HOLISM AND A PREFERENCE FOR FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION

Across a variety of vectors among a diverse array of Amish insights, I observed a clear preference for what philosophers of technology Albert Borgmann (1984) and Don Ihde (1990) observe in their assessment of how technologies facilitate the fulfillment of human values. According to Borgmann, technology has increasingly acted to restructure our social world over the past three or so centuries (1984). He finds this problematic because "to speak of a deeply ingrained pattern is also to say that the pattern may be difficult or perhaps impossible to see. . . . It is understood in the sense of being taken for granted" (35). In a summary of Borgmann's work, Pieter Tijmes says that despite the fact that "technology provides the inescapable horizon of our existence," it also "tends to become invisible" (2001, 19–21). For Borgmann, it is only when such a patterned way of doing things breaks down that we are able to see it clearly, and identifying new ways of doing things is otherwise nearly impossible. The fact that technology shapes our social world and at the same time is hard for us to perceive has important implications for our ability to act intentionally when it comes to enacting our moral and ethical values. Indeed, Borgmann notes that we have very little choice today about whether or not we choose to adopt technologies. As a result, we often see ourselves either as powerless in stopping the inertia of technological development or as having a responsibility for choices made at each step in the process of change.

Don Ihde also sees technologies as nonneutral objects that mediate and change our experiences with reality. Even seemingly ubiquitous technologies such as eyeglasses are capable of altering a user's behavior. "For every revealing transformation there is a simultaneously concealing transformation of the world, which is given through a technological mediation. Technologies transform experience, however subtly, and that is one root of their non-neutrality" (1990, 49). Furthermore, for Ihde, to begin discussing the morality of a technology, one must first reveal the inner workings and the

way in which the technology mediates a relationship between the user and the world (1990). Only then can a user work to fulfill his or her moral or ethical values through the use of technology.

Like these authors, the Amish also believe that technologies are ethically nonneutral. They lead users in a direction that weakens their ability to fulfill moral and ethical goals. Instead, in many cases, users are agents in the fulfillment of governmental and corporate goals. To empower users, the Amish seek to make the means or mechanics of a technology visible and then ensure that it is limited in its use and is precisely tailored to the fulfillment of specific Amish goals. In essence, they pursue minimalism and holism, where connections are visible among all facets of daily life. This allows them to take control of their tools—not the other way around.

This quest for holism, observed here specifically in terms of digital technology use, undergirds all aspects of Amish life. When asked what it is that we can learn from the Amish, I always come back to this pursuit of unity, holism, and interdependence that I find most enlightening and illustrative. In today's increasingly complex, dynamic, and technical social world, it seems that we all strive for this kind of simplicity and control, despite the fact that technology companies work endlessly to obscure the labor, technology, and financial operations at the core of our devices' functionality.

In the most transformative moments in my fieldwork, it seemed that this topic was always bubbling under the surface. For Amish participants, holistic communication involved maintaining a tangible connection between the communication medium and an intended outcome. For them, this manifested most poignantly in a decided preference for face-to-face communication so that one's emotion could be read in nonverbal cues while doing work, making plans, and conveying information of all kinds. For example, in one of my first interviews, an Amish business owner told me that he thought that digital technologies "ruined *real* communication." For him the word *communication* was synonymous with face-to-face communication. He said, "For families, communication is very important, but it needs to be face-to-face, eye-to-eye, sit down and talk . . . out on a boat or whatever." The belief that face-to-face, collocated communication was inherently better than the digital forms of communication available today was shared by all Amish participants. They believed that this type of communication was the best way to convey emotion, show respect for communication partners,

achieve a complete understanding of messages, limit access to objectionable worldviews, avoid temptation, and maintain control over messages sent. All these, they thought, helped create environments that were morally and ethically sound. They also believed that these environments were beneficial for the physical and spiritual health of individuals, helped strengthen social bonds in the family and community, and reproduced Amish identity and social structures in future generations.

One question that I asked almost everyone I met was, "What differences do you see, if any, in communicating via phone or in person?" Of the many responses I received, this one from an Amish minister summarizes feelings expressed by numerous others:

> I have very, very strong feelings that nothing can replace face-to-face conversation. Looking each other in the eye, seeing facial features, seeing the look in the eye, whether it be a bright look, or sadness, or frustration, or sorrow. Nothing can compare. Nothing.

Similarly, Perry, a minster and business owner, reported that a phone conversation had "no comparison" to a face-to-face conversation "because you're with your friend and you can see their feeling." Repeatedly, participants told me that it was impossible to communicate emotions through the phone or computer.

Understanding how someone thought about something was important because it became associated with a person's identity or reputation over time. On important or controversial topics, one did not state an opinion flippantly or sarcastically. In talking with people, I often heard things like, "[so and so] knows how I feel about that," or "[so and so] knows how I would react to that." They would say, "[such and such] saddens me," or "I would have been deeply ashamed by [that]." In this way, emotions and feelings seemed to accumulate over time and contour a business owner or church leader's reputation.

Although cell phones and computers were allowed at his work, Andy, a deacon and co-owner of a construction company, thought that face-to-face communication was more meaningful than digital formats. He said, "If I want to tell you you've done a good job, it makes less of an impact if I send you a note via email or by text than if I make a point to tell you face-to-face." In the same way, "I can be nastier to you through phone/text because I might feel okay saying something I don't have the courage to say to your

face." When asked why face-to-face was better, he said, "There's more in-depth value transferred in the conversation." Even though he reported using a cell phone "all day, every day" for work, he clearly believed that face-to-face communication was preferable over other options available to him.

David, a bishop, believed strongly that digital technologies removed emotion from human communication. In a conversation about text messaging, he stated that love cannot be expressed via text message. "Can you feel love through a text?" he asked. "No. You can't. . . . [With technology] you can communicate and connect with others but there's no life in it." The kind of communication that connected people, for David and many other informants, could only occur face-to-face. Communicating through technology for them only went halfway.

For participants, feelings were part and parcel of everyday information exchange, and removing even a portion of this through talking on the phone, texting, or emailing, whether in business situations or not, was less than ideal. Generally this was undesirable because emotion was seen as essential to the maintenance and development of strong family and community bonds. In these verbal and corporeal communicative exchanges, informants believed that they were better able to understand how their communication partner felt about the topic that was being discussed and to know how the person thought that it was important to them. In short, in ideal circumstances, the information exchanged and the feeling of the communication partner, as expressed via bodily or verbal cues, were inextricable from one another. Thus, one reason informants preferred face-to-face communication over other media was that these communication channels carried information inherently imbued with human emotion, and this emotion helped establish and maintain bonds with family, church members, and colleagues. In this sense, there was a preference for communicating in a way that made a tangible connection between the emotions of an individual, information exchange, and community coherence.

