

Symbols of Blood and Soil:
Identity Construction and the Hex Signs of the Pennsylvania Germans

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ABSTRACT**Symbols of Blood and Soil:
Identity Construction and the Hex Signs of the Pennsylvania Germans****Brenna Elizabeth Tuel**

This thesis analyzes the hex signs of the Pennsylvania Germans as an evolving, settler-colonial folk practice that continues to play a role in the construction and manipulation of shifting identities and craft in the United States. Examining the influence of hex signs on rural tourism and growing cultural movements, it responds to ideas of nationalism and the ways in which these craft-oriented objects represent and aid in the formation of communities in colonial and contemporary Pennsylvania. Questioning the role of hex signs as symbols and souvenirs, the essay considers the impact of political movements and the tourist industry on individual and communal identities as well as on material objects. Through a case study of Kristin Farr and Hunter Yoder, two working hex sign artists whose signs contrast in both representation and use, this text seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussion of the meaning and purpose of hex signs as bearers of identity and memory for the Pennsylvania German community and those who align themselves with a German settler heritage. This thesis does not take a stance on the symbolic or decorative meanings of the objects under analysis, but instead considers how meaning and function shift with the individuals creating and consuming hex signs. Identifying as a practicing Heathen, Hunter Yoder's hexology incorporates symbols important to his Germanic heritage and religion. In doing so, he associates his work with certain histories and movements connected to those symbols. Kristin Farr's murals and collaborative projects seek to reimagine hex signs in urban spaces, galleries, and commodities, thus complicating the ideals of authenticity and tradition that remain bound to the practice. Examining the work of these hexologists and their involvement in various cultural industries and practices, this thesis concludes that hex signs continue to function as an example of craft's influential capabilities of manipulation in the processes of identity construction.

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INTRODUCTION

In rural southeastern Pennsylvania, hex signs, a popular folk art in the region, appear on roadside advertisements, in craft and gift shops, as well as on the facade of barns, businesses, and homes belonging to those who identify as Pennsylvania German and others who have adopted the motif (Figs. 1-2).¹ Circular in form, these folk objects typically consist of images of geometric hearts, rosettes, stars, and a variety of both real or imagined native flora and fauna. Many hex sign artists and collectors of these objects believe that the geometric patterns and images serve a symbolic purpose: for example, tulips may speak to faithfulness to one's partner and God, while the "Distlefink", a mythological bird related to the goldfinch, brings good luck and happiness (Fig. 3). Some individuals use the objects as tools to perform healing rituals or provide blessings to those in need of emotional or physical aid. Others within the Pennsylvania German community support the idea that hex signs simply serve an aesthetic purpose as decorations, in contrast to claims that the objects reference witchcraft or folk magic. This division between those who believe in the magical properties of hex signs and those who view them as decorative embellishments, builds upon the superstitions and stories that make up the history of hex signs, and is part of an ongoing debate on the meaning, purpose, and origins of the objects (Fig. 4). Contemporary artists further complicate this debate as their work challenges many ideas about the objects as representations of heritage, authenticity, and the handmade.

¹ Throughout this text, I will utilize the umbrella term *Pennsylvania German* to refer to those settlers who migrated from German-speaking regions in Europe to the United States of America. Both secular and nonsecular groups, fall into this categorization. It is important to note that this group is also often identified as *Pennsylvania Dutch* or *Pennsylvania Deutsch*, both of which are misnomers and lead many to believe that these groups originally hailed from the Netherlands and therefore speak Dutch. As such, I refrain from referring to these terms in this essay. For further reading see Patrick J. Donmoyer's *Hex Signs: Myth and Meaning in Pennsylvania Dutch Barn Stars* (2013).

This thesis analyzes hex signs as an evolving, settler-colonial folk practice that continues to play a role in the construction and manipulation of shifting identities and a growing tourist industry in the United States.² Examining hex signs, it responds to ideas of nationalism and the ways in which these craft objects represent and aid in the formation of communities in colonial and contemporary Pennsylvania. Through the case studies of Kristin Farr and Hunter Yoder, two working hex sign artists whose signs contrast in both representation and use, the following essay seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussion of the meaning and purpose of hex signs as bearers of identity and memory for the Pennsylvania German community and those who align themselves with a German settler heritage.

Although Pennsylvania German scholars Dr. Don Yoder, Thomas E. Graves, and Patrick J. Donmoyer have contributed greatly to the historical debate and artistic analysis of hex signs, their research lacks a critical approach to the objects both inside and outside of the Pennsylvania German community as well as a comparative analysis of working hexologists (another term for hex sign artists).³ While many contemporary hex sign artists continue to employ symbols familiar to Pennsylvania Germans, others like Hunter M. Yoder and Kristin Farr choose to use alternative techniques that speak to their personal interests and artistic backgrounds. As such, by closely examining the work of two practicing hexologists and how the objects continue to gain new meaning, this project seeks to fill some of the gaps neglected by these scholars; mainly to expand upon conceptions of hex signs as memory bearers and things with changing aesthetic

² For further reading on the role of settler-colonial art history see: Damian Skinner, "Settler-colonial Art History: A Proposition in Two Parts," *Journal of Canadian Art History* 35, no. 1 (2014):130-175.

³ Jacob and Jane Zook, *Hexology: The History and Meanings of Hex Signs*, with comments by Professor Johnny Ott (Pennsylvania: Published by the Authors, 1962), 8.

and spiritual appeal, as craft-oriented commodities, and finally as markers of a settler group's transition and resistance to homogenization in the United States of America.

Methodology

Researching hex signs as folk objects requires close attention to folklore theory and ideas of authenticity, and as such I utilize and respond to ideas found in the texts of craft, folklore, and material culture writers. Aligning myself with scholars like Glenn Adamson, Henry Glassie, Ian McKay, Erin Morton, and others, I aim to better understand how hex signs continue to represent a facet of the Pennsylvania German culture, act as social agents for a settler-colonial community, function within a lucrative tourist industry, and the ways in which their makers interpret and often challenge conceptions of tradition in this folk practice. In conducting this study of hex signs, a redefining and breaking down of the word *tradition* must occur as it often appears in scholarship on folk art and especially in previous research on these objects. Approaching this term, one must resist considering tradition as something static and historically linear. Not only do traditions transform over nonlinear branches of time, adapting to and spreading outwards from the shifting societies in which they exist, but they also stand as abstract frames of categorization. All traditions arise from processes of invention, habit, or sharing; individuals and groups find a specific practice deemed important enough to want to continue to enact, manipulate, or build upon it. To conceptualize this term, folklore and material culture scholars Martha C. Sims and Martine Stephens state the following:

Especially important to note is the vitality of traditions— traditions are behaviors *we do right now* that connect us to other people in a group, and may also connect us to another culture, provide us a sense of ethnicity, or help us make other connections. Traditions are

those informally shared behaviors, customs and verbal expressions that circulate within and among groups. We share and continue them because they help us tell other members of the group and those in other groups (that esoteric/exoteric idea) who we are and what matters to us. That is *why* we pass traditions across the web of community.... Group members can teach each other, they can learn by observing, or sometimes simply begin participating as they become interested in joining or establishing identity within a group.⁴

Traditions involve and greatly contribute to processes of individual and group identity construction. As Sims and Stephens explain, traditions do not have to move through generations or remain the same in order to thrive, but can develop, change, die out, and re-emerge as groups shift, grow, or diminish. The continuation of a tradition does not necessarily depend upon acts of passing down, rather it depends on whether or not a group deems the practice as something important to their identification, memory, and connection to the rest of the world. While a tradition can have a specific date or location of origin, the entirety of its existence does not move chronologically but instead outwards into what Sims and Stephens label ‘the web of community’. Traditions may go unpracticed for years, but can reappear at any given point depending on how individual interests shift or a group’s needs change. Helping to maintain and organize communities, traditions allow groups of people to adapt to, manipulate, and reconstruct their practices as needed.⁵

Turning to folklorist Henry Glassie’s formative text, *Material Culture*, the study and multi-functionality of material objects through cultural, political, and philosophical means comes under analysis. Defining culture as a series of shifting patterns that begins with the individual and expands to society, Glassie categorizes makers and consumers in order to speak to the ways in which objects move through and aid in developing identity. An artifact’s history flows across

⁴ Martha C. Sims, and Martine Stephens, *Living Folklore: An Introduction to the Study of People and Their Traditions* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2005), 71.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

webs of “creation (concentration, learning, teaching, cooperation, technology, form, memory, hope), communication (collaboration, donation, commerce), and consumption (use, preservation, assimilation)”.⁶ Through these lenses, artifacts make possible the narration and cataloguing of history, while also representing a group or individual’s culture; by creating objects like hex signs, an artist contributes to the development of their individual identity and community. Each object serves a purpose; artifacts can function as decorations, tools, and aid in ceremonial or ritual practices.⁷ Displaying individual or group identity, objects communicate value and meaning, and educate others on a specific aspect of culture. Glassie writes that communication and consumption go hand in hand as the processes of purchasing an object from its maker or a vendor involve dialogue on the item’s cultural history, creation, monetary worth, and how the buyer plans on integrating it into their life. On this note, the author makes clear that an artifact can obtain meaning and purpose throughout its lifetime. Assimilating the object into one’s life after the initial creation and purchase shifts the item’s functionality and value; Glassie explains that when the assimilation of the artifact into an individual’s lived environment occurs, it takes on their needs and beliefs. One can apply Glassie’s concept to hex signs as their use and value shifts with the beliefs, histories, and needs of the object’s creator as well as that of the consumer and viewer. Lastly, creation, communication, and consumption function as essential components in the web of traditions conceptualized by Sims and Stephens. With these ideas of tradition and how society creates, communicates, and consumes material objects in mind, I seek to interpret hex signs not as the final frontier of Pennsylvania German tradition, but rather as a highly influential and con-

⁶ Henry Glassie, *Material Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 65.

