Nostalgia for America's Village Past: Staged Symbolic Communities

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If an objective past exists, it is fully comprehensible only to a being above and apart from the social order. For actors *within* the social order, the past will always be understood only as filtered through screens of subjectivity. These screens can be viewed theoretically as the personal, the social, and the more broadly cultural, though in truth they do not operate discreetly but in mutual conjunction. Freud provided important keys to individuals seeking to unlock the personal past, their own history (1900). Now sociologists and cultural historians are increasingly interested in collective acts and modes of interpretation: how social groups and cultural collectivities subjectively interpret the past and actively use it to pursue group goals, explicit or implicit (Gowans 1989, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, Lears 1981, Lowenthal 1985, Williams 1983).

These acts of interpretation take several forms. Many of these involve the arts and popular culture. For example, Barry Schwartz and Eugene Miller have analyzed the iconographic significance of cultural heroes such as George Washington and the role of portraits in defining both individual and group character (1986). Landscape historian John Brinckerhoff Jackson has examined the role of statues and monuments in memorializing important events and in reaffirming collective values (1980). Individual artists and artistic movements have interpreted the past and, in so doing, often provided their audience with a new source of national direction. Examples include the glorification of Teutonic culture inspired by Richard Wagner's operas; the role of the Norwegian poets in creating a sense of national identity (Jacobs 1980), and the interweaving of culture and politics in nationalistic architectural revivals (Barthel 1988). And, of course, there are the popular rituals incorporated in national holidays, such as Bastille Day and the Fourth of July, in which the subjective interpretation

of the past takes many forms, some relatively spontaneous, some highly controlled (Halle 1984).

Here I examine a comparatively neglected cultural form through which the objective past receives collective subjective interpretations. This phenomenon I identify with the label "Staged Symbolic Communities" (SSCs).

Staged Symbolic Communities are staged representations of past communities, whether reconstructed on an original site, such as Williamsburg, Virginia or imaginative recreations of generic communities without specific historic referent. Old Sturbridge Village in southeastern Massachusetts is an example of this latter category, insofar as historic buildings were gathered from all over New England and placed in a locality where heretofore no previous village had existed. SSCs can also exist alongside so-called "living communities," as is the case in Amana, Iowa, where some historic buildings have been given over to the interpretation of the past and others remain private, serving the needs of present residents (Barthel 1984).

In labelling such "communities" Staged Symbolic Communities, I am drawing directly on the work of Suttles (1968, 1971) and Hunter (1974), and indirectly on the work of many other community sociologists as well as scholars interested in the symbolism of space (Glazer and Lilla 1987, Gottdiener 1986, Rochberg-Halton 1986). Suttles has discussed the processes through which communities construct their moral and social order, while Hunter coins the term "symbolic communities" to describe the importance of "shared or collective representations." This article pushes the argument one important step further by examining how certain "communities" serve a symbolic function for the larger society. SSCs are symbolic insofar as they only play the *role* of community. They *perform* community in a society wherein organic communities are a thing of the past, if, indeed, they ever existed (Wrong 1976).

Communities have long been valued as important intermediate levels of organization, negotiating the distance between individual and the forces of organized society (Tocqueville 1945, Warren 1963). Sociologists of community, however, are notorious for failing to come up with a shared definition of what it is they study. Opinions differ as to whether communities must have a geographic basis, or whether they can be associational (Kuper and Kuper 1985). Whatever the structure, opinions divide further as to the content of community. Is it assumed or achieved, does it require sentimental attachment (Nisbet 1953), does it exhibit some independence of operation, or is it in truth part and parcel of modern society? (Vidich and Bensman 1968).

Staged Symbolic Communities differ from "real communities" in several important ways. For example, even given the confusion over definitions, most sociologists would probably not consider Old Sturbridge Village in Southeastern Massachusetts to be a real community. Its residents don't reside there; they leave the community after gates close to go home. While in the village they

don't simply perform social roles, but rather they interpret historic social roles to tourists. These "interpreters" or "residents," as they are called, have an extra level of self-conscious distancing. Both interpreter and tourist are intently aware that the former is playing a role, whether or not they realize that the tourist is doing so as well.