Other informants worried that if digital technologies were brought into the workplace it would mean less fulfilling work for employees. On one occasion in my fieldwork, I was accompanied by the director of a local historical museum. We arrived at a wood furniture workshop unannounced in the afternoon. We received a warm welcome by the receptionists, who introduced us to a floor manager named Ben. Ben broke away from the

work that he was doing to give us a tour of the facility, where forty-five employees worked. He showed us the workshop's tools and how the products were created, from raw bulk lumber to painted, finished, and assembled furniture. He showed us the workshop's very high-tech electric equipment, including a table saw that had an automatic turn-off mechanism if the blade came into contact with human flesh. Ben said that this feature was demonstrated to him at a trade show, where a salesman put a hot dog in contact with the blade, causing the machine to turn off. After the tour, Ben introduced us to the company's owner, Sam, who invited us to sit down in his office. I asked Sam a number of questions about technology use in the Amish community, which ignited a deep philosophical and existential conversation. When I told him the reason for our visit and what I was writing about, his eyes lit up. He informed us that he was a "tech buff" and that as a young man, he never thought that he would join the Amish church because he enjoyed tinkering with, using, and fixing electronic and mechanical gadgets so much. He informed us that he had taught himself how to do these things from a book because he had only an eighth grade education, and electronic and mechanical skills were not taught in school, as was the norm among the Amish.

He explained that recently the church leaders in his district (one of whom worked for him) had decided to allow plain computers. Sam thought that church leaders had made a mistake by allowing these. He said, "They don't know what they've done." He did not want a plain computer because, as he said, "If it were sitting here in my office, I don't think I'd be able to control myself from tinkering around with it. It wouldn't take long and I could automate the entire workshop. These computers are very powerful. That would put forty-five people out of work." In making decisions like this about adopting technologies, Sam said, "I consult my conscience." For him, it was of utmost importance to create a work environment where people could make an honest living and feel spiritually fulfilled by working there. In this way, adopting a plain computer was seen as possibly disrupting a larger ethical goal of providing a spiritually fulfilling work environment for as many people in his community as he could.

Others expressed preferences for face-to-face communication because they saw it as essential for the development and maintenance of close-knit family and community bonds. In a discussion about the adoption of new digital technologies, Howard, the owner of a small RV motor repair

company, told me, "The more I can live my life without the modern conveniences, the better life I am going to have . . . for me and the family." He went on to explain that digital technologies weaken family bonds.

> The more modern conveniences you're going to introduce to the family the more you're going to lose what's really worth. . . . The more conveniences that creep in here, the more dysfunctional our family will become . . . the further apart we will become. . . . We won't have the closeness. . . . Right now, when I come home, we usually sit around the kitchen table and we either eat a watermelon or peaches and we share the day. We ask, "What have you kids been doing?" or we talk about what we're going to do tonight. And we always . . . just always, we sit around the kitchen table and we share the day. In the morning we do the same thing with the kids before they go to school and we have our morning devotions. Now if we have this technology in the house, there would be no way I would have time to do that and the kids wouldn't either. . . . It would make our family dysfunctional.

Howard's comments reveal a spirited dedication to maintaining strong bonds among the members of the family. From his point of view, digital technologies would disrupt these bonds. This was his primary reason for rejecting new communication devices in his work and at home. He thought that routinized face-to-face interactions, either while eating or through spiritual edification (and sometimes both), helped build strong bonds among family members. He believed that introducing digital technologies into the home would distract his family from those routine activities and weaken family bonds.

According to participants, face-to-face communication required individuals to work to make arrangements that brought bodies together. Because automobile travel was not an option and individuals lived in sparsely populated rural areas, planning was necessary to overcome a significant geographic barrier to communication. The kind of planning that brings bodies together, then, was meaningful for Amish participants because the work involved showed respect for communication partners and their religious convictions (which prevented them from owning a car or smartphone).

Noah accompanied me on a visit with a bishop and business owner named Victor. In our conversation, Victor reported experiencing frustration when his non-Amish customers would expect him to stop everything that he was doing and tend to their emergency. His engine repair shop had normal business hours and closed for the evening at five o'clock. At that

time of day, he typically went home to be with his family. Sometimes when his customers experienced an unexpected engine problem, they wanted him to respond and provide service immediately, whether during business hours or not. Although he found this frustrating, he could understand that engine breakdowns sometimes happen unexpectedly. What he found less understandable, however, was when his regular customers, who did not have emergencies, would expect that he work through an evening to have their engine repaired and ready for them to use the next day. Noah sympathized with Victor's frustration. A common adage came to his mind that he thought captured the sentiment well: "A lack of planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on mine."

Both men thought that new digital technologies such as the internet and cell phones contributed to a widespread complacency toward making plans in advance and sticking to them, especially among their non-Amish customers and coworkers. They believed that it was partly because of the ubiquity of cell phones and internet access that "when people want something, they want it right now," according to Victor. This, however, does not fit well into the Amish way of life. In his view, if people want him to work after hours, this disrupts time spent seeking spiritual fulfillment and bonding with family or community members.

Some participants noted the disadvantages of digital technologies because they believed that they poisoned holistic systems: they fractured mind from body and individuals from the collective. Many participants discussed digital technologies such as cell phones and the internet in terms of psychological diseases, especially addiction, that were capable of infecting individual and collective bodies. For example, Nelson, a sixty-two-year-old harness maker, told me, "Cell phones were the worst addiction to hit the United States." Many participants shared his concern that cell phones and smartphones were dangerously addictive. These concerns stemmed from a desire to pursue holism in the connection between mind and body and in connecting people to one another. In this case, digital technologies were seen as working to separate an individual's mind from his or her body and the individual from the collective.