⁷ Glassie, *Material Culture*, 65.

tinuously manipulated craft practice that exists in a constantly expanding web of nonlinear histories.⁸ To build upon these ideas, this thesis also uses the texts of Pennsylvania German, religion, and tourism scholars to aid in the analysis of hex signs and the development of settler identities in the middle colonies. Lastly, in the final section on Kristin Farr's hex sign practice, I utilize the works of anthropologist Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff to explore how commodities can function as craft and to trace object biographies throughout their lifetime.

The first section of this thesis examines and outlines the historical background of the Pennsylvania German community, touching on their colonial beginnings and processes of settlement in North America. I explore the development of the tourist industry in southeastern Pennsylvania as it functions as an essential component of commerce and plays an important role in the manipulation of barn stars into hex signs. I then turn to the creation of hex signs, surveying their commodification in regions of Pennsylvania and scholarly interpretation while also speaking to their role as symbols of Pennsylvania German culture, community, and identity.

The first case study investigates the hex signs of contemporary hexologist Hunter M. Yoder, whose artistic and religious practices uphold and contribute to ongoing processes of identity construction in Pennsylvania as well as within Heathen communities. Using aspects of the neo-pagan religion of Heathenry as a guide, I offer a critical analysis of the black sun symbol used by Yoder, relating it to its historical and contemporary application outside and within alternative cultural and political groups. Questioning whether or not granting symbols like the black sun

⁸ It has been suggested by scholar Robert Ensminger that hex signs stand as the final stage of Pennsylvania German craft. Not only does this belief support the idea that craft remains forever on the edge of disappearing, but it assumes that artists and scholars will not continue to reinterpret and analyze these objects. See: Robert Ensminger, "Hex Signs and Barn Stars in Pennsylvania: Finding the Missing Link," *Material Culture*, 36, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 20.

new meaning causes an erasure or ignorance of its historical background, this thesis examines the role of heritage and authenticity in Yoder's work in order to open new ways of understanding the duality and multiplicity of meanings in hex signs and the communities in which they exist. The challenge of laying out how the manipulation of objects and symbols that aid in processes of identity construction leads to the development of complex, and often contrasting, layers of meaning based on the needs and structures of a group is taken up at the end of this case study.

The artistic practice of Kristin Farr is examined in relation to her role as a hexologist outside of the Pennsylvania German community, collaborator with various retail industries, and avid social media participant. Applying larger than usual hex signs to the exteriors of buildings and music festival sites, Farr's designs reference optical illusion artists like Bridget Riley (b.1931), another female artist whose trippy, meticulously designed compositions offer a new way of seeing the world and respond to the construction of individual identity and emotional responses to the lived environment. For Farr, hex signs represent joy and inspire pure happiness, as visualized in her use of radiant, harmonious colors and geometric patterns. Though visually and ideologically different from Hunter Yoder's hexology, Farr's signs remain inherently bound to the same histories of colonization, identity construction, and tradition that surround hex signs. In analyzing the hexology work of Kristin Farr, this second case study aims to show the continuous reinterpretation and transformation of hex signs outside of the Pennsylvania German community and Farr's participation in a practice mainly dominated by men.

Each section in this thesis contains perspectives of individuals who identify as Pennsylvania German and whose craft practice acts as a mechanism from which to construct, challenge, and reimagine a well-known American folk discipline. Ideals about pastoral life and the people

who inhabit the rural regions of the United States continue to manipulate and disrupt the ways in which hex sign designers interpret and interact with others within and outside of Pennsylvania German communities. The multi-faceted histories of colonization, invented traditions, and tourism come together in the story of hex signs and thus remain tied to the ongoing creation of these objects.

Developing Identities: Pennsylvania German Settlers in Colonial and Contemporary America

The history of colonial Pennsylvania and the regional development of the tourist industry stand as two important components in the formation of the Pennsylvania German community and in linking the role of hex signs as commodities to their position as settler-colonial identity markers. In resisting homogenization and total integration into a society dominated by Anglo-Americans during the colonial and Early Republic era, German-speaking settlers established cultural practices that allowed them to maintain parts of their European heritage and construct identities that continue to exist and transform alongside the changing social structures of the United States.⁹ While the Amish, Lutheran, Mennonite, and others differ in their religious and cultural practices, the groups that constitute the Pennsylvania German community share histories of colonial settlement. Historically and currently, they find themselves agglomerated by others into a singular mass that further complicates their identity as individuals and members of religiously and culturally diverse micro-communities.

⁹ Steven M. Nolt, *Foreigners in Their Own Land: Pennsylvania Germans in the Early Republic* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 145.

In approaching this juncture of colonial history and the corresponding development of Pennsylvania German identities, one must reassess the melting pot metaphor that often arises when analyzing the early formation and contemporary social structures of the United States. First appearing in 1908, the term melting pot refers to the assumed integration and homogenization of those who, voluntarily or not, settle(d) in North America.¹⁰ Once situated in the so-called melting pot, these individuals were often expected to adopt a new, Americanized identity and thus any subsequent forms of identification appeared to originate from this new self.¹¹ The operative nature of the melting pot metaphor often attempts to disregard, repurpose, or strip away individual and communal histories. In reality, groups of settlers like the Pennsylvania Germans formed a conglomerate of diverse languages, religions, memories, and cultural practices.¹² Though they certainly gained new identities in order to fit into American societal ideals, their selfhood remained and transformed as a result of the challenging experiences they encountered. Social and political philosopher José-Antonio Orosco suggests that, most often, the melting pot metaphor elicits feelings of “either fear or nostalgia” towards immigrants. For the government, migrants like Pennsylvania Germans either represent economic opportunity, consumerism, and cultural diversity, or function as a threat to the structure of the nation.¹³

¹⁰ José-Antonio Orosco, *Toppling the Melting Pot: Immigration and Multiculturalism in American Pragmatism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 3.

¹¹ Orosco, *Toppling the Melting Pot*, 1.

¹² In North America, the folk includes groups of white, European settlers who participated in the colonization and formation of the nation and remained in rural, seemingly impoverished pockets of land across the country. Ironically, Indigenous groups with whom these settlers interacted also often fall into the melting pot and category of the folk, as their culture functions as an essential perspective and tool in the *idea* of the United States. The roots of power in the United States, and therefore the conceptualization of the folk and the melting pot in North America, started with those groups who historically played roles in the birth of the colonial nation. See: Nolt, *Foreigners in Their Own Land: Pennsylvania Germans in the Early Republic*, 28-29.

¹³ Orosco, *Toppling the Melting Pot*, 5.

Rather than adhere to the shallow and often romanticized conceptions of the folk and ethnicity that arise with the use of metaphors like the melting pot, I write this section with the following understanding of identity in mind:

...ethnic identity is viewed as something far from unified or stable. It is an inherently dynamic category, contingent on ever-shifting historical and social contexts and subject to manifold tensions and conflicts. Simultaneously the product of self-identification and external ascription, ethnicity constitutes a sense of peoplehood, of common values, customs, and traditions that define the boundaries between different groups. This implies that these values and traditions are fluid in nature and are continually being reinvented through the network of reciprocal cultural relations in which these groups negotiate fluctuating boundaries.¹⁴

Recognizing the impact of, but avoiding the use of, inaccurate metaphors like the melting pot, it becomes possible to challenge the conception of an authentic, fully refined American identity and instead examine how selfhood develops differently among diverse groups of individuals as they interact with others and challenge the ideals associated with them.¹⁵ Twentieth-century nationalistic ideals that remain ingrained in the melting pot metaphor maintain that anyone who wants to identify as an American must adhere to a monocultural, mono-linguistic, and ultimately anglocentric society.¹⁶

The roots of the United States' power, and therefore the conceptualization of the folk in North America, started with those groups who historically played roles in the birth of the colonial nation. More often than not, the folk comes to represent a nation's identity; as a nation builds its roots from those who live on the land and adhere to the principles and values deemed essential to

¹⁴ Jan Stievermann, "Introduction," in *A Peculiar Mixture: German-Language Cultures and Identities in Eighteenth-Century North America*, edited by Jan Stievermann and Oliver Scheiding (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 9-10.

¹⁵ Orosco, *Toppling the Melting Pot*, 12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

the success of the country. The highly selective image of the folk has been used by governmental bodies to distinguish who qualifies as a “*true*” citizen, while simultaneously highlighting those who supposedly do not belong. Existing alongside and often in opposition to the ideals of the nation, ethnic identities transform as groups and the larger societies in which they inhabit change and encounter new experiences. Resisting cultural totality, communities constantly adapt and respond to their environment in order to maintain singular and group individuality. To think of ethnic identity as something static ultimately undermines its ability to establish and challenge boundaries put in place by conflicting parties and the nation, and feeds into “the long-standing habit of retrospectively projecting onto the colonial period interpretations that lead, teleologically, to the constitution of a cultural totality.”¹⁷ Creating an ethnic identity that resists integration into and homogenization by American society becomes an essential part in claiming one’s place and maintaining cultural memories. In order to construct a community and therefore a sense of belonging in their new location, Pennsylvania German settlers began to develop common practices that would transform and adapt over time as the cultural, political, economic, and social climates of the United States changed.

Colonial Settlement of Pennsylvania

Beginning in the late seventeenth and continuing into the eighteenth centuries, the transatlantic migration of German-speaking settlers to the middle colonies brought about great social change in the early United States of America, with the influx of immigrants into the Port of Philadelphia leading to an increased desire to claim place in a rapidly developing colonial nation under Eng-

¹⁷ Jan Stievermann, “Introduction,” 6.

lish rule.¹⁸ Traveling with their families and Church congregations, the first groups of German settlers fled to what was then the Province of Pennsylvania in 1683 in hopes of escaping “political, economic, and religious dissatisfactions in the homeland,” and thus starting a new life in the so-called New World.¹⁹ In Pennsylvania, freedom of religion allowed European settlers to openly practice their spiritual beliefs without persecution.²⁰ Despite these new freedoms, growing tensions between British and German-speaking settlers continued to arise as the new nation developed.²¹ Competing for land and commerce with the English, the German settlers established settlements upon which they succeeded in developing agricultural businesses and communities that determined the economic and cultural landscape of southeastern Pennsylvania.²² From this moment onwards, the rapid settling and intermingling of European colonizers and Indigenous peoples motivated German-speaking communities in rural and urban environments to hold onto and

¹⁸ Marie Basile McDaniel, “Divergent Paths: Processes of Identity Formation Among German Speakers, 1730-1760,” in *A Peculiar Mixture: German-Language Cultures and Identities in Eighteenth-Century North America*, edited by Jan Stievermann and Oliver Scheiding (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 184-85.