This discrepancy is underlined by a third difference, for the community is curiously located out of time, embedded in history. Recreated at an approximate historical moment, it will always be 1830 in Sturbridge (unless the foundation decides otherwise). The only "time" this community recognizes is repetitive seasonal change: time moves on without progressing. This discontinuity between present and past, and the consequent denial of future possibilities, also means that the social processes most community sociologists assume as central to the life of real communities are simply non-existent. Any social, political or economic issues, such as may arise in this bizarre context, are decided not by 1830's residents, but by 1989 officials and curators.

While Sturbridge would not be recognized as a "real" community, many that might be so considered fail to live up to sociological definitions and expectations of community. For Gans, the prototypical planned post-war community, Levittown, was not a "real" community as he defined it. "It was not an economic unit whose members were dependent on each other for their livelihood, and it was not a social unit for there was no reason or incentive for people to relate to each other as Levittowners on any regular or recurring basis. And Levittown was clearly not a symbolic unit, for the sense of community was weak" (1967: 145). If it wasn't a community, what then was it? Gans suggests it could best be considered "an administrative-political unit that encompassed an aggregate of community-wide associations within a pre-defined space" (ibid).

What was true of Levittown is increasingly true for other communities. Today, planned communities, whether suburban developments or urban condominiums, are organized around "concepts" and offer desirable leisure facilities. Many, however, lack the integrating economic and social ties which Gans uses as criteria of community. Older, once "organic" communities also become economic shells, as women, formerly over-represented among those doing the "work" of community (Seeley, Sim and Loosley 1963) increasingly look for work outside the community, and as corporations and professions demand ever more of the energies of both men and women.

The irony, then, is that while SSCs are not real communities by sociological standards, however slack or rigorous, to many tourist visitors they seem *more* like real communities than do their home localities (Williams 1989). This paradox is central to our understanding of Staged Symbolic Communities. SSCs are an increasingly significant feature of our social landscape in part because they present images of coherent, organic communities: small towns and villages

whose secure boundaries selectively filter the impact of the greater society, rather than being overcome by it.

Before considering in more detail how SSCs structure the subjective experience of history, it is worth considering how SSCs arose in the first place. While historic preservation as a movement and enterprise got seriously underway in most Western societies in the nineteenth century, in America, SSCs are a phenomenon of the twentieth century. I have argued elsewhere that historic preservation can best be understood as a response to industrialization and its discontents (Barthel 1989). In this context, it is particularly interesting that most of the first generation SSCs resulted from the distinctive vision and financial backing of leading industrialists: John D. Rockefeller in Williamsburg, Henry Ford in Greenfield Village, Michigan, Albert Wells, a successful manufacturer of optical products, in Sturbridge Village, among others.

One can speculate as to why these leading industrialists found it attractive to re-create images of pre-industrial America. A similar phenomenon did not occur in Great Britain. One explanation would be that in Britain, "fake villages" would receive stiff competition from real villages. Interestingly the most famous "fake village," Portmeirion in North Wales, is a village of total individual fancy without pretense to historic reality. It is quite possible that American millionaires, in contrast to their British counterparts, felt the subjective need to create the village that would complement their new "lord of the manor" status. In Britain, the village comes with the territory and with the title. Now, however, a SSC recreating a village caught in the throes of the Industrial Revolution has been constructed outside Birmingham, but this represents a later, more professional initiative within the preservation movement.

In the United States, SSC founders used the shards of the historic past— from utensils to furniture to architectural and decoration styles—to communicate their own subjective interpretations of the past to their fellow citizens who would visit their villages.

For Rockefeller, Williamsburg provided the opportunity to present a genteel, harmonious vision of colonial America. This harmony resulted from the visual aesthetic: the freshly painted houses, beautifully tended gardens, the Williamsburg "look" featured in many popular magazines. They were meant to be copied and were in fact copied. The harmonious vision also resulted, however, from an idealized representation of social harmony that ill corresponded to the history of this important community. Tourists do not see impersonations of ill-bred or unruly colonial subjects. Nor did they, until recently, see any evidence of slavery in this Southern SSC first opened in the early 1930's. For Ford, Greenfield Village provided the means through which he could present *his* version of history to the American public. Ford's famous "history is bunk" quotation comes from this context. Ford felt the history told by historians and archaeologists was bunk, whereas the structures and artifacts he gathered would,

presumably, tell the truth, the objective truth. Albert Wells, like Ford, saw his role as one of educating the American public, teaching visitors about the "ever-good things of New England's past" (Hosmer 1981).