Becoming overly dependent on technologies was often associated with a mental, social, or cognitive impairment at the individual level, which had group-level implications. Andy, a forty-two-year-old deacon and business owner who used a cell phone daily for work, said,

> If you're not in business, having a cell phone is a detriment to our way of life. You lose personal contact if you send a text message instead of talking to someone face-to-face. You can become so dependent on it that you lose the ability to plan ahead. It's just about impossible to function without [cell phones and computers], but we don't want to rely on [them]. With computers, people don't learn to think on their own. If you go to a store and the computer doesn't work you often can't pay for what you need or people can't count your change back to you.

"God put a brain in our head to use. If we don't use it our brainwaves will get stagnant," Andy continued. He thought that the brain and body should work together independently of any technological help, such as using a calculator for math calculations.

Similarly, in my conversation with minister and business owner Floyd, the topic of GPS technology came up. I mentioned that it had been useful for me in navigating the country roads during my fieldwork. I feared that I might be growing too dependent on it, however. It was becoming harder and harder for me to recognize which way was north without looking at my smartphone, I confessed. Floyd, who owned a fencing installation company, reported using his smartphone's GPS to travel to distant work sites. For navigation in his community, however, he relied on training that he had received during his school days. In one-room Amish schools, he said, the blackboard was always positioned on the northernmost wall. This helped teach young children which way was north. As an adult, he said, remembering which wall had the blackboard on it and which way the schoolhouse faced allowed him to identify north and successfully navigate his stomping grounds. As a sixty-year-old grandfather, he said, I still "think back to my school days and remember which wall had the blackboard on it."

Negative feelings about communicating via digital technologies among participants often overlapped with feelings that the asynchronicity of exchanging voicemails, emails, and text messages created communication gaps that face-to-face communication avoided. Because of their size, cell phones and smartphones could also be concealed on the body and used in private, which church leaders feared would lead to sinful behavior and break families apart.

Floyd informed me that much "phone" communication today actually takes place through voicemails. It is uncommon that an Amish individual can be reached at home with a phone call, because the phone resides

outside in an outbuilding, unless prior plans are made. Even much of the church's business is done through the exchange of voicemails. From Floyd's perspective, this is not a good thing. He believes that a voicemail is a performed monologue—not much different from an email—in which someone might feel inclined to say something about someone that they would not have the courage to say if the conversation occurred face-to-face in real time. Floyd's wife, who sat in on our interview, expanded on this, saying, "You may say something about someone else or characterize him or her unfavorably in a way that you would not if you were speaking face-to-face." These sentiments were shared by many other participants as well.

A number of individuals believed that these communication gaps occurred especially during the exchange of text messages. According to participants, these were dangerous for two reasons. First, participants found that texting resulted in a temporary, artificial courage to say something that would not usually be said. According to Timothy, a bishop, cell phones were bad because they made it easier to spread rumors, gossip, and stretch the truth. "You might not say these things to someone's face because you are not anonymous," he said. Similarly, Calvin, a bishop from a different settlement, said there had been issues with married men texting young women who were not their wives. His biggest fear was that cell phones and smartphones could tear the family apart. For the most part, divorce was unheard of in Amish communities. Many participants echoed Calvin's fear that mobile devices could lead to divorces for this reason. Because these devices were small and could be tucked away in a pocket, people could send messages without it being visible to others, who typically would hold them accountable in such situations. According to Calvin, it could "result in one person hiding in one corner of the house and one in another." He thought that this could lead to a lack of separation between the Amish and the rest of the world, where divorce and infidelity were much more common. I asked if he believed that such technologies could also tear the community apart. He said, "as is a family, so is a community."

According to Jacob, a minister in Calvin's settlement, the main problem with smartphone adoption was with young people. The concern was that cell phones made it possible for people to say something via text that they wouldn't say face-to-face. According to Jacob, the church leaders preached and taught that the Amish should be separate from the world to protect

themselves from the lust of the flesh. The internet, he felt, was of the world, so they preached against it.

Because of these negative feelings about networked digital technologies, some participants associated the internet and computers symbolically with the devil. In articulating this association, it was sometimes referred to as the *mark of the beast* or seen as "a forerunner of it." The mark of the beast, described in the Bible, identified someone as being coupled with the anti-Christ and against God. According to Revelation 13:13–18,

> And [the beast] performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name.
>
> This calls for wisdom. Let the person who has insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666.

Participants who associated networked digital technologies with the mark of the beast believed that the "world's system" was moving in a direction where it was increasingly impossible to buy or sell without using electronic media, specifically the internet. This led to questions about whether or not the internet was the mark of the beast. This caused much consternation because, according to Christian doctrine, anyone who received the mark of the beast "drinks the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath" (Revelation 14:10).

Jacob thought that the internet was a forerunner of the mark of the beast. "If we depend on it so much, are we going to be able to say no? We cannot enter heaven, according to the Bible, with the mark of the beast. The cell phone is the first step of it." Technologies "are status symbols"; according to Jacob, "What is high status among men is an abomination to God. . . . Cell phones lead to lust and temptation for fallen beings, and we are all fallen beings. This is why the Amish seek a separation from the world."

Jacob believed that mobile devices were dangerous because they amplified lust for worldly things, and following this lust would work to sever

people from their creator. In his community, they also had issues with inappropriate texting, Jacob said. For him, this is evidence that the internet is "of the world" and a precursor to the mark of the beast. In Bishop Levi's community, the idea that the internet was the mark of the beast was "common thought," but people still used it. This caused him "a sadness" because he preached and taught against the adoption of these technologies, yet sometimes it went "in one ear and out the other." "We know we don't want it, but we know we have it," Levi said. Like other church leaders, he also thought that texting made infidelity more likely. Based on these beliefs, his approach to technology adoption was "to shun the temptation that leads to sin first." For him, this meant shunning the technology that made sin easier to access, given his belief that people are inherently sinful.

Thus, church leaders saw asynchronous electronic media messaging as dangerous for two reasons. First, they thought that disembodied communication (through digital technologies) produced gaps in understanding for message senders and receivers. Second, the ability for mobile devices to be concealed on the body produced an environment where "inappropriate," or lustful, communication could occur between unmarried individuals, which compromised their moral standards and could result in divorce and the separation of family members. In both these cases, digital technologies were seen as detrimental for individual mental health and the creation and maintenance of community bonds. Sometimes this signaled to church leaders that the internet should be classified in terms of the mark of the beast. To use it signaled an outright disobedience to God and marked an individual as incapable of receiving God's ultimate favor. In this way, digital technologies were dangerous because they were seen as capable of severing ties between an individual and his or her God.