¹⁹ John G. Gagliardo, “Germans and Agriculture in Colonial Pennsylvania,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 83, no. 2 (April 1959): 192.

²⁰ Prior to their migration to Pennsylvania in the late seventeenth century, Protestant or Reformed (which broadly includes Anabaptists, Baptists, Hutterites, Lutheran, Methodist, and others) Christian groups in Europe were ostracized by the Roman Catholic Church for the greater part of the sixteenth century. Many of these groups and movements formed during the Reformation. For further reading, see: *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Reformation*, edited by Peter Marshall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge, U. K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996).

²¹ On Pennsylvania Germans in the southeastern region of the state, Englishman and Founding Father Benjamin Franklin (b. 1706- 1790) made the following statement: ““Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our language or customs, any more than they can acquire our complexion?” In addition to characterizing the settlers as a singular cultural group, Franklin racialized them as ‘swarthy’ in contrast to the English, who ‘make the principal body of white people on the face of earth.’” Benjamin Franklin as quoted in *Pennsylvania Germans: An Interpretive Encyclopedia*, edited by Simon J. Bronner and Joshua R. Brown (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2017), 1.

²² Gagliardo, “Germans and Agriculture in Colonial Pennsylvania,” 198.

reinvent certain traditions previously practiced in their homeland. American history scholar Marie Basile McDaniel explains that by breathing new life into their languages, religions, and traditions, German-speaking settlers in Pennsylvania:

...developed a collective identity through recognition of their linguistic similarities or common experiences. While the immigrants attempted to recreate European traditions, demographic reality forced them to accommodate ethnic differences, thereby redefining their previous provincial identities as new colonial identities that sometimes bore little resemblance to those in Europe.²³

Claiming one's place in a colonial nation required German settlers to adapt to the diverse communities in which they found themselves. In order to fulfill expectations of assimilation, Pennsylvania Germans recreated and invented new identities as colonizers and in doing so, established their place as both Americans and a constantly changing ethnic group.²⁴ As their visual culture expanded and shifted alongside their new environment, the religiously and culturally diverse identities of the German-speaking colonizers began to merge together.²⁵

Tourism: Identity Manipulation and Commodification

Today, a shared and ongoing desire to return to a simpler period and encounter colonial life acts as the driving force behind the tourist industry in regions like Lancaster County in southeastern

²³ McDaniel, "Divergent Paths: Processes of Identity Formation Among German Speakers, 1730-1760," 188.

²⁴ Pennsylvania Germans are often broken down into two distinct groups described as 'plain' (referring to the sects that refrain from decorating their space and wearing elaborate clothing) and 'fancy' (assigned to the nonsectarian Germans who freely adorn their homes and do not follow strict dress codes). See: Patrick J. Donmoyer's text, *Hex Signs: Myth and Meaning in Pennsylvania Dutch Barn Stars* (2013).

²⁵ I would like to note that this section covers a *very* general summarization of the colonization of Pennsylvania and does not aim at a full, in-depth historical analysis of the settlement period as such an endeavor would result in a book-sized essay. For more see: Simon J. Bronner's *Pennsylvania Germans: An Interpretive Encyclopedia* (2017); Steven M. Nolt's *Foreigners in Their Own Land: Pennsylvania Germans in the Early Republic* (2002); Jan Stievermann and Oliver Scheiding's *A Peculiar Mixture: German-Language Cultures and Identities in Eighteenth-Century North America* (2013); Robert F. Hueston's article, "The Assimilation of German Immigrants into a Pennsylvania German Township, 1840-1900" (January 2009).

Pennsylvania. Souvenirs, restaurants, and agricultural themed tours grant tourists access to the daily life of the Amish and local farmers, albeit in a highly idealized manner.²⁶ Mixing together images of the Amish with motifs taken from Pennsylvania German folk art, souvenir shops and advertisements blend the various cultures of the community together, thus labelling them as homogenous, “authentic” examples of a seemingly indistinguishable society. As a folk group, Pennsylvania Germans share their beloved culture with visitors, and in response tourists create their own image of the community based on their experiences in the region. When considering the historical and contemporary impact of the tourist industry, it is worth noting the influential economic power of the German settlers in Pennsylvania as well as the longstanding tendency for outsiders to idealize their culture. For example, Rudyard Kipling, well-known author of *The Jungle Book*, made the following statement on the German inhabitants of southeastern Pennsylvania:

It’s a kindly, softly country there, back of Philadelphia among the German towns, Lancaster Way. Little houses and bursting big barns, fat cattle, fat women, and all as peaceful as Heaven might be if they farmed there...²⁷

²⁶ Amish is an umbrella term used to distinguish those Anabaptist (baptism occurs by choice in adulthood rather than during infancy), German-speaking settlers whose social organization, cultural practices, and religious beliefs differ from nonsectarian Pennsylvania Germans. Broadly speaking, “the Amish cherish tradition and family, negotiate carefully with progress and modernity, and interact with each other in unique ways to create a culture very different from that of the dominant ‘English’ world around them.” Seen as a threat to the European systems of power built upon Catholicism, the Amish and Mennonite sects faced religious persecution prior to their arrival in North America. During the American Revolution (1775-1783), Civil War (1861-1865), and other periods of conflict, the Amish and Mennonite groups maintained pacifistic views, thus leading others to question their loyalty to the United States. Church functions as the communal base in Amish society, as members of their community seek redemption from human suffering through religious obedience and commitment. For further reading see: Karen M. Johnson-Weiner and Joshua R. Brown, “The Amish,” in *Pennsylvania Germans: An Interpretive Encyclopedia*, edited by Simon J. Bronner and Joshua R. Brown (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2017), 148-163.

²⁷ Rudyard Kipling as quoted in “The Marketplace,” in *The Pennsylvania Germans: A Celebration of Their Arts 1683-1850*, edited by Beatrice B. Garvan and Charles F. Hummel (Philadelphia: The Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1982), 67.

Kipling's comments on the rural regions outside of Philadelphia summarize some key ideas utilized by businesses involved in the tourist industry. Paradise seems to exist in the rolling hills of Pennsylvania, with bountiful crops, sturdy homesteads, and a happy, healthy population. Such a description not only helps in constructing a sellable image of Lancaster County and its inhabitants, but in claiming that the land itself stands in contrast to the rest of industrialized society that tourists long to escape. The Pennsylvania German people often appear as carefree characters in a fairytale story when in fact, they contribute greatly to the development of local and national industries. To expand upon this idea of the folk, one can consider the following excerpt from historian Ian McKay's *The Quest of the Folk*:

The Folk were the living antithesis of the class divisions, secularism, and 'progress' of the urban, industrial world- that *Gesellschaft* of modernity, of contracts and class divisions, and of that scourge of the oral culture of the Folk, the printed word. To visit the folk...was to transcend class divisions and to live the truth of a pastoral vision of society-one in which rich and poor were bound together by ties of love and understanding.²⁸

The city of Lancaster, Pennsylvania has gradually shifted from a rural region to a populous one with shopping outlets, guided tours of farms and homesteads, and other forms of sightseeing entertainment. When tourists visit regions in southeastern Pennsylvania, they "transcend class divisions" and find themselves transported to a simplistic period of time separate from their everyday lives.²⁹ As tourism increased in the twentieth century, the images and lifestyles of the Amish and Mennonites became branded, commodified, and simultaneously blended with cultural aspects and aesthetics of the nonsectarian Pennsylvania Germans. Traveling through Lancaster and other

²⁸ Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 12-13. For further reading on the German term *Gesellschaft*, meaning civil society, see Ferdinand Tönnies's text, *Community and Civil Society* (2001). My thanks to Dr. Nicola Pezolet for recommending this excellent source.

²⁹ McKay, *The Quest of the Folk*, " 12-13.

nearby counties, it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate between the strikingly nonidentical cultures of the two communities. Souvenir shops and advertising businesses mix together images of the Amish with motifs and objects, like hex signs, from Pennsylvania German folk art (Fig. 5). Ironically, the increase in tourism over the past century has led to development projects by corporations that contribute to the destruction of farmlands and transform the idyllic county into an urban center, therefore impacting the idealistic qualities that tourists pursue in the region. Struggling to protect expanses of property from development while other Pennsylvania Germans and businesses benefit off of their idealized image, the Amish and Mennonite groups in Lancaster have had to adapt to the ongoing economic and cultural changes; in order to keep their land, Amish families have needed to drift away from their preferred careers as agricultural producers and work positions that complicate their role in the community.³⁰

Taking note of these trends, public relations and tourism scholar Joseph Harasta's analyses and interviews make clear distinctions between the experiences of the Amish and secular groups of the region, as well as the ways in which the Amish brand has both positively and negatively impacted the communities in the once-rural region. Interviewing secular and non-secular members of the Pennsylvania German community at local souvenir shops and other tourist spots,

³⁰ To build upon this idea, one should consider the implications of land ownership, relationships with Indigenous groups like the Susquehannock, and agricultural development within the Pennsylvania German settler community. Through a series of events, the land belonging to the Conestoga peoples was taken, redistributed to European settlers, and transformed into agricultural properties. Though I will not attempt to cover the entire history of the Susquehannock, Lenape, Iroquois, or other Indigenous peoples and their relations with European settlers, I find it essential to recognize these histories not only as a settler from Pennsylvania, but also as a researcher whose work directly deals with colonial occupation on Indigenous land. While this thesis deals mainly with material objects in Pennsylvania German culture, it has also been an eye-opening and intensely educational experience- not only on the histories that are so often neglected in American history courses, but on the day-to-day impact that settler-colonial groups had and continue to have in the state of Pennsylvania. For further reading on the presence of Indigenous groups in Pennsylvania and across the United States see: Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014); *The World of Indigenous North America*, ed. by Robert Warrior (New York; London: Routledge, 2015).