Beyond these subjective intentions, SSC founders used their villages to tell stories in mythic form. Myths are stories which resolve contradictions: how night becomes day, how winter's death leads to spring's rebirth (Turner 1968). SSCs help resolve the *social* contradictions historians have identified as existing between the garden and the machine: the rural, pre-industrial past and the urban, industrial present (Marx 1964). Wells wrote about the meaning someone who shared in the work at Sturbridge might take away with him. "When the young man is at last placed in an industrial job, he will realize that, as an individual, he is taking part in carrying on a fine inheritance. He will understand, too, how modern industry assures a life far more abundant than what existed under a handicraft system" (Hosmer 1981).

Thus, as Barthes (1972) has described, mythic narrative in this three-dimensional form removes all the contradictions of history. Actual social outcomes are seen not only as the only possible outcomes, but as the *best* possible outcomes. This integrative function is especially striking in communities such as Amana, where the contradictions, as between the community's communal, pietist past, and its aggressive, capitalist present, are particularly striking. The Raytheon corporation, owners of Amana refrigeration, uses the slogan "In the Tradition of Fine Craftsmanship" in its advertising, accompanied by soft focus images of nineteenth century craftsmen at their worktables. Somehow, the advertisements avoid mentioning the fact that these craftsmen were not working for individual profit but for group survival. Similarly, tourists delight in the craftsmanship exhibited in Shaker villages, without being asked to consider to what extent communalism and celibacy might, like Shaker chairs and tables, be adapted to fit new social contexts.

In most SSCs, control of them has passed over to foundations. The subjective interpretation of the past is now the job of business-people, lawyers, historians, curators, and interpreters. These are the SSCs "symbolic bankers" (Burke 1984), managing the symbolic capital and sharing in the profits. Within these groups, however, there exists a tension between those who wish to approach the objective past as closely as is possible, and those more conscious of the subjective nature of SSCs. In brief, SSCs may, on specific issues, feel torn between the desire to be historically accurate and the need to please an audience. These issues include whether or not to plant historic crops, to avoid modern pesticides (and have worms in apples, slug-riddled flowers) (Karp 1982), and to restore paint colors to their original garish glory. Along with writing slavery into the Williamsburg story, this SSC has also decided to leave outbuildings unpainted, thus adding to historical accuracy, if detracting from visual harmony (Karp 1981).

For the most part, preservation tends to depict the better off rather than the worse off, and to pretty up history. Restored ironworks are incongruously surrounded by sweeping green lawns, and every resident can afford a decent pair of shoes. If one is inviting people to *visit* the past, rather than requiring them to *learn* the past, that visit must be a pleasant, memorable one. As one tourist visitor commented, "History goes down smoother this way." In short, SSCs are history made digestible.

EXPERIENCING SSCS

SSCs are clearly delimited spatially. It is evident when one is entering or leaving the community. This may be accomplished simply through discrete signs marking village borders or through billboards welcoming the visitor to the community. Borders may also be tightly monitored through high fences and admissions booths. A *Zone of Mediation* is thus established to facilitate and exploit the transition between outside world and historic community. At Sturbridge, this includes the vast parking field, the entrance and visitor center, which collects the entrance fees and directs tourists as to the correct way to "see" community, both logistically and imaginatively. On the way out, tourists stop in, as if required, at the large gift shop, where they purchase Sturbridge souvenirs and other objects with links, however, tenuous, to early America. While inside, visitors discover a village that is humanscale. In contrast to suburban sprawl and overgrown urban areas, SSCs can be taken in and walked through as one experience. The layout is well organized, frequently with buildings arranged along a village green, with a white church in prominent position at one end. Automobile traffic is usually outlawed. Sheep safely graze. First impressions are reassuring.

Just as they organize their space, SSCs also manipulate time. As they pass through village gates, tourists travel back, as a Sturbridge pamphlet puts it, "to see up close how life in New England used to be, in the days when most families still earned their livings from tilling the soil, when picturesque villages were just beginning to dot the landscape, and when strong individuals like Emerson, Thoreau, and Daniel Webster seemed to stand as tall as New England's rugged hills."

Great care must be taken to preserve this image. This task is especially difficult in living communities, where the present always threatens to intrude upon the past. Specific strategies must be developed to negotiate the desires of tourists to penetrate into community and to share its authentic experiences, and the desires of the community to protect some of its social processes from public view (MacCannell 1976). These strategies manipulate space and time by creating areas, activities, and periods that are off-limits.