Participants also found the ability to copy and forward text messages and voicemails, sometimes without the sender ever knowing about it, particularly distressing. In a few cases this functionality was seen as useful for the maintenance of close-knit bonds. For the most part, however, participants felt a loss of control over communications that became easily removed from the sender's body and especially those that could be duplicated and travel across space quickly. According to Timothy, a bishop, the late-night parties attended by Amish youth now get started and end via text message. Oftentimes alcohol is served at such parties, and many attendants are under the legal drinking age. If the police show up, he said, a text message is

sent around, and people will scatter. Timothy has had meetings with the police about this. Furthermore, if someone in the local community makes a "mistake," the word travels quickly. "If there's any problem anywhere, within five minutes, everyone knows." In his mind, the fact that cell phones can easily and quickly forward messages through space makes it possible for people to gather at parties where people do things that are counter to Amish spiritual beliefs and escape them without consequence. He also thought that it was detrimental to community bonds to spread information that could damage someone's reputation so quickly and without providing proper context.

At the same time, Timothy demonstrated for me how the ability to copy and forward messages could be used for good. On a snowy January afternoon, I stopped by his workshop. I introduced myself and asked if he had time to answer a few questions. Timothy was extremely jovial and answered my questions enthusiastically with a smile. Conversation flowed smoothly, and he asked me a few questions too. He was surprised to learn that I had never received a song over voicemail from a friend. He informed me that this was a common practice among members of his peer group. When I told him that I had absolutely no experience with the practice, he promptly stood up and retrieved the cordless landline phone from his office. He called home to access his voicemail so that he could demonstrate what he was talking about. Over the speakerphone, he played me two of his favorite songs that friends had forwarded to him. He liked them so much that he saved them for future listening. He sang along as we listened to the songs. They were very motivational, beautiful, and uplifting tunes. The most memorable feature of one song was the melodic yodeling of a female vocalist. The other song's lyrics spoke of letting go and allowing God to make plans for our lives. To my untrained ear, the gospel music sounded like it came from the 1970s or 1980s and had Southern bluegrass influences. I asked Timothy how the person who started forwarding these songs acquired them. He said, usually, non-Amish taxi drivers played gospel music on their car radios. He supposed someone probably recorded it with their cell phone while in a taxi and then played it for a friend over his or her voicemail. That individual, then, would have added a verbal greeting before the song and forwarded it to other friends. In this case, Timothy was very pleased with the ease and efficiency with which one could forward an enjoyable song to friends to share. This was a rare case in which participants

reported feeling good about the ability to copy and forward disembodied, asynchronous messages quickly using networked digital technologies.

John, a minister, had a more common reaction to this functionality. He told me a story about a compromising photo of a young woman that was forwarded to others via email. This experience had lasting negative repercussions for her as an individual as well as for her family and community. According to John,

> There was a young Amish gal, who was photographed participating in . . . what I would consider to be a totally unacceptable activity. The photograph was taken by her friend. The friend was then going to send the photograph to another friend except they put it into the wrong email address. That photo was then sent to the wrong person and then that person emailed it to me and asked, "What is going on? What is this Amish girl doing involved in this activity? If I understand it correctly, the Amish faith frowns on this type of behavior." Once the picture was taken by a cell phone or smartphone and sent, it was out of her control. And the other Amish person who had that photo, it was also totally out of their control—not retrievable. That photo of her is now out in the world and she can't get it back. This may not have an immediate impact on a person's life, but later a person grows up, gets married, changes their convictions. They may have children and they are trying to instill values and convictions in them and yet here comes this picture back. The kids may say, "How can you tell me not to do that? Here is this picture of you doing that. This is you."

Curious, I had to ask what the activity was, but John would not say. "If that would be my daughter, though, I would be deeply ashamed for her," he conceded. He also told me "it was not fornication." For him this event was especially problematic because it reflected poorly on the girl's family and community, not just the individual engaged in the behavior. John reflected on a lesson that he had given to a group of young people the previous week, which he thought applied to this scenario.

> What I just tried to explain to young people this past Sunday was: You as an individual, the life that you live, has an effect on your name. Who people see you . . . the type of person people see you as. But it goes beyond you as an individual. What you do with your life also has an effect on your family's name. And it has an effect on the church. It has an effect on the community. So, we can choose to do selfish things and only think of ourselves but we can't . . . we should not do that. Because to do otherwise and shed a bad light on our family, our loved ones, our church community. . . . It's selfish. I just look at it as selfishness.

John's feelings indicate, according to his worldview, that the body is the ideal site of control for both everyday actions and interpersonal communications. Control over these individual-level actions and communication choices have significant family- and community-level consequences. For John there is a clear connection between one's individual actions, communication medium choices, and group-level identity. This also has broader political ramifications for Amish social formations and structures. According to Amish perspectives, maintaining a strong and consistent cultural identity helps strengthen internal networks across which essential resources and information flow. Maintaining strong internal networks, they think, allows them to remain separate from—or less dependent on—the outside world.

For John, the body was clearly the communication medium on which maximum control could be exerted. As noted by other participants, offloading communication onto technological media was reported to cause anxiety and stress. In this case stress seemed to come from message senders relinquishing control over their communication when they sent messages quickly across space. In these less than ideal circumstances, facial features, live reactions, and intended recipients could neither be immediately perceived nor guaranteed. For participants, everyday choices about communication media were tied to significant group-level implications as reputation and identity signaled deference to Amish organizational structures and beliefs. This symbolism has broader political significance because it helps maintain strong close-knit networks within the Amish community over which the information, support, and resources necessary for life in today's world flow. Importantly, such resources enable the Amish to retain cultural autonomy and resist the pull of the outside world and the logic that produces profits for high-tech capitalists.