Harasta gathers opinions on the tension between the desire to maintain an agricultural, religiously focused lifestyle and also contribute to the region's growing economy. While some members of the Amish and Mennonite sects long to return to the period before corporatization and their exploitation, other Pennsylvania Germans benefit culturally and financially from the influx of tourists seeking to experience agricultural life.³¹ Aesthetically speaking, the Anabaptist Amish and Mennonite sects strictly adhere to a 'plain' life with unadorned architecture, dress, and decor, while many members of the Lutheran and other German Reformed groups unabashedly decorate their everyday objects such as furniture, tools and documents with intricate, colorful motifs. Further, the 'plain' sects tend to lead a more private life separate from the rest of society while those belonging to the 'fancy' sects publicly display their heritage, often in the form of hex signs and other cultural signifiers, and willingly contribute to the economy. Considering these differences, it is important to note that although the rest of American society often places these groups under the umbrella term of Pennsylvania German, these groups differ greatly in their everyday lifestyles and religious beliefs. The conflicts that arise due to increased industrialization and tourism speak to the lasting divisions between the individual groups within the Pennsylvania German community and how their lives continue to intertwine since their initial arrival in colonial North America.³²

Exploitation and claims of authenticity act as the central concerns and motivators for those involved in the tourist industries of Lancaster County and other regions in southeastern

³¹ Joseph Harasta, "The Amish — A People of Preservation and Profitability: A Look at the Amish Industry in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania," *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014): 23-41.

³² Harasta, "The Amish- A People of Preservation and Profitability," 24-25.

Pennsylvania.³³ Images and objects function as monetary tools that aid in the development of a recognizable representation of a place and its people, all of which inspire feelings of nostalgia for tourists. On the federal level, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania creates and distributes tourist information including the production of images that aim to draw in prospective visitors. In *The Quest of the Folk*, Ian Mackay describes this process as the transition to a tourism state, with its expansion in the official production of images transformed from an intermittent activity to a routine state function: “This in turn created opportunities for middle-class cultural producers, who could make a good dollar by creating marketable images of the Folk.”³⁴

Souvenirs like hex signs allow visitors to the region of southeastern Pennsylvania to bond together the cultural practices and identity of the German community and incorporate these into their daily lives.³⁵ From being associated with farmers to entering a capitalist system of exchange and production, objects that become representations of the community, like hex signs, move between social classes as tourists and Pennsylvania Germans create and consume these material items. As the commodification of hex signs occurs, questions of authenticity and commercial production arise. Craft-oriented souvenirs tend to align with ideas of the inauthentic as the lines between mass-production and the handmade blur. Explaining this process, art historians Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner state the following:

In some instances, where the fact of commoditization could be hidden, the objects have been accorded a place in one or the other category. In others, where their commoditized

³³ Ibid., 33.

³⁴ Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 33.

³⁵ Michael Haldrup, “Souvenirs: Magical Objects in Everyday Life,” *Emotion, Space and Society* 22 (2017): 53.

nature has been all too evident, they have most often fallen into the ontological abyss of the inauthentic, the fake, or the crassly commercial. A particularly dense aura of inauthenticity surrounds objects produced for the souvenir and tourist trades because they are most obviously located at the intersection of the discourses of art, artifact, and commodity.³⁶

Authenticity and exploitation act as the central concerns and motivators for those involved in the tourist industry of Lancaster County. On one hand, tourists visiting the region arrive with an expectation for an authentic experience of simple, Amish life and colorful Pennsylvania German culture. Here, exploitation occurs as the Amish sacrifice not only their rural environment as the influx of tourists generates urbanization, but also their ability to lead a life that follows their belief system. Pushed further, as with many souvenirs and experiences associated with a particular group of spectacularized individuals whose identity becomes a source of profit, the material culture aspect of Lancaster County's tourism led by members of the Pennsylvania German community pushes the Amish and Mennonite to participate in the production of tours and selling of mass-produced goods. In this sense, these plain sects contribute to their own exploitation out of pure necessity and economic need. Within the tourist industry, the manipulation and alteration of hex signs also occurs. As representations of Pennsylvania German culture, hex signs function as tourist souvenirs and spectacles, property markers, craft objects, and works of art. Commodified by individual artists and commercial companies, the purpose and meaning of the signs continue to shift.

³⁶ Ruth B. Phillips, and Christopher B. Steiner, "Art, Authenticity, and the Baggage of Cultural Encounter" in *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial Postcolonial Worlds*, ed. by Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1999), 4.

History of Hex Signs

Hex, the German term for witch, conjures images of spell casting, talismans, black magic, and fairy tale characters.³⁷ However, in Pennsylvania German culture, the word *hex* brings to mind the circular designs that often appear on agricultural structures in the southeastern pocket of the state. The invention and history of hex signs corresponds with the development of the tourism industry as their transformation from two-dimensional, static paintings to commodified souvenirs occurred apace with the rise of tourism in mid-nineteenth century Pennsylvania. Prior to their transformation into transportable hex signs, barn stars first appeared as stone engravings carved into new barns and homesteads.³⁸ Most often, these markings include a geometric star with the date of the barn's completion as well as the household name, thus acting as markers of land ownership, blessings for the new home, and property signifiers of a family's settlement.³⁹

Visual representations of a family's hopes, dreams, and settlement, barn stars gained an alternative title during the early development of the tourist industry in the 1920s.⁴⁰ In his travel book, *Pennsylvania Beautiful* (1924), writer, photographer, and Massachusetts resident Wallace

³⁷ Don Yoder, and Thomas E. Graves, *Hex Signs: Pennsylvania Dutch Barn Symbols & Their Meaning* (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 2000), 3.

³⁸ Patrick J. Donmoyer, *Hex Signs: Myth and Meaning in Pennsylvania Dutch Barn Stars* (Kutztown: The Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center at Kutztown University, 2013), 26.

³⁹ Donmoyer, *Hex Signs*, 26.

⁴⁰ It is interesting to consider that the tourist industry also flourished in the Palatinate region of Germany in the interwar period as Nazi activity boosted national interest in towns like Annweiler. Many Pennsylvania German settlers left this region prior to this period, but one could consider the ways in which the tourist industry profited and continues to profit off of ideals of Germanic peoples. Further connections could be made to the Heathenry and Pan-Germanism movements. See Fabian Link, and Mark H. Hornburg, "He Who Owns the Trifels, Own the Reich': Nazi Medievalism and the Creation of the *Volksgemeinschaft* in the Palatinate," *Central European History* 49 (2016): 228.

Nutting describes the circular motifs found on barns in the region as *Hexafoos*, or witch's foot.⁴¹ Whether he misheard an interviewee sharing local knowledge or came up with the term himself in order to draw in his readership, Nutting's text ultimately sparked an ongoing debate that seeks to answer the possible meaning and purpose of barn stars and hex signs. Some skeptics support the idea that the objects serve a decorative purpose, meaning that the designs function as motifs to beautify a person's property. Others follow the belief that the signs hold magical powers that bring good luck, fertility, or financial opportunities (Fig. 6).⁴²

In the years leading up to and following the American Civil War, affordability and availability of commercial paints and a continuous desire to decorate the homestead with intricate designs and symbolic motifs taken from daily life, folklore, and religious texts led anonymous painters of barns to take the liberty to add circular, celestial images to the properties of local farmers.⁴³ According to Pennsylvania German scholar Patrick J. Donmoyer, the artists responsible for applying the barn stars to the buildings refrained from adding their signature to their work and therefore remain anonymous, a regular occurrence in folk art. However, a few barn star painters like Milton Hill and Harry Adam later became recognized by local communities because of their unique designs and participation in the gradual commodification of hex signs (Figs. 7-8).⁴⁴ Since the establishment of the Kutztown Folk Festival in July 1950, a number of locally and nationally recognized hexologists, including Hill, Adam, and others, design both custom and

⁴¹ Yoder, and Graves, *Hex Signs*, 3.

⁴² For a breakdown of the debates surrounding the meaning of both barn stars and hex signs see: Patrick J. Donmoyer, *Hex Signs: Myth and Meaning in Pennsylvania Dutch Barn Stars*, Vol. 2, (Kutztown: Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, 2013), 10-13.

⁴³ Yoder, and Graves, *Hex Signs*, 7.

⁴⁴ David Fooks, "The History of Pennsylvania's Barn Stars and Hex Signs," *Material Culture* 36, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 3.

mass produced hex signs, often claiming that they possess magical, protective and symbolic qualities or are purely decorative.⁴⁵ Johnny Ott, a southeastern Pennsylvania local known for his eccentric style and colorful interpretations of hex signs, attributed symbolic meanings to the geometric motifs and images found in his work, claiming that the objects possessed magical properties in order to increase sales (Fig. 9). David Fooks, Executive Director of the Kutztown Folk Festival explains that “by 1952, superstitious powers were being attributed to the hex signs by Johnny Ott, a somewhat mysterious Pennsylvania Dutch folk artist from Lenhartsville, Pennsylvania.”⁴⁶ Painting hex signs that featured popular motifs like tulips and hearts, Ott “found that by designating superstitious powers to the signs, they sold much faster.”⁴⁷ Using the superstitions that surround hex signs to his advantage, Johnny Ott capitalized on barn stars, transforming them from a static, agricultural feature to a highly coveted souvenir object available at local shops and folk festivals. Similarly, Jacob Zook of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, mass produced hex signs and other products with the popular images of farm life, barn stars, and Amish peoples.⁴⁸ In addition to mass producing hex signs using processes like silkscreening, Pennsylvania German artists also began profiting off of the image of the Amish and other familiar icons from local culture. The wide variety of hex sign paraphernalia that these artists and community businesses continue to

⁴⁵ The Kutztown Folk Festival is the oldest folklife-oriented event in the United States of America. Founded by American folklorist and World War II Veteran Dr. Alfred L. Shoemaker, the Pennsylvania German-focused festival involves participatory performances, educational lectures, local food and artist vendors, agricultural and craft demonstrations, and music. Tradition, authenticity, and pride appear in full force at the festival. See; Don Yoder, “25 Years of the Folk Festival,” *Pennsylvania Folklife Magazine* 23, no. 60 (Summer 1974): 2-7.

