pre-established signs of advertising. Notably, she felt “relaxed” and “away from the loud and busy city,” which is exactly the same rhetoric used on PADutchCountry.com. Touring homes and seeing the horse-and-carriage in person, this review found the Amish “way of life” to be “peaceful” and “humble.” While obviously the marketing strategy of PADutchCountry.com sells exactly this image, what is most notable is that the vocabulary employed in this barely differs from that of the negative reviews. There is an expectation of what will be experienced far before the experience occurs, and the reviews demonstrate whether or not that expectation has been fulfilled, not whether the tourist has successfully escaped inculcation into the rhetoric.

**Conclusion**

Advertising of Lancaster County has very little to do with the Amish as a complicated human culture. Appropriating characteristics of the Amish that mesh with the idealized American past to function as symbols, advertising appeals to tourism by playing on disillusionments with high-speed progression and a nostalgia for the past. While the Amish participate in restricted ways in the tourist industry, the logic behind their alternative lifestyle and religious beliefs are rendered irrelevant within the tourist experience. As Hovinen (1995) notes, “The average visitor has no idea of the complexity of Amish life, the conflict of Amish lifestyle problems, and the fact that Amish products are not
always made by a single individual by hand but that technology and occupational specialization are often involved." Why is this invisible when it seems to be in plain sight?

Though in my travel to Lancaster County I found the discordance between advertising and reality to be highly visible, my position as having begun my journey with a critical analysis of rhetoric, is significant. In general, the tourism website successfully overcomes dissonance in the interest of consumerism. As Roy Buck (1978:163) argues, “Language is a powerful tool employed in sight sacralization. The language of Amish Country aims to(...) provide them (visitors) the magic lens or imagery sufficient to realize escape into a remembered and imagined past.” PADutchCountry.com allows for a framework of understanding Lancaster as guided by symbolism and without the need for questioning or analysis. Once the framework is established, the facts and inconsistencies of the actual experience are beside the point. The simulation precedes reality, and the tourist is awarded an experience that references the past, a nostalgic past that exists in the symbols of the Amish and their horse-and-buggies and stands in stark contrast with the stressful, harried present. The tourist, regardless of what fell short of expectations, has been taught to understand it in the language of the tourism website. While, in Lancaster County, the tourist might be in physical proximity to the Amish, this is almost completely irrelevant. He or she is a semiotician of Americana, experiencing an Amish Country that has been constructed ahead of time by advertising.
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