In doing the work of learning about Amish perspectives, I became aware of circumstances constraining and affording my own face-to-face communication with people in Amish communities. I knew that face-to-face communication would be the primary channel through which I would learn from the Amish, but I had no idea how many different factors would come into play to facilitate or prevent these conversations from occurring. It was my goal to talk to as many Amish church and business leaders as I could. Often, however, icy roads stood in the way of my recruiting new participants. I worked around it as best I could, but the weather played its part. Many other more mundane circumstances contributed to the facilitation or

deterrence of face-to-face conversation, including air temperature (something about the freezing air outside and the warm air inside seemed to make people pleasantly verbose), family obligations (when I did not have a caretaker for my pets, I could not leave home), hunger (conversations often flowed well when hungry bodies ate together and died out when people were hungry), exhaustion (late night conversations were sometimes cut short so I would not fall asleep at the wheel driving home), illness (sitting in close proximity with a person whose body is obviously infected by a virus also seemed to shorten conversations), and injury (driving many hours in an old car with bad suspension had disturbing results on my lower back, which required time to heal before sustaining another long-distance drive). The seemingly mundane task of planning and coordinating a physical meeting with my participants was a significant and real barrier to the process of communicating with and learning from them. Sometimes it was harder to convince my potential conversation partners that this was more worthwhile than it was for me to drive hours through snow and ice to be able to talk with them. In short, these factors made me acutely aware of how the means and ends of my communication with people in Amish settlements were connected, and, specifically, which circumstances yielded fulfilling results and which did not.

As a result, when I heard Amish participants discussing face-to-face communication as a medium that inherently required both biological and spiritual elements for optimal functioning, I could relate. From a *physical* standpoint the body needs a comfortable place to converse with other bodies. The body should not be hungry, malnourished, in pain, or tired, among other things. From a *spiritual* standpoint, the body needs time for rest and introspection; it needs guidance and motivation for asking and answering questions; and it needs to feel in control, rooted and understood, among other things. Furthermore, in my conversations with them, the Amish highlighted the explicit connections between these two modalities. These connections seemed to fuel Amish social life and gave them a distinct sense of fulfillment that agreed with their religious values.

FARMING AS HOLISM

It is commonly known that farming has been a venerated profession among the Amish since their sixteenth-century beginnings in Europe. Only in the past thirty years or so has farming experienced a significant decline, in terms

of the number of people who engage in it as a primary profession. Enthused about a possible revival of farming, Perry, a minister and business owner, thought that there may be opportunities popping up that would allow people to get back into farming in his settlement. There are more Amish farmers there today than a few years ago, he said. Despite a macrolevel trend that has resulted in a flourishing industry of small (nonfarming) businesses in the area, he thought that the growing popularity of organic produce markets in the general population has helped more Amish people make the move back into farming. Perry said that he had two nephews who were taking on the home farm and one or two more who were buying farms. This, he believed, was an indicator that opportunities currently existed for young men who wanted to pursue farming as an occupation. His enthusiasm suggested a desire for a return to the venerated way of life of his forefathers through agricultural work, which he believed provided families with physical and spiritual nourishment.

There was a difference, however, in the type of farming done today versus that done by his forefathers, according to Perry. One of his nephews, for example, was interested in hydroponic farming. On a tour of Amish businesses in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in 2013, I visited such a farm, which produced Bibb lettuce for Whole Foods grocery stores. The farmers used electricity to circulate water and rotate plastic columns where the plants grew (figure 7.1). When a business was lucrative and fit within the Amish lifestyle in one Amish community, it was likely to be imported into other Amish communities as well. It seemed that hydroponic farming has been one example of this.

Many business owners with whom I talked were nostalgic for their farming heritage. As a hobby, one man collected antique Amish farming equipment, and he invited me to an annual event that he organized every year where members of the Amish community used the old equipment to depict (mostly for tourists) the way farming used to be done. It is at this event where photographs for local "Amish life" postcards are usually taken. They are commonly sold at the visitors bureau and in tourism-oriented retail shops in the area. Actual farming, even among the Amish, has now become much more high-tech, according to the collector.

Kenneth, who owned a woodworking business, told me that he now mowed hay for fun. He saw it as a "monotony breaker." He turned twenty acres of his eighty-acre farm over to his son and twenty to his son-in-law,

Figure 7.1
Lancaster County Amish hydroponic Bibb lettuce farm.

who both work in the workshop for him. These young men farm all eighty acres, and they sell the crops that they harvest. "We consider farming a hobby," Kenneth informed me. When his son wanted to grow fall crops during the workshop's busiest time of year, Kenneth objected. "We have to acknowledge our bread and butter," he said. According to Perry, still today "there is probably no more honorable a profession than being a farmer. You're creating good nutritious food for people who want to eat, and everyone wants to eat." These sentiments indicate that being close to nature and producing something of value are still esteemed by the Amish because they yield distinctly tangible and connected spiritual, physical, and social rewards.

In the process of talking with Amish people for this book, I also gained a deeper appreciation for farming. Many days, as I drove to talk with members of Amish communities, the director of a local historical museum accompanied me. He grew up on a nearby farm and patiently introduced me to various agricultural conventions, processes, and machines that were

common on farms in the area. One day, he and I went together to interview ninety-one-year-old retired farmer Martin. While we were sitting at Martin's kitchen table, he told us that he loved being a farmer, and it was all that he had wanted to be his whole life. Martin remembered that being in farming during the Great Depression was an advantage for his family over the other (non-Amish) families that he knew who lived in town. During the Great Depression, his family farmed tomatoes. They would pick three acres of tomatoes by hand. I was informed that this was commonly referred to as truck farming because the tomatoes would be picked up and taken to a local canning factory. This arrangement was eventually displaced when refrigerated trucks became readily available, because they could bring vegetables to the Midwest from places like California with longer growing seasons.

Martin went to school as a child with non-Amish children. There were only three Amish church districts in the area when he was young. At the time of our visit, there were thirty. He remembered that his family always had enough to eat. In school during lunchtime, though, he recalled that there was a little girl who asked if anyone had anything left over because all she had to eat was a small biscuit. Looking back, he recalled that there was always enough to give a little bit away to people who did not have anything. This obviously made an impression on him, because he could describe the events and emotions from eighty years ago effortlessly. He thought that living in the country meant that they were often better off than those who lived in the city because they could feed themselves.

He remembered being content staying on the farm, for what today would seem like extremely long periods of time, without leaving. At that time there was neither an opportunity nor an expectation for them to leave. Today, Amish people travel into town more frequently and travel the continent for vacation. (One person I met took his family via boat to Europe for vacation.) When Martin was young, though, his mother did not go to town to get groceries. Instead, he said, a peddler would come to their house, and Martin's mother would give him a chicken in exchange for some basic supplies.

Martin also thought that when everyone farmed, there was a much smaller discrepancy (even within the Amish community) between the haves and have-nots. When businesses started popping up out of the cornfields, people started making more money, and some made much more than others. When everyone farmed, it seemed that each family had about the same resources, according to Martin. Back then people were dependent on each other to acquire what they needed for daily life. This, Martin thought,

helped connect members of the community together in ways that do not happen as often today.