⁴⁶ David Fooks, “The History of Pennsylvania's Barn Stars and Hex Signs,” *Material Culture* 36, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 6.

⁴⁷ Fooks, “The History of Pennsylvania's Barn Stars and Hex Signs,” 6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

create remain a hot commodity in southeastern Pennsylvania's tourist industry; souvenir shops and craft shows that sell the signs also appear alongside images of the Amish in advertisements that promote sightseeing activities in regions like Berks and Lancaster County. As explored in the previous section of this chapter, while the tourist industry has brought commerce into these areas, it has also created conflict between the culturally and religiously diverse Amish, Mennonite, and non-Anabaptist Pennsylvania Germans.⁴⁹ Business owners exploit the image and labor of the Amish and Mennonites for capital, which has led to tourists wrongly associating objects like hex signs with the anabaptist groups.⁵⁰ Such trends not only speak to an object's ability to manipulate an outsider's understanding of a specific culture, but also its influence on the community that initially created it.

By placing hex signs on publicly visible areas of their homestead, members of the Pennsylvania German community exhibit their ancestral pride, hopes and dreams, and claim their territorial place in American society. Often symbolic of the shifting of the seasons, the circular shape of the stars also act as reminders of the agrarian roots of the German-speaking settlers. As a more recently established cultural practice, hex signs show the ongoing processes of identity construction among Pennsylvania Germans. The construction of an identity based on performative or ritualistic practices has allowed settler-colonial powers to establish their place in a region, while ensuring that the original inhabitants adhere to their economic, political, and social systems. Writing on the impact and importance of hex signs in the United States, David Fooks makes the following statement:

⁴⁹ Harasta, "The Amish- A People of Preservation and Profitability," 39.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

Although hex sign painting may have begun with misleading and commercial motives, there is no doubt that it has established itself as a unique, indigenous, American folk art, exhibiting high quality workmanship and unique artistic styles. Considering the first hex sign was made in 1950, this makes hex sign painting the most recent recognized form of indigenous American Folk Art.⁵¹

Considered an “indigenous, American folk art,” numerous theories around the meaning and purpose of hex signs continue to arise. For example, writers Thomas E. Graves and Don Yoder previously explored the historical and more contemporary context of hex signs as decorative objects, healing instruments, and souvenirs.⁵² Further, they looked at how individuals involved with the Pan-Germanist Movement glorified the German race, as well as the motifs that appear in both German-speaking regions of Europe and in the middle colonies of North America.⁵³ To expand upon the ideas of these scholars, I turn to the work of hexologist and practicing Heathen Hunter M. Yoder in order to illustrate how hex signs continue to represent and aid in the construction of identity.

⁵¹ Fooks, “The History of Pennsylvania,” 7.

⁵² See Don Yoder, “Forward,” in *Hex Signs: Myth and Meaning in Pennsylvania Dutch Barn Stars* (Kutztown: The Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center at Kutztown University, 2013), 12.

⁵³ Beginning in the late nineteenth and continuing into the early part of the twentieth century, Pan-Germanism aimed at politically and culturally unifying all German speaking peoples regardless of their geographic location. Simply put, it can be “understood as an identity matrix in which various camps, movements, and parties followed their own political and cultural agendas as they sought to orientate their multiple paths within a common national framework”. See Julie Thorpe, *Pan-Germanism and the Austrofascist State, 1933-38* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2011), 16. Perhaps one could consider manifest destiny in the United States as a precursor to Europe’s Pan-Germanism: “A central motif of manifest destiny was the notion of Americans as a ‘chosen people’ who possessed a divine calling to bring about a state of global democratic redemption....[Walt] Whitman held that the projection of American power was exempt from the traditional moral constraints of international law. The mission to spread liberty and democracy over the continent represented a higher claim to ‘imperial right’ than traditional justifications in international law such as discovery and conquest”. See: Adam Dahl, *Empire of the People: Settler Colonialism and the Foundations of Modern Democratic Thought* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018), 102.

Coming Home: Germanic Pasts and the Work of Hunter Yoder

As an active member of the Pennsylvania German community and owner of the online shop The Hex Factory that began in Philadelphia, hexologist Hunter M. Yoder's art practice focuses on revamping hex signs with runic symbols and other recognizable Germanic or occult motifs.

Growing up in rural Berks County, a region northwest of the city of Philadelphia, Yoder found himself exposed to and inspired by Pennsylvania German culture early on in life.⁵⁴ Working on his father's farm where he painted his first barn star, Hunter M. Yoder gained an appreciation for agricultural life, the natural world, and hex signs as a mode of creative and spiritual expression.⁵⁵ Throughout his books, which include *Hex Highway* (2006) and numerous online essays, Yoder explores heritage, Heathenry, and history by conducting interviews with those who share his beliefs and interest in hex sign imagery.

Approaching Yoder's work as a non-practitioner of Heathenry, I maintain an inquisitiveness and purely analytical stance in approaching this religion and its followers. While I disagree with certain problematic viewpoints that exist within many Heathen groups, I find it important to take all arguments and perspectives into consideration as I critique and analyze Hunter Yoder's hex signs. Accepting that certain aspects of the religion maybe be inaccessible to me as an outsider, I apply the knowledge of others in order to better understand the historical background and contemporary use of certain elements in Yoder's work to make an inference. I aim to respond to the question of whether or not symbols like the black sun can be granted a second life by Hea-

⁵⁴ Hunter M. Yoder, "About Us," The Hex Factory: Hunter M. Yoder, <https://www.huntermyoder.com/aboutus.htm>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

then communities or if the motif's historical and contemporary political application by far-right groups remains overbearing.

According to his website, Yoder aligns himself with the “reconstructionist religious movement” of Heathenry, whose practitioners connect “with ancient Germanic and Norse cosmology using literary, archaeological, and historical research to reconstruct a premodern worldview as they honor gods such as Thor, Odin, and Freya.”⁵⁶ Heathenry and other modern, Norse neopagan religions like Odinism and Ásatrú continue to transform and break up into various groups mainly divided between universalist, folkish, or tribal systems of belief and community organization.⁵⁷ Some members of the folkish and tribalist Heathen groups located in the United States share the belief that, as “an endangered minority” their “Folk” must “support neotribalism, emphasize racial purity, and the family unit,” ideals which link closely to twentieth century ideologies of the Nazi Party and adhere to contemporary nationalistic views of belonging.⁵⁸ Further, folkish and tribalist Heathens, like other Neo-pagan groups with an interest in Norse cosmology, “tend to see ethnicity, both at the level of ethnic traditions and ethnic identity, as something relatively fixed, closed and limited.”⁵⁹ As a number of Heathens within the folkish and tribalist groups sympathize with those affiliated with politically conservative or far-right leaning organizations, these members may share opinions on issues of gender, race, and nationalism. Real or

⁵⁶ Jennifer Snook, “Reconsidering Heathenry: The Construction of an Ethnic Folkway as Religio-Ethnic Identity,” *Nova Religio: Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 16, no.3 (February 2013): 52. DOI: 10.1525/nr.2013.16.3.52.

⁵⁷ Snook, “Reconsidering Heathenry,” 57-58.

⁵⁸ Betty A. Dobratz, “The Role of Religion in the Collective Identity of the White Racialist Movement,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40, no. 2 (June 2001): 290-291.

⁵⁹ Michael F. Strmiska, “Pagan Politics in the 21st Century: ‘Peace and Love’ or ‘Blood and Soil’?” *The Pomegranate* 20, no. 1 (2018): 7.

imagined ancestral blood ties and claims to a homeland, whether local or international, stolen or not, stand as crucial elements for most participants of Heathenry, as “how it feels and what it means to be German... is less about lineage than about what external meanings a person is influenced by in regards to what ‘Germanness’ should, and should not, look like.”⁶⁰ While large numbers of practitioners of Heathenry deny any affiliation with white supremacist or nationalist groups, many struggle to explain why they believe only those Germanic in appearance (i.e. white) or descent can follow the religion.⁶¹ This division between followers of Heathenry functions as a point of debate: some practitioners continue to welcome others into their religion, while many create ancestral and racial restrictions that limit who can partake.⁶² In the United States, accusations of racism, misanthropy, sexism, and pro-violence continue to follow folkish and tribalist Heathens, as non-practitioners rightfully question the group’s political alliances, social beliefs, and intentions. In Yoder’s artistic practice, the idealization of colonial and pre-Christian pasts come into play as well as strong notions of ancestral pride. Referring to his hexology work and Heathen practice as *heiden*, Yoder references his roots and the trials of his Germanic forebearers, as the term means Heathen in High German.⁶³ Such details indicate that Hunter M. Yoder’s belief system may align with those who believe in the ancestral right to practice Heathenry and support more conservative political views.

⁶⁰ Snook, “Reconsidering Heathenry,” 56.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 55.

⁶³ *English-German Dictionary*, s.v. “Heiden,” accessed December 1, 2018, <https://www.dict.cc/german-english/Heiden.html>.