Collective action may take the form of an overall charge to tourists on behalf of the community, and severe restriction of front stage social action (MacCannell 1976). Such is the case in Taos, where the steady stream of tourists are charged a hefty entrance fee, plus a fee for each camera they intend to use (which is then tagged). In addition, they are instructed not to photograph any of the residents without asking specific permission, possibly rewarding them for their cooperation. Much of the tourist activity is confined to the central area where cars are parked and from which tourists can view the architecture of this settlement and also gain access to the historic church. Residents stare silently out at the tourists, who quickly get the message that wandering in the back regions is discouraged.

In the Amanas, confinement of the tourists to a front stage arena is more difficult, insofar as historic sites and tourist-oriented businesses are scattered throughout the seven villages on their 25,000 acre tract. Tourists often make a point of at least driving through each of the seven villages, collecting them as through they were different National Parks. Tour maps and an extensive signage system attempt to keep the tourists on approved tracks, but some wander off either in ignorance or in pursuit of the authentic. Some forget that most Amana homes are private property, rather than museums or services. Residents report tourists picnicking on front lawns or even walking into houses to ask when dinner will be served (Barthel 1984).

Besides management of *space*, a second strategy for negotiating past and present involves management of *time*. In SSCs with defensible boundaries, tourism may be restricted to specific hours. Given the extensiveness and dispersion of Amana attractions, this delimitation is more difficult to achieve. Amana residents adjust their activities to the tourist ebb and flow. They make intensive use of the early hours to do gardening and any local shopping. They also emphasize how the community "returns to them" in the evening, and in the less hectic off-season.

Coexistence with an historic community opens opportunities for individual enterprise. Communities must balance the need for economic planning and apparent authenticity with individual desires to market goods and services. In Taos, residents sell Indian artifacts from small shops fronting on the central plaza. In Amana, the mushrooming of individual businesses resulted in a lawsuit in which the Amana Society corporation sued some of its stockholders, who were providing competition for its businesses. In such cases, over-exploitation may result in a loss of tourist interest, as commercialization overwhelms the appearance of authenticity.

Other strategies available include maintaining a sharp psychic divide between insiders and outsiders, and by some individuals fleeing the community during the tourist season; becoming tourists themselves in search of the authentic. Amana people who remain in the villages report a sense of unease when

asked to perform, as if they were part of a living exhibit. One resident fought back by wearing a tee-shirt proclaiming, "I'm not a tourist I live here!" At Taos, some Indian boys express their annoyance by throwing pebbles at tourists.

Taos and Amana both represent communities where tourist penetration has necessitated considerable interpretation *and* regulation. By contrast, in other historic communities minimalist strategies are used. Litchfield, Connecticut presents a genteel facade that is historically inaccurate but visually appealing to contemporary tastes (Butler 1985). Stately white structures with dark shutters sit proudly on streets that radiate from the village green. These houses are not, however, open to the public, nor does the public expect them to be. Interpretation is limited to that performed in the museum and school, and consumer services are contained in a few shops and restaurants facing the green.

Historic Deerfield, like Litchfield, does not advertise extensively. Contrasting itself to Old Sturbridge Village, with its busloads of tourists, Historic Deerfield seeks to attract only the "right sort of tourist," usually middle to upper class with a specific interest in early American architecture and crafts. Historic Deerfield has a village store and an up-market inn.

In sharp contrast to the restraint exercised in these two Anglo-American communities, it may be argued that an attitude associated with processes of internal colonialism affects historic communities of diverse ethnic or racial origins. Tourists expect to see folkloric presentations of dance and song and to view residents in their historic costumes rather than modern dress. Visitors express disappointment that Amana residents no longer wear the heavy dark clothing now associated with the Amish, and when Indian youth ride mopeds rather than stallions. Such folkloric displays are not expected of the upper class who own the Litchfield houses or the privileged students of the Deerfield Academy. For them, historic dress is strictly optional.