I learned a lot from the historical museum director during our conversations in the car. He found it humorous that I grew up in the Midwest and liked to eat healthy foods but knew basically nothing about how that food came into existence. I did not grow up in a city and have always had relatives who garden, but I knew embarrassingly little about how a farm worked. I felt pretty confident about my ability to recite the appropriate health food buzzwords—"buy local," "eat grass fed," "organic," "free range," "sustainably farmed," "non-GMO." During our conversations, though, I realized how ignorant I was about the story behind the food that I consumed on a daily basis. I started to understand that at the point of sale—a grocery store, a co-op, a restaurant, or even a farmer's market—it was too easy to overlook the (rather miraculous) journey that the food had taken to make it to the shelf. Additionally, it seemed, the people who actually grew and raised the food were unnecessarily erased from such experiences. It occurred to me that for too long I was unaware that there was a nontrivial gap in my understanding of how the food system—one vital to every human being's survival—actually worked. Coming to this realization raised many questions about my ability to make ethical choices about something as mundane as food. I began to wonder what similar gaps existed in my understanding of communication systems today and what ethical implications these might have. Interestingly, although it may be common for us to see food as separate from communication processes, among the Amish (and perhaps rural non-Amish), food is seen as central and intricately tied to daily work and social life. When time is not spent growing food, for the Amish, breakfasts and dinners (and lunches for many) are opportunities for the family to gather daily in the home and talk to one another. It is nearly always seen as a component of spiritual education through mealtime devotions and after-church gatherings. One minister told me that the afternoon meal on Sundays, which is hosted in a member's home and served by the family, is just as important for members as the church service before it.

During our time in the car together, the historical museum director, who was a retired college instructor, tolerantly described to me what it took to raise enough hogs to make a living, and how much land one needed at a certain cost per acre to make a return on an investment. In one of my most memorable farming tutorials, he described to me how he learned to sow seed corn from his father. He said that his father would use his finger

and point to the knuckle to tell him how deep to plant the seed. He said he still remembered the smell of fresh soil after the plow had turned it over so that the seeds could be planted. According to him, we have to remember that "soil is a living thing. We must nurture it and it will nurture us."

Though he was proud of his Irish heritage, this gentleman's family story is similar to many Amish, he said. His family also had a small working farm, which they eventually sold because it became impossible to make a living on the small parcel of land—the same reason why many Amish people have left farming and started small businesses. In our conversations, he recalled fondly his time growing up on the farm but noted some disturbing changes in how large-scale farms operate today. While driving around the countryside, he pointed out that many of the animals were now required to live indoors so that the farmer could prevent the spread of disease and better control what the animal ate. He believed strongly that this was unhealthy and unnatural for the animals and that farms in this area were quickly becoming more like factories, where the people who owned them and worked them only had weak connections to the land and what it produced. Farm owners often did not live in the area or even in the state, he said. Over the past forty years he had seen local, small-scale farms that had produced a livelihood for families for generations be absorbed into large-scale factory-like operations that aimed to produce low-quality crops for amorphous, anonymous masses.

Although it saddened him that large factory-style farms meant that fewer individuals had intimate connections to the soil, he was more concerned about the environmental implications of this disturbing trend. He said,

> Urban people are disconnected from the farmland on which they are dependent for their own survival. . . . This is the tragic result of a failure of imagination. If we don't pay attention to erosion or the killing of farmland, at some point we may not be able to feed ourselves. Now, however, farming is a factory. We must nurture the soil because it nurtures us. Place has always been a part of who we are. Today, though, we have to be reminded of it. This is why the Amish are a good case study. If you didn't grow up farming, you don't know what that means. . . . The Amish are more into place than we are. During the era of flourishing small-scale family farms, the home was the center of business. Now business is the center. When farming got too expensive, the Irish and English moved away to find jobs. The Amish stayed home and dealt with it locally. In the rest of the world, people go away somewhere else to work. For the Amish

they stay home. Instead of asking what opportunities are there for me in the city, they stay and ask what does the local community need. In going away, we become divorced from the soil. This is a tragedy. When we feel that place is interchangeable, we lose connection to the ground itself. We don't realize that the soil nurtures you. It becomes part of you and you become part of it in a literal sense. . . . The vegetables you grow, the cattle and hogs you raise on the ground, it all becomes part of you in a physical sense. People don't realize the loss of that who live in an urban setting. They get divorced from the soil and from the land and from what is important, but the Amish are in tune with that.

This made me think differently about something that Noah had said to me a few years earlier. In a conversation about cell phones and smartphones, he said, "Today's generation is the most connected, disconnected generation yet." At the time, I thought he simply meant that people were connected to technologies but not necessarily to each other. Years later, now that I know him better, I also think he meant that people had become disconnected from the "what is important" that the historical museum director talked about—the place and the soil that sustains us not only physically, but socially and spiritually. Implicit in Noah's view of "what is important" is a comprehensive, connected sense of spiritual, social, and physical health that is directly dependent on nature. For the Amish (and likely other non-Amish farming families), this is accompanied by a feeling of being rooted and devoted to the place where your father, mother, and grandparents lived—a place that sustained them, too. Amish social life in many ways is organized to foster spiritual and social health through maintaining a closeness and dependence on the natural world, which they believe that God designed and provided so that people may responsibly sustain themselves. Being *connected* intimately to the place and soil that sustains them provides a sense of fulfillment that spans both physical and spiritual realms for members of Amish communities. It is clear that doing the work of producing food requires daily engagement with the natural world, and these efforts yield spiritual rewards, which the Amish believe could only artificially be divorced from physical efforts.

AS TIMES CHANGE: MEDIUM CONTROL AS SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL HOLISM

As already noted, through a series of economic changes over the past few decades, many Amish farmers have been forced to start small businesses.

Oftentimes, these are still based out of the home, so the entire family can be part of the economic unit and close bonds among family members are developed and sustained. Though many people today maintain beautiful vegetable gardens, the Amish increasingly buy food in stores and restaurants. Although farming and maintaining an intimate tie with the soil remain central to ways of imagining Amish life, for more and more people, daily labor takes place in workshops, factories, retail stores, and offices.