Blending together Pennsylvania German culture with Norse occultism, Hunter M. Yoder looks to the past for artistic inspiration and to support his current belief system, heritage, and community. In contrast to the work of Kristin Farr, Yoder does not create large scale hex sign murals, but instead smaller, transportable versions similar to the signs found in souvenir stores, folk festivals, and artist shops in Pennsylvania. While some of his work features familiar Pennsylvania German and Pagan motifs like tulips, distelfinks, and oak leaves, many of Yoder's hex signs present more historically complex and troubling symbols.⁶⁴ Aligning himself with those who believe in the magical properties of hex signs and using Heathenry for visual inspiration, Yoder grants symbolic meaning to the images that appear in his signs. Alluding to his ancestral past, the artist experiments with runic alphabets, swirling suns, and other Nordic or Germanic emblems. Incorporating these motifs into his hex sign designs, Hunter Yoder aims to rekindle Pagan practices previously erased or deemed sacrilegious by other sectarian, specifically Christian, groups.⁶⁵ In doing so, he complicates and often neglects the more contemporary histories of the symbols, which leads one to question the implications and overall impact of the greater Heathen community's attempts to reassign new meanings to motifs like the black sun. Approaching these images in the context of Heathenry, identity construction, and contemporary politics, famil-

⁶⁴ Motifs like the distelfink (a reinterpreted, Pennsylvania German goldfinch), tree of life, oak leaves, and other designs taken from the natural world that appear on hex signs have roots in pre-Christian religions. For example, in Norse paganism, the tree of life, or *Yggdrasil*, acts a connector to the various realms that exist within the mythological stories. This symbol also plays a role in other religions, including Judaism and Christianity. My thanks to Dr. Nicola Pezolet for pointing out the tree's presence in the scriptures of these religions. For further research on Heathenry, Scandinavian history, and Norse mythology, see: *The Conversion of Scandinavia* (2012) by Anders Winworth, Stefanie von Schnurbein's "Germanic Neopaganism- A Nordic Art-Religion?" (2016), and Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke's *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (2002). The life and work of Else Christensen is also an interesting venture for those curious about the political motives and ideologies of other Norse Neo-pagan movements in the United States.

⁶⁵ Hunter M. Yoder, "About Us," The Hex Factory: Hunter M. Yoder <https://www.huntermyoder.com/aboutus.htm>.

iar questions on the co-opting of ancient symbols arise: if two groups with similar or contrasting religious beliefs, political views, and overall culture adopt the same symbol and grant it new meaning in order to produce an identity, how should one interpret the motif? While these groups could generate a new symbol, they instead choose to look to the past and select one with multiple layers of meaning. Comparable inquiries arise when considering the nuanced image of the swastika.⁶⁶ Moving forward in this section, the historical and contemporary context of the symbols used by Yoder and others in the Heathen community come under scrutiny in order to grasp how, why, and if symbols that play a role in identity construction can indeed gain new meaning.

Examining Yoder's work, one notices his frequent use of the black sun symbol, also known as the *Schwarze Sonne* (appearing in yellow or black in fig. 10-11).⁶⁷ Formed using a dozen sig-runes, or 's' runes from the *Elder Futhark* alphabet which dates from approximately the second to eighth centuries in what is today Germany and Scandinavia, the black sun represents the cycle of the seasons, power, and various aspects of fertility.⁶⁸ While the sig-rune and sun motif materializes in cultural artifacts from ancient Nordic and Germanic groups, it later be-

⁶⁶ It should be noted that the *swastika* has roots in Asian religions and even makes an appearance in the first logo of the Bauhaus. The symbol was later coopted and reversed by the Nazi Party. My thanks to Dr. Nicola Pezolet for sharing these connections with me.

⁶⁷ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 150.

⁶⁸ Edred Thorsson, "Rune Knowledge," in *Futhark: A Handbook of Rune Magic* (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1984), 9.

came an important symbol for the Third Reich alongside the *swastika* and *wolfsangel*.⁶⁹ For example, Heinrich Himmler of the Nazi Party, infamous for his role in the development of concentration camps and obsession with the occult, adopted the twelve-spoked black sun motif during World War II to create an emblem for a hall in the Wewelsburg Castle located in Büren, a region of eastern Germany.⁷⁰ While they utilized the idea of the *Volk* in propaganda, the Nazi Party's use of castles for headquarters highlighted the "alleged cultural and racial superiority of the contemporary German Reich."⁷¹ Like these castles, Himmler's greenish-black, twelve-spoked sun rests in the middle of the marble floor in the SS Generals' Hall at Wewelsburg, therefore representing the power and centrality of the sun in the universe, a metaphor for Germany's perceived influence at the time. As a tool to legitimize the actions of the Nazi State, the black sun signifies the Third Reich's goals of cultural, political, and racial unification across Europe as well as the ideologies that rested at the crux of their governmental policies.⁷² The reappropriation of the black sun by practitioners of Heathenry mirrors the Nazi State's practice of resurrecting and refurbishing castles with German handiwork in an effort to reconstitute and strengthen the identities of the nation's population. Utilizing the black sun motif to fulfill their own needs, the Heathen commu-

⁶⁹ The *wolfsangel* is a runic symbol historically used to ward off wolves, mark territories, and signify landmarks. Like the black sun and swastika, the *wolfsangel* was coopted by the Nazi Party in World War II and has thus been banned in Germany. Today, Far-Right groups in the United States, Ukraine, and elsewhere utilize the symbol on flags and other paraphernalia to visualize their political alliances and ideologies. One could consider a possible link between symbols like barn stars and the *wolfsangel* as markers of territory and identity for Germanic peoples. For further reading see: Robin Lumsden, *Himmler's SS: Loyal to the Death's Head* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2009), 201–206; John E. Richardson, and Ruth Wodak, *Analysing Fascist Discourse: European Fascism in Talk and Text* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 235; Roderick H. Watt, "Wehrwolf or Werwolf? Literature, Legend, or Lexical Error into Nazi Propaganda?" *The Modern Language Review* 87, no. 4 (October 1992): 879-895.

⁷⁰ Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 148.

⁷¹ Fabian Link, and Mark H. Hornburg, "He Who Owns the Trifels, Own the Reich': Nazi Medievalism and the Creation of the *Volksgemeinschaft* in the Palatinate," *Central European History* 49 (2016): 215.

⁷² Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 148.

nity regularly neglects the troublesome histories attached to the symbol, instead opting to develop the black sun as a representation of nature's power and their real or imagined Pagan heritage.

Today, politically motivated hate groups in the United States, Germany, and elsewhere continue to utilize the black sun as a symbol representative of Neo-fascist ideologies and white power. Like these conservative communities, Hunter Yoder and other practicing Heathens reappropriate and grant the symbol new meaning based on an idealized past: the cyclical movement of the seasons, life, and ancestral memory now appear in the image of the whirling sun. While similar sun motifs emerge in other cultures, one must take note of the context in which the symbol appears. In Yoder's work, the black sun represents a connection to and pride in his American and Germanic heritage. Although this motif has its roots in pre-Christian societies and holds specific linguistic and cultural meanings, one must also consider the political histories and contemporary employment of such symbols, as doing so recognizes the ongoing debate that surrounds these images. In idealizing and reappropriating certain aspects of a Germanic past while ignoring or overlooking others, it becomes increasingly difficult to separate the black sun from its political history; although Heathen groups attempt to utilize and reformulate the motif in their diverse artistic and religious practices, the use of and obsession with the symbol by Neo-fascist groups remains bound to its historical application and the decision to ignore more recent associations has implications. As seen on the flag of Vanguard America-Texas, a white-supremacist group that participated in the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, the black sun continues to act as a symbol of violence, staunch patriotism, and racism.⁷³ Like their European coun-

⁷³ Hatewatch Staff, "Flags and Other Symbols Used By Far-Right Groups in Charlottesville," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, August 12, 2017, accessed September 10, 2018, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/08/12/flags-and-other-symbols-used-far-right-groups-charlottesville>.

terparts, Neo-fascist groups in the United States that utilize runic symbols also support blood and soil ideologies in order to validate their identity and visualize their cultural, political, and racial alliances.⁷⁴

Other aspects of Yoder's online presence raise questions of where he stands on both the Heathen and political spectrums. For example, his website features an interview with Matthias Waggener, one of the founders of the Wolves of Vinland, a viking-inspired, Heathen "tribe" with chapters across the country that advocate for "primal masculinity," violence, and supports white nationalist groups.⁷⁵ Labeled as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center, the Wolves of Vinland "despise the modern world, and are invested in an anti-equality worldview."⁷⁶ An acute obsession with medievalism, warrior culture, and, more often than not, a deep misunderstanding of Viking society often rests at the center of folkish Heathen dogma, as the formation of the religion connects itself to an idealized Germanic and Nordic past. Manipulating, neglecting and selecting certain aspects of these historical periods in order to develop their identity also complicates how Heathen groups construct ideas of authenticity and belonging.

Considering the divided perspectives of practitioners of Heathenry, it remains difficult to separate the neopagan use of the black sun from its contemporary and historical application.

Yoder uses the religion of Heathenry to explore ideas of authenticity and selfhood in relation to

⁷⁴ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 306.

⁷⁵ Rose City Antifa Staff, "The Wolves of Vinland: Fascist Countercultural 'Tribe' in the Pacific Northwest." *Rose City Antifa*, November 7, 2016, <https://rosecityantifa.org/articles/the-wolves-of-vinland-a-fascist-countercultural-tribe-in-the-pacific-northwest/> (accessed November 12, 2018).