Regardless of strategies adopted, visual discrepancies must be minimized. Tourists want modern services, but they also want a nostalgic vision of organic solidarity. The tourist route is drawn to emphasize the interdependence of tradesmen and craftsmen, and the intimate connection of home and work. Even a "dedicated" community such as Mystic, Connecticut with its life organized around the sea, still emphasizes the different trades and crafts associated with sea-faring. In Amana, old photographs of communards working side by side in the fields or in the communal kitchens belie the fact that the community had to hire hoboes to do work communal members disdained, and that shirking was viewed as a major problem.

The presence of social order implies a moral order. Staged Symbolic Communities present their moral order explicitly in the prominent place assigned the church. The stocks suggest punishment for minor misdemeanors, while providing a prop for family photographs.

Morality often entails high standards of cleanliness, and SSCs are clean beyond reason. They also don't smell bad. The stench that would have permeated a whaling town like Mystic is totally absent.

Both landscape *and* inhabitants, then, are clean, innocent, and unspoiled. An advertisement draws the reader in with a silhouetted Amish farmer and his mule team. "Spring in Pennsylvania Dutch Country. Uncrowded, Unhurried, & Almost Perfect." The copy continues, "The fields turn the brightest, freshest shade of green, Amish farmers plant with mule drawn equipment, Spring flowers and orchards bloom . . . ."

SSCs celebrate their moral order in rituals meant to demonstrate rural or ethnic values. Staged events offer an image of ethnic authenticity which may or may not be grounded in historic reality. Indian dances are presented out of their social context, and Amana hosts Oktoberfests quite at odds with its pietist background. Such "pseudo-events" (Boorstin 1973) have all the advantages of planning. They are pleasurable, colorful, and offer plentiful opportunities for consumption.

Much of the appeal of SSCs is that they promise, and usually deliver, two social goods that are usually seen as contradictory. They offer new experience, and they promise security. It is their ability to deliver both that makes them safe bets for two sizable social categories, namely senior citizens and school children. This subjective experience of history is designed to be "fun for the whole family," meaning it is *safe* for the whole family. Sex and violence are usually, incongruously, absent from SSCs. When depicted, as in characters such as frontier town Madames and events such as cowboy shootouts, they provide more color than conflict: a titillating new experience that does not threaten one's security.

Thus part of the nostalgic vision of an innocent past is the vision of the pre-Freudian family: safe both from external threats *and* internal conflicts. Wherever possible, SSCs present an exhibit meant to depict a typical family home of a pioneer or Amish family, etc. Even in the Amana Colonies, where people lived in multi-family houses, the Amana Heim Museum seems laid out for one family unit. Such exhibits gloss over how many town residents were single, widowed, divorced, or separated, and how many children were left orphaned.

If SSCs are fun for the whole family, they are also meant to be educational. Both adults and children dutifully set about learning lessons about the past, as long as they're not too difficult or demanding. Visitors do the "work" of tourism as they follow the designated trail through the villages and as they watch exhibits and demonstrations.

A curious process of role playing commences as the visitor begins to interact with SSC "interpreters"—the temporary-but-pretend-permanent residents. This results in an intriguing contradiction. In the first instance, visitors

revert to the status of child in a tutorial relationship (Donzelot (1979). They stand quietly, respectfully, as interpreters go through their presentations. Some of the better tourist-students prepare questions, which they hope to get the chance to ask. The teachers, the interpreters, have adult status insofar as they have *knowledge* of preindustrial or early industrial work processes. It is also important that they are shown *working*—always industrious—while the work of the tourist is relatively passive (MacCannell 1976).

On a deeper level, however, the parent-child roles are reversed, wherein lies the contradiction. Tourists know that the knowledge being delivered is no knowledge at all: unnecessary, outmoded, anachronistic. In this sense, they know *more* than the interpreters. Visitors play the adult role because they represent adult society—the sophisticated, knowing capitalist society that developed out of these *innocent* beginnings. A spokesman for Mystic said the community "brings people back to a more innocent era." Interpreters work as if motivated by Rousseau's General Will, knowing that by serving the common good they serve their own interests. Visitors know it's not what you know, but who you know.

There is more to the superior position of the visitor's knowledge, which transcends the SSC setting, and the interpreter's, which is particular to it. There is, after all, a story being enacted, and the tourist experiences the pleasures of the narrative (Barthes 1975). Like readers of popular romances (Modleski 1982), tourists know the familiar plot and take comfort in it. There's a titillating pleasure in knowing more than the characters, whether they're in a book or standing in front of you, real as life. SSCs have begun to realize the psychic play afforded, and have begun to provide "naive" characters. As one example, a colonial seaman just returned to Mystic encounters two visiting English tourists, one of whom tells him she's English. He responds, "But so am I Madame! So are we all!"