Despite this trend, I observed a number of ways in which people organized their surroundings so that connections between the earth and their daily work were tangible and spiritually enriching. For example, because Amish people conventionally opted for horse and buggy transportation, many fed and cared for horses, which required outdoor chores—not to mention the outdoor ride itself in cold or warm temperatures.[1] In more conservative communities, to avoid "high" creature comforts, buggies do not have tops, which ensures exposure to the elements. Without electricity, windows in the summertime are left open, filling homes with the sounds of birds, locusts, and bullfrogs instead of air conditioners, televisions, or popular music. Having clean laundry in the closet depends on the weather; it has to be dry outside to hang clothes without an automatic dryer. Filling the stove with wood to heat the house in the winter requires trips out into the cold to gather wood. Even an electric saw powered by solar panels requires the sun to shine. In these ways and many others, despite changes to the economy, Amish life maintains a tangible connection between everyday work, nature, personal fulfillment, and spiritual enrichment.

Indeed, many people in nonfarming professions reported organizing their work life to foster connections among physical work, family members, and their appreciation of nature and place. They reported doing this because it was beneficial to their spiritual health. They reported working alongside their family members, which helped maintain bonds through the participation in a family-oriented, collocated economic unit. Ninety-one-year-old Martin helps answer phones in his daughter's fabric shop. Sam enjoys having his wheelchair-bound father join him at work in his furniture-making workshop, where his wife manages the office. Noah helps his wife run a tourism-oriented retail shop and café on days when he is not working at his construction company. Kenneth's wife does his bookkeeping, and his son and son-in-law work in his woodworking shop. Sarah works in a furniture showroom and retail shop owned by her family. Her

son is in charge of marketing, her husband manages the operation, and she helps customers find what they are looking for. Dennis built a successful construction company over the past thirty years. Its daily operations are now taken care of by his three sons. Ben, the office manager at a company that sold millions of dollars' worth of product a year on an auction website, worked for his cousin, who owned the company. These are only a few of the family members I spoke with who reported still working together to produce income and resources despite no longer being in agriculture-based professions. David, a bishop, told me that it was important to be surrounded daily by people who remind you of your values. Despite the Amish's moving off the farm, working closely with family has undoubtedly continued to accomplish this goal.

Even owners of larger-scale Amish businesses reported believing that the culture of a work environment nurtures the spiritual health of employees. Sam, owner of a successful furniture-making workshop with forty-five employees, thought that his main goal in life was to create a work culture where people felt comfortable and enjoyed working. He wanted to create a "good Christian" environment where people could make an honest living. In our first meeting, he told me about his business. He said, "There's always someone who can beat you on price." His (non-Amish) competitors would seduce potential clients by whisking them away on private jets to Colorado for hunting trips. When the same clients would ask what he could offer them, he would say, with a smile, "Come on down . . . I'll take you on my private jet. It's pulled by a horse." He refused to cut costs if that resulted in a poor-quality product. He also refused to market his products based on the premise that he was Amish. Instead he wanted his products to sell based on their own merits and offered clients the best service and the best quality at the best price. The day that I was there, I talked with his wife, his office manager, who said they would be turning away a big job for a hotel chain because they simply had too much business. There were no frills in Sam's organization, but it was far from unsophisticated.

Sam told me that he decided to start his own business after working for a number of years as a lead mechanic at a large-engine repair shop. He worked alongside three other non-Amish mechanics. In the workshop, they had a radio that played popular country music most days. He was not fond of the beat and the lyrics of the music. Even though he thought that country music was supposed to be less vulgar than other types of popular

music, he realized that it contained immoral lyrics that did not align with his beliefs. This really bothered Sam. One day, he went to his boss and told him that he did not want to say why, but he was submitting his resignation. Sam's boss was upset. Sam was one of his best employees. Sam's boss asked for an explanation, saying, "You at least owe it to me to tell me why you want to leave." So Sam told him it was because of the music on the radio in the workshop. His boss said that he would fix it and went out and removed the radio from the workshop.

Understandably, this made Sam's coworkers upset. Not only was the music that they liked gone, but their boss apparently cared more about Sam's wishes than their own. His colleagues were upset with him for not coming to them first. He told them that he had intended to submit his resignation, not to have the radio taken out. They told him that they would have preferred that he come to them and discuss the problem before he went to the boss. "We would have worked it out and not played the music," they said. They did not know how he felt. He realized that he had made a mistake. Sam stayed and worked there another two years and remained friends with the other mechanics. When I asked him what specifically he thought was so dangerous about the music, he said, "When I heard the music it became a part of me. I couldn't take that part of me away."

At that point he started his furniture business because he wanted to create a Christian environment where people felt comfortable working. At this he has been very successful. He has had low turnover and a waiting list of people who want to work there. He told me that he attracted the best local employees because he provided good benefits, including profit sharing, production bonuses, health insurance, paid holidays, and vacation. Because 2013 was a very profitable year, his employees each got $3 to $4 per hour more than usual due to his profit-sharing policy. He said, "My accountant told me I'm crazy, but he respects what I'm doing."

Sam introduced me to some of the management philosophies that he believed really contributed to creating an environment that provided for people physically as well as spiritually. For him, there was a distinct difference between an organization's *purpose* and its *mission*. An organization's purpose, according to Sam, is "what inspires us. It's what grips our hearts," he said. "It is the answer to the question, 'why do you do what you do?'" An organization's mission, on the other hand, "is more practical. It is the answer to the question, 'what do you do?'" For Sam, his passion drove his

daily approach to business. He worked to encourage his workers' eternal salvation. For him, this came before everything else. "There's no lasting value to anything else," he said.

He also sought to create an environment where solutions to problems came from the workers themselves. "I want people to feel comfortable coming to talk to me, but I also want to make sure I am the least missed person in the company. There are dads, sons, and daughters who have dedicated their lives to this business. If I have a heart attack, I want to make sure the business can carry on and everyone is taken care of." Every Monday morning, Sam meets with his lead employees. The meeting starts with a devotional. Then members of his team voice any concerns they have. Every month, all employees gather to participate in a similar meeting. On these days, Sam's wife has lunch catered. The devotional, he said, "set the tone for the meeting so that it won't end up in shouting." He uses an inspirational illustration to make people think. Then there is a prayer, and the meeting starts. The devotional, Sam said, helps people remember the organization's purpose—why they do what they do. It is important, he said, to infuse it into every aspect of the employees' work. Sometimes the young women were bashful, so they would write their ideas down and drop them on Sam's desk before the meeting. They did not need to write their names. He said that everyone really enjoys the monthly meetings. They make people feel like they are in control, belong to the community, and are valued and heard. From a management perspective, he also found these meetings to be invaluable. Many things that made a meaningful contribution to the organization came out of those meetings, he said. Sam cited their profit-sharing program as well as a number of proposals for "better, quicker ways of doing things" as examples off the top of his head.