⁷⁶ Hatewatch Staff, "A Chorus of Violence: Jack Donovan and the Organizing Power of Male Supremacy," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, March 27, 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/03/27/chorus-violence-jack-donovan-and-organizing-power-male-supremacy> (accessed November 23, 2018).

others as well as to claim his place within the Pennsylvania German and Heathen communities. The hex signs that Yoder creates grant him access to these two groups, as the material objects themselves come from Pennsylvania German culture and the motifs Yoder uses appear in Heathen rituals. Further, this blending of two communities allows Yoder to authenticate, develop, and legitimize his own identity within these groups. Not only does his involvement with Pennsylvania German society grant him the label of being a supposedly *authentic* hexologist who creates so-called *authentic* hex signs, it also demonstrates to others within the Heathen community that he is of German descent. Idealization of a Germanic, pre-Christian past and an anti-modern worldview acted as the fundamental base from which the concept of the authentic came to fruition. Visible in the Nazi Party's administration of the folk and ancient symbols, many of the ideals attached to a notion of authenticity led to the development of racist policies that limited and manipulated the scope of folklore and folk art. As a term fraught with cultural, political, and societal meaning, *authentic* implies or claims, truth, legitimacy, and validity. Anything deemed inauthentic automatically loses these traits. Deeply connected to ideas of ethnicity, authenticity seems to haunt the Heathen community, as participants seek authentication from their peers as well as within themselves. In developing an ethnic identity as a white settler in a nation with a deeply rooted history of racial cleansing and ongoing hate-oriented violence, Hunter Yoder and his fellow practitioners of Heathenry who live in the United States risk associating themselves with white supremacists who also seek to establish themselves as an indigenous minority group separate from the rest of American society.⁷⁷ For both Heathens and supporters of the Far-Right,

⁷⁷ Jennifer Snook, "Reconsidering Heathenry: The Construction of an Ethnic Folkway as Religio-Ethnic Identity," *Nova Religio: Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 16, no. 3 (February 2013): 56.

race and religion function as determining factors for who may participate in their practice or movements. Analyzing this trend, sociologist Betty A. Dobratz explains the following:

Although religion may be viewed as an individual matter, it is mainly a shared experience that links one human being to others; bond and tradition are major concepts associated with religion. While religion and race can be crucial to the construction of one's individual identity, they can also be used to foster collective identity in various social movements.⁷⁸

In forming individual and collective identities, religion and tradition often play important roles as they aid in establishing systems of belief, values, and cultural practices. Hunter Yoder's close bond with the Pennsylvania German community arises from his interest and participation in the cultural practices and histories that form the group's identity. Although his religion differs slightly from that of the original German-speaking settlers, Yoder uses Heathenry and race to strengthen his connection to the community he grew up in and continues to associate with. Mirroring the experiences of the German-speaking settlers in Pennsylvania, American Heathens work to carve out their place in American society and foster a sense of belonging; Hunter M. Yoder's hexology practice visualizes this process as he creates emblems to reinvent and reinterpret the past in the present.

Regarding processes of belonging, sociologist and practicing Heathen Jennifer Snook explains that in creating a collective identity by intentionally establishing specific ethnic and racial symbolic qualities that limit who can participate, practitioners of Heathenry build an exclusive community that creates insurmountable boundaries for others who do not match up with their real or imagined ideals. To expand upon this idea, Snook writes that:

⁷⁸ Betty A. Dobratz, "The Role of Religion in the Collective Identity of the White Racist Movement," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40, no. 2 (June 2001): 288.

While a few Heathens find ancestry irrelevant, for most it is salient to Heathen identity and belonging and the internal conversations which seek to define Heathenry as an exclusive indigenous tradition, a system of faith separate from ethnic identity, or a complex folkway struggling to be ethnic while resisting racist labels.⁷⁹

As seen in the development of the Pennsylvania German identity, religion functions as both a point of commonality and division. In finding a balance between pride and ethnocentricity, the Heathen community encounters similar difficulties. Hunter Yoder's hex signs feature symbols taken from runic alphabets also utilized by Nazi and Neo-Nazi groups. Within the Heathen community, these runes represent both forces of nature and ancestral pride. But for Alt-Right and folkish Heathen groups these motifs symbolize ethnocentric and nationalistic principles. Through his hex signs, Hunter Yoder simultaneously creates, refines, and validates his two identities; aspects of his Pennsylvania German and Heathen selves merge together in his hex sign practice.

To expand upon this analysis, one should consider other possible reasons for Hunter Yoder's use of the black sun motif and other complicated symbols. Certainly, the geometric shape of the black sun compliments the standard designs found on hex signs in regions of southeastern Pennsylvania, as well as the circular form of the objects themselves. To build upon this factor, hexologists Johnny Ott, Eric Claypoole, and Ivan Hoyt also employ sun-like stars in their hex sign work, albeit in divergent styles. Further, the blessings, prayers and symbols associated with hex signs could function as magic; after all, spell casting or ritual magic often involves visualizing processes in order to declare and fulfill a desire, hope or wish. In this sense, one could argue that Yoder creates hex signs that feature the black sun to manifest strength, abundance, and fertility.

⁷⁹ Snook, "Reconsidering Heathenry," 55.

Hunter Yoder's creative practice functions as an example of the ceaseless, complex processes of identity construction within Pennsylvania German, Heathen, and American communities. Acting as the vessels in which individual and collective identities merge, hex signs bring together the beliefs, memories, and ideals of both creator and consumer. The desire to reconstruct the past in the present while reassigning meaning to politically charged symbols in hopes of building a future for a specific group of people continues to complicate the ways in which identity construction occurs. For Hunter Yoder, hex signs become a mechanism upon which to visualize and affirm his identity, both for himself and others. As explored in the historical context presented earlier in this thesis, ethnic identity cannot exist as something static. Rather, it shifts and transforms over time as individual and communal needs adjust to cultural, political, and social change. Like tradition, ethnic identity rests upon a web that involves far more than a simplistic desire to claim one's place in the world; a small veil separates ethnocentricity and negative nationalistic ideals from the need to develop an identity. Identity construction often involves processes of retrospection in order to determine what cultural practices from the past can be adapted into one's life in the present. Yet to neglect historical context is to ignore and manipulate how the past continues to affect the present and shift the outcome of the future.

Pop Hexology and the "Just For Nice" Signs of Kristin Farr

Deputy Editor of Juxtapoz Magazine, curator, educator, and self-proclaimed Neo-Folk artist, Kristin Farr's creative practice involves reimagining hex signs in gallery spaces, corporate of-

fices, on the exteriors of urban sites, and at music venues.⁸⁰ With a background in textile design and sculpture, Farr's hexology work takes on many forms and meanings; on the surface level, the bright, contrasting colors that form her hex signs bring joy on sight to the viewer.⁸¹ On closer inspection and considering the historical background of hex signs, however, her gigantic murals and gallery installations complicate conceptions of where and in what form so-called *authentic* hex signs should exist. Identifying as a woman, Farr aligns herself with other female craft practitioners and the role they played and continue to play in the ongoing discourse of craft. Historically, the practice of painting barn stars and hex signs was seemingly undertaken by men: overall, and for unknown reasons, few women appear to have contributed to the production of stars and hex signs in the past.⁸² Thus, Kristin Farr's hexology stands in opposition to this trend and creates space for other women involved with or interested in participating in the folk practice.

Investigating Farr's position as a hexologist whose social media presence merges pop culture and Pennsylvania German folk art, it becomes apparent that her participation in and contribution to the ongoing hex sign mythology not only complicates but challenges existing scholarly analyses and other artistic interpretations of the objects. As a child, Farr's father crafted souvenir hex signs and for this reason she feels a deep connection to the practice as it "was in my blood and in my history and it was something that I could carry on like a legacy and put a little

⁸⁰ Kristin Farr, "Words," *Kristin Farr*, accessed 11 December, 2018, <http://www.kristinfarr.com/about/>.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² The only scholarly source that I have encountered that considers the hexology practices of women is Patrick J. Donmoyer's text *Hex Signs: Myth and Meaning in Pennsylvania Dutch Barn Stars* (2013). However, this source does not examine artists who challenge or reinterpret hex signs and barn stars outside of the Pennsylvania German community.

modern twist on it.”⁸³ Although her signs differ visually and geographically from the hex signs found in souvenir shops and on the surfaces of barns, Kristin Farr’s hexology work appears more accessible to a wider range of contemporary audiences as it takes on numerous forms and locales. Her public commissions, collaborations, and exhibitions allow individuals to learn about hex signs and barn stars outside of the Pennsylvania German community, as well as to interact with craft in unexpected spaces.

While she refrains from categorizing her work within the op art canon, the radiating lines and movement inducing colors that make up Kristin Farr’s hex signs bring to mind the trippy artwork of optical artist Bridget Riley (b. 1931).⁸⁴ As seen in Riley’s black and white *Blaze 4* (Fig. 15), the circular form and angular lines that create an optical illusion of radial movement also come into play in Farr’s work, especially in the pieces that appeared in the 2018 exhibition *Bad At Math* (Figs. 16-17). Both Bridget Riley and Kristin Farr manipulate colors and geometric designs to generate an emotional response and physical sensation for their viewers. In this sense, Farr’s work aligns with the creative practices of contemporary artists like Riley as well as the original barn star painters who fit into the folk art genre. Such connections speak to Kristin Farr’s ability to move between and re-conceptualize two distinct forms of art with contrasting histories.

⁸³ Joel Wanek, “Neo-Folk Art with Kristin Farr,” *KQED Arts*, November 6, 2014. <https://www.kqed.org/artschool/499/neo-folk-art-with-kristin-farr>.

⁸⁴ Contemporary artist Bridget Riley was born in Norwood, London in 1931. Riley’s optical illusion art helped spark the beginning of the op art movement when in 1965 she participated in the exhibition, *The Responsive Eye*, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. The first woman to win the International Prize for Painting at the 1968 Venice Biennale, Riley’s work challenges conceptions of what art can and cannot be as it asks the viewer to visually interact with rather than interpret the artist’s representation. Movement, illusion, and modification stand as key components of Riley’s artistic practice. Her work has greatly influenced the spheres of advertising, architecture, and design. For further reading see: Bridget Riley, Michael Bracewell, and Arts Council England, *Bridget Riley: Flashback* (London: Hayward Publishing, 2009); Bridget Riley, Paul Moorhouse, and Tate Britain, *Bridget Riley* (London: Tate Publishing, 2003); Frances Follin, *Embodied Visions: Bridget Riley, Op Art and the Sixties* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004).