The plot in SSC narratives is seldom explicit, but then, it is not supposed to be. As Lyotard remarks, narrative is not history but the opposite of history (1986). Narrative takes the raw material of history and alters it to make a better story. The visitor is lulled back into childhood, and does not have to take responsibility for understanding the past, much less the complexities and strange twists on the road to the present.

Thus SSCs offer a range of experiences that are rewarded beyond MacCannell's apperception of the celebration of social differentiation and the more obvious cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) accumulated through travel. SSCs provide certain psychic rewards related to knowing and not knowing. While visitors perform the work of tourism, it is at a leisurely pace, and far more restful than the work re-enacted in the sawmill. In addition, visitors satisfy their "libido for looking" as they see displays far different from their usual surroundings. When they tire of visual and cognitive pleasures, tourists can

indulge in oral pleasures. It is no accident that inns, restaurants, candy stores and snack bars figure prominently in village layouts, and, in terms of traffic, prove some of their most popular attractions.

Besides consuming Colonial popovers and German sauerbraten, visitors are, more importantly, consuming history. SSCs are like the factory outlet villages that spring up in their vicinity. They offer lots of history crowded into a relatively small area—and for a group discount. All have shops either within or immediately outside the community, where visitors are encouraged to buy souvenirs—some specific to the SSC, other included because they suggest Americana or a nostalgic approach to domesticity. In some instances, the line between the historic village and consumer villages is so blurred that visitors no longer recognize the difference. Interstate 80 has an exit stop in eastern Iowa called "Little Amana," where the tourist shops, restaurants and motels have frequently been mistaken for the real Amana villages located several miles off the road. Advertisements for Pennsylvania Dutch country further blur the distinction. On the same page as an advertisement for "The Amish Village," with its blacksmith shop, one-room school, and guided Amish house tours, another advertisement for "The Village that has it all" invites tourists to "*sleep* in spacious guest rooms, *dine* in their restaurant, and *shop* in over 80 factory outlets." Neither "village" bears much resemblance to a real Amish village, kept backstage to most tourists. The emphasis on pre- and early industrial production inside the SSC is mirrored by the postmodern consumerism outside.

The SSC image and narrative also feed back into society, leading to not just the consumption, but also the production of cultural values.

LEARNING FROM SSCS

I have argued that SSCs are popular attractions in part because they provide outlets for desires created by mass industrial society —the desire to experience community, to understand history as myth and narrative, to have a wholesome family experience, to consume a range of products which are small luxuries (restaurant food, souvenirs, toys and items of decor). But visitors take on board more than these pleasing visions and attractive products. SSCs are exemplars providing lessons in the "good community," whether fake or real is of no concern in the age of facad-ism. These lessons can be summarized as follows:

1.) *The good community is the genteel community.* It is clean and harmonious, residents share the same refined tastes. This was the image provided by Williamsburg, the "Williamsburg look" that added fuel to the ongoing Colonial Revival (Axelrod 1985). This genteel image has been adopted as a model for up-market communities and even down-market condominiums.

Rockefeller's upper class gentility becomes translated into middle-class con-
formity. Houses are painted either in white, as in Litchfield's uniform facades,
or in approved colonial colors: Pilgrim Red, Newport Gray, Tavern Green.

2.) *The good community is the protected community.* To enter an SSC
the visitor passes through a gatehouse, for such ideal communities could not
exist in the middle of suburban sprawl without some form of symbolic divide.
Gatehouses are now an important architectural feature of new communities
being built. They are an important part of the new definition of marketable
communities, insofar as they offer both the appearance of social status and the
illusion of security.

3.) *The good community is conflict free.* One does not see SSC residents
at odds over new development plans or prospective neighbors. The behavior
of SSC residents, like every other aspect of SSC life, is, in fact, governed by
invisible management. The management is not seen, but it makes rules that
even tourists are required to obey: keep to the paths, no defacing of property,
no professional photography without permission.