In talking with Sam, I realized that the way in which the historical museum director had described an individual's relationship with the soil—that it became a part of you, and you of it—was strikingly similar to Sam's feelings about the music that he did not like in his job as a mechanic. He said that the immoral and vulgar lyrics of the music became a part of him that he could not take away. Just as the soil from the land was seen as part of the body, the words, images, and stories to which Sam was exposed were described as part of his soul. He felt so strongly about this that he eventually quit his job and worked to create an environment that he thought would provide for its employees' physical and spiritual needs by working

to create an organization where the culture reflected Amish values. In this way, he was able to create a sanctuary for Amish living that made use of some technology for the enhancement of the business but resisted the negative impacts of digital capitalism on peoples' lives. Namely, his business resisted adopting strategies that that would uproot individuals, separate minds from bodies, and separate bodies from each other and nature. He also worked to make each person feel creative and offered them opportunities to exercise their creativity to improve the work process.

Sam's father was a farmer, but when the economy changed, he developed a business that utilized the resources that he found in his area and provided for people in his family and community. He thought that it was very important to appreciate "the unique gifts each person had been given" and "act as a good steward" of the resources and skills that God had given him. He told me that he did not believe in ownership. On judgment day, he believed, he would have to provide an account of what he did with the resources that God had provided. He also told me that he and his wife were completely different people, which was good. "If they were the same, it would make one of them unnecessary." He truly believed that it took a team who respected each other's differences and valued their unique skills to create the type of environment that provided for their physical needs and nurtured their souls. For him these two goals—to provide for physical and spiritual nourishment—were not easily separated from one another. They were connected parts of the same whole.

In participants' minds, farming held a certain idealized status because it organized life in a way where human efforts served a dual function: it made the connection clear that working to provide the fuel necessary for life also helped foster spiritual growth by bringing individuals into direct contact and making them dependent on each other and nature—God's creations. Despite a macrolevel exodus from farming, Amish participants still reported believing that maintaining the tangibility of the connection between work that produces both physical nourishment and spiritual nourishment was empowering to them. From Amish perspectives, then, the body as the medium for face-to-face communication was seen as inherently "a part of" the physical and cultural environment in which it was embedded. To perform according to one's calling as an extension of God's will, from an Amish perspective, it was best to be embedded in an environment where human efforts were useful and respectable and the

images, sounds, and stories filling the environment reflected spiritually edifying values.

To illustrate this connection further, John, an Amish minister, explained to me that the ease that digital technologies brought to communication was actually a disadvantage to their communities. In fact, he thought that effort, not ease in communication, worked to strengthen internal bonds and protect the community's cultural autonomy. After he told me that "nothing can compare to face-to-face communication," I asked him to articulate what he thought was lost from face-to-face engagement during a phone conversation. His response was, "There's not the total connection between two people over the phone like there is face-to-face." I shared with him an observation from my own life working at a university. In the university, people typically send emails to get work done. I said, "It's just so much easier for people to email." In response to this he said, "Well, there's one key word that you shared with me that is not always best and that is *easier*. It's easier to call you on the phone. It's easier to text you, but easier is not always better."

To describe his viewpoint in more detail, he used a cooking analogy. John continued,

> It is easier for a woman to just open up a can or open up a box, but that cannot compare in any way with a home-cooked meal or a cake or dessert or baked bread made from scratch. My wife . . . I am very, very blessed. Because my wife is a great baker, she is a great cook, she's a great seamstress, she's a great homemaker . . . all that stuff. But when she bakes bread, when she is kneading the dough, she is praying for the people that are going to eat that bread. Now, you cannot get that from a loaf of bread from the store or from a bakery . . . a commercial bakery. And that is an expectation that I would not have when I go to buy a loaf of bread from a bakery or get a loaf of bread from a friend. But with the knowledge that my wife has been praying for the special people in her life—it just makes it a little more special.

The fact that John used a cooking analogy helps tie together points made earlier in this chapter. He identified a meaningful connection between his wife's physical *work* and creativity in nourishing her family and the spiritual act of praying for them. It is clear in doing so that he sees value in maintaining a connection between the act of providing physical nourishment and spirituality. Indeed, for him, when these are intricately bound together, life is simply more authentic, meaningful, and beautiful. His wife's work,

which was required to make this happen, is a deep expression of her care for family. There were alternatives that could make her work easier, but they would privilege the value of efficiency instead of effort. Seen from a holistic point of view, effort, not efficiency, conveyed love for others, provided physical and spiritual fulfillment, and strengthened family bonds.

In this way, I found that Amish people believed that face-to-face communication had real implications for the protection of their cultural autonomy over time. They thought that actively choosing not to use digital technologies (some did not use them at all, and some used them only for certain reasons) helped preserve a slow pace of life that kept connections between physical creation and spirituality tangible in the performance of relatively mundane daily activities. This helped maintain strong bonds of mutual support within their community while reinforcing Amish cultural identities as separate from the outside world. When physical creation and spiritual edification are directly connected to the land and soil on which they depend, it produces a sense of holism for individuals where everything is inherently and visibly tied together: the weather, God, livestock, cultural values, the quality of food on the dinner table, and their daily labor. For the Amish, it is easy to look around and see how one area of life has a direct impact on the other.

Utilizing the human body as the primary mode of communication, according to Amish perspectives, allowed individuals to maintain control over their culture and way of life in a world where they believed that powerful governments and corporations would be happy to fill the void if they did not. The particular communication affordances of the human body necessitated small-scale social and economic configurations that for the Amish emphasized holism, simplicity, spirituality, a slow pace of life, tradition, and heritage. As a result of placing limits on mediated forms of communication, a sanctuary exists that resists the individualizing influences of surveillance and control through corporate and political advertising. In contrast to most information work today, Amish intellectual and professional pursuits were part and parcel of a way of life in which people were at peace, had a purpose, and were rooted and known. These are indeed the facets of Amish culture that they thought empowered them most.