Like SSCs, the governing boards of private communities and con-
dominiums draw up lists of rules that prohibit the unsightly and the unseemly:
speed limits of 30 miles an hour, no parking along the streets, no dogs off the
leash, no wash hanging on balconies, no broken down cars in carports. Many
potential sources of conflict are thereby ruled out ahead of time. Residents
themselves can be expected to play their social roles within these strictures
more consciously *and* conscientiously, like the "residents" of SSCs. Their ex-
pressed values and behavior must conform to an ever more tightly drawn, class-
specific set of rules and norms, just as their houses must be the right shade of
paint. In Mystic, a local historian emphasizes the residents' "great consciousness
in maintaining the place of these homes in history." The result is to guarantee
both the personal and the financial investment in history.

4.) *Personal and social history can be re-written.* A critical part of
Freud's vision was that people were shaped by their personal histories: histories
that could not be unwritten or changed but only revealed and dealt with ra-
tionally. The "history of nations" was also long held to set a course which
each nation followed. One studied history both for a sense of the past and a
sobering balance to the events of the present. History provided an anchor
against the consuming whirlpool of political events and mass enthusiasms
(Lloyd-Jones 1983).

Now, history has been sucked into the whirlpool. It is not treated as past
actuality, but as present possibility: raw material to be shaped by contemporary
exigencies. Nietzsche was overcome by the weight of history; modern social
actors simply dismantle it and reassemble it in whatever piece of *bricolage*
they fancy.

This applies to individual history and also to the fraudulent assumption of aristocratic identities through fashions and other status props. It also applies to group and even national history. The attempt to write the holocaust out of history is notorious, but there are small omissions, from Samoa to Watergate on down to the community level (Thernstrom 1965).

In the process, many SSCs now recall Marx's dictum that history repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce. The Middle Ages were a time of periodic want and suffering for a large percentage of the population. Now, this historic period is gayly re-enacted, both in England, in early Tudor castles, and, even more farcically, in America, which clearly did not participate in the European Middle Ages. Nonetheless, Medieval theme parks promise a "return to the days of chivalry, knighthood and honor . . . as a guest of a regal Count & Countess inside a completely enclosed, air conditioned, European-style Castle." A Medieval festival is incongruously included as part of the Amish country schedule of pseudo-events. It is the presence of such social forms in contemporary capitalist society that adds weight to Carroll's call for a more skeptical sociology (1980) to do them justice.

5.) *The smart locality is one that either exploits old history, or creates new history.* History, as we have seen, becomes a product to be consumed. In Amana, local history was considered by some residents to be like "the goose that laid the golden eggs." The major concern was that the goose should *continue* laying golden eggs: i.e., the tourist potential be properly exploited to avoid over-exposure and a decline in the quality of the tourist's encounter with history, as carefully manipulated and presented by the community (Barthel 1984).

In the nineteenth century, communities competed to become stops on the railroad line and to attract industry. In the late twentieth century, communities compete to become stops on the tourist trail and to attract the service industries that feed on tourism. New frontier towns are created across the West, as local boosters climb on board this new train to wealth and opportunity (Jackson 1980).

In the process, the line between fake and real becomes blurred. The *simulacrum* is as good as or better than the real thing. Often, ironically, whatever authentic community identity exists gets destroyed in the process, as in the small Catskill communities now bracing for the arrival of "ParcEurope." Under proposed development plans, "authentic European villages" (along with Robin Hood and an equestrian school) will replace authentic rural American villages. While many residents are opposed to these plans, one welcomed the idea, saying it would be like "having Europe in my backyard . . . I can walk there. I won't even have to fight the traffic or the airlines" (*New York Times,* April 3, 1989). ParcEurope, then, promises to be more amusing than either rural New York or Europe itself, and without the hassles of modern society.

CONCLUSION

Staged Symbolic Communities have become important cultural forms in contemporary America. As *simulacrums* of community, they offer a vision of the organic community with which few contemporary communities can compete. They offer an outlet from the work organization of mass bureaucratic society enabling the tourist visitor to feel both relaxed and in control.

Visitors to SSCs take away more than souvenirs and decorating ideas. They also carry lessons regarding identity, history, and community. The "Williamsburg effect" involves more than paint colors and the attractive presentation of historic villages. It is now the leading architectural model for new communities, the colonial town replacing suburban sprawl (Mohney and Easterling 1989). We have yet to see whether this model will indeed prove the "radicalism of tradition" (Calhoun 1983), resulting in the restoration of community structure and affective ties, or whether the step backward suggested by SSCs is simply and only that.

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