Understanding the role of barn stars and hex signs as decorations, identity markers, and spiritual symbols, Farr's participation in the practice complicates and reconstructs the tradition in the present.

Because her artistic practice involves folk objects that began in a specific geographic location and belong to a group's culture, Farr's work inherently connects to the histories and debates that surround hex signs. Associating her work with those who follow the idea that hex signs function solely as decorative embellishments while simultaneously designating notions of nostalgia and happiness to her signs, Kristin Farr's hexology visualizes the ongoing processes of manipulation, recreation, and invention that occur within the craft practice.⁸⁵ Contributing to the ongoing "biography" of hex signs, Farr repeats and makes possible the continuation of the actions of the original barn star painters. Seemingly a spur-of-the-moment decision to embellish and mark agricultural sites with distinct motifs, the creative exercise gradually transformed into "a set of practices...governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or a symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which auto-

⁸⁵ The idea of Kristin Farr's hex signs as purely decorative leads one to consider the longstanding historical devaluation of colour and lasting hierarchies surrounding ideals of beauty, design, taste, and social class. As seen in the following excerpt from Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790), many of these ideals determined and continue to generally dictate what is acceptable and deemed beautiful in the arts which in turn could be considered in relation to craft and folk art: "In painting, sculpture, and in fact in all the formative arts...the design is what is essential. Here it is not what gratifies in sensation but merely what pleases by its form, that is the fundamental prerequisite of taste. The colours which give brilliancy to the sketch are part of its charm. They may no doubt, in their own way, enliven the object for sensation, but make it really worth looking at and beautiful they cannot. Indeed, more often than not the requirements of the beautiful form restrict them to a very narrow compass, and, even where charm is admitted, it is only this form that gives them the place of honour." Historically, craft and folk art stand in opposition to these essentialist ideals of order and beauty, yet it should be considered whether Kristin Farr's take on hexology branches from these notions of the decorative. Immanuel Kant as quoted in David Brett, *Rethinking Decoration: Pleasure and Ideology in the Visual Arts* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 17.

matically implies continuity with the past.”⁸⁶ Inventing barns stars and hex signs simultaneously strengthened and complicated the identities of the Pennsylvania German community. By creating a new, transformative tradition in the twentieth century, barn star painters reintroduced values and norms important to their colonial ancestors; mainly, the shared desire to claim space and establish identity in a young nation. Perhaps in marking agricultural sites with motifs that signify identity and territorial ownership, members of the Pennsylvania German community sought to visually reinforce their claims to ownership of newly stolen lands from Indigenous peoples.⁸⁷ While many hexologists claim that their work intends to brighten and decorate the exteriors of barns, the aggressive settlement and fortification of stolen Indigenous land in colonial Pennsylvania could further complicate the role of barn stars as markers of identity and territory.

To build upon this possibility, one can consider Farr’s desire to “paint Magic Hecksagons all over a barn” in “the old fashioned way” as they symbolize aspects of her “visual culture and

⁸⁶ *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1.

⁸⁷ A deeply ingrained mythology exists around the “founding” of Pennsylvania and therefore any interpretation of how the first settlers interacted with Indigenous groups should be approached with caution. Speaking to the legacy of Penn’s Treaty (1682-1760), American art historian Ann Uhry Abrams writes: “Shortly after William Penn landed on the banks of Delaware in 1682, he developed a comprehensive plan for obtaining land from the Indians. Convinced that the Delawares deserved recompense for territories that were rightfully theirs, Penn arranged meetings with each tribe. At these gatherings, he gave the Indians gifts in exchange for documents that turned over their lands to the English. In Penn’s own account, written during his first visit to the colony, he specified that these individual deeds were to be authenticated by ‘a grant of the same in writeing [*sic*] under their hands and seales or some other public way used in those parts of the world.’ This contract was subsequently inscribed in the ‘publick register’ and Indian tribes were given copies of each document. William Penn’s rules for fair dealing with the natives according to English law thus constituted his legendary treaty with the Indians.” In true colonial fashion, such ‘treaties’ later deteriorated or never actually occurred. See: Ann Uhry Abrams, “Benjamin West’s Documentation of Colonial History: *William Penn’s Treaty with the Indians*,” *The Art Bulletin* LXIV, no. 1 (March 1982): 59-74. For further reading on the Walking Purchase of 1737, which forcefully removed the Lenape peoples from their land, see: Steven C. Harper, “The Map That Reveals the Deception of the 1737 Walking Purchase,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 136, no. 4 (October 2012): 457-460.

heritage.”⁸⁸ Although Kristin Farr’s current work most often appears in urban locations and galleries, her goal to place stars and signs on vernacular, agricultural structures speaks to an eagerness to connect to her family’s Pennsylvania German heritage and identity. With this in mind, one should question whether or not Farr’s hexology practice recognizes the potential connection between histories of territorial aggression and land dispossession in Pennsylvania, the development of barn star painting, and contemporary interpretations that link the practice to alt-right movements. If Farr recognizes these histories, her work gains meaning beyond the familiar claim that the motifs are “just for nice”. For example, murals like “World’s Largest Hex Sign” could speak to the impact that her colonial ancestors had on Indigenous communities, historical and contemporary conflicts around land ownership in the United States, and the potential role of hex signs as visual, territorial barriers (Fig. 14). By focusing on the aesthetic elements of barn stars and hex signs, Farr risks neglecting important histories and current events in favour of those that support her creative practice and heritage, a questionable trend addressed and critiqued in the previous case study. While such processes of selection aid in identity construction, one must consider the implications of avoiding segments of history that continue to impact specific groups. By participating in the painting of hex signs and barn stars, Kristin Farr’s work makes possible the continuation of complex values and behavioural norms that aid in the construction of identity, territory, and a profitable souvenir market for the Pennsylvania German community.

As seen in her exhibitions and murals, Kristin Farr complicates the barn star-hex sign dichotomy supported by writers like Donmoyer and Fooks by placing her work on urban sites, galleries, and venues outside of the Pennsylvania German community and agrarian context (Figs.

⁸⁸ Kristin Farr, “UO Studio Visits: Kristin Farr,” Interview by Urban Outfitters, *Urban Outfitters Blog*, Winter 2014. https://blog.urbanoutfitters.com/blog/uo_studio_visits_kristin_farr

12-14).⁸⁹ In contrast to hexologists like Johnny Ott and Eric Claypoole, Farr refrains from utilizing familiar motifs like tulips, distelfinks, hearts, and clovers in her work, perhaps due to her keen interest in the geometric and mathematical complexity of linear design. Despite her geographic distance from the state, Farr's work responds to and adopts the Pennsylvania German practice of beautifying and claiming one's space in the United States. Almost functioning as a graffiti tag, the gigantic barn star murals and gouache-on-wood hex signs that Farr creates notify passerby that the artist has not only claimed the site for her work, but that through her creative expression, the space itself has gained new meaning and purpose. In colonial Pennsylvania, land functioned in a similar way: property ownership made possible the development of community and agricultural businesses for Pennsylvania Germans. For both Pennsylvania Germans and craft practitioners, claiming territory and producing an identity involves establishing and breaking down visual boundaries. Certainly, barn stars and hex signs function as markers of both identification and territory; not only do the designs publicly indicate land ownership and a desire to create barriers, but they also openly signify one's cultural affiliations, identity, and experiences.

In her hex signs, Farr creates motifs that signify aspects of her identity in order to construct public symbols of connection and differentiation. This process becomes clear in Farr's

⁸⁹ Donmoyer writes the following in regards to where authentic barn stars should exist and how they should be understood: "One particular grain of truth is evident: if these designs are to be understood they cannot be considered apart from the agricultural structures they adorn. The story of the barn stars cannot be separated from the story of the barns themselves. Forged by the same hand, with the same tenacious fervor that transformed the rugged landscape of Penn's Woods into a thriving agrarian paradise, these stars are the embodiment of the will of a people destined to persevere in a rapidly changing world. The barns of the Pennsylvania Dutch are the physical manifestation of generations of labor and dedication to a way of life. As artifacts of this process, the stars themselves stand alone, incapable of offering opinions, or repeating gossip. The legitimacy of their testimony can be observed only in the texture of old weathered barn boards and the remnants of their pigments still clinging to nearly-bare wood. Their history lies in the visible evidence of interactions between the elements of nature and the aged wooden surfaces, the diversity of design and the artists, the historic structures and their perpetual maintenance." See: Patrick J. Donmoyer, *Hex Signs: Myth and Meaning in Pennsylvania Dutch Barn Stars* (Kutztown: The Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center at Kutztown University, 2013), 17.

self-proclaimed “World’s Largest Hex Sign” located not in southeastern Pennsylvania but in Worcester, Massachusetts (Fig. 14). The angular, repetitive loops that make up this mural appear three-dimensional, therefore creating the illusion of movement on the surface of the exterior wall. One can see Kristin Farr’s love of color, passion for Pennsylvania German culture, and interest in geometry shine through in her mural work. Bright, contrasting colors generate levels within the circular shape of the mural transforming the design into an eye or perhaps a gigantic lollipop. Feelings of childhood nostalgia and joy may arise when viewing Farr’s brilliant designs, as well as an acute sense of how one perceives the world. In this sense, there is a vulnerability to the work of Kristin Farr: she shares her nostalgia with the viewer and asks that they open themselves to the sensations and emotions that occur when encountering her work. Color-obsessed and inspired by her experiences with synesthesia, Farr strategically incorporates either segments or whole spectrums of the rainbow into her mathematical work, which in turn marks the artist’s personal interests and form of self-expression.⁹⁰ While Farr uses color to express her identity and heritage, Hunter Yoder’s work uses historically complex symbols to visualize his attachment to an ancestral, pastoral past and to signify contemporary associations with religious and political movements. In avoiding symbols familiar to the Pennsylvania German community and political groups, Farr distances her work from that of the original hexologists and barn star painters as well as those who utilize problematic motifs. Doing so increases the marketability of Kristin

⁹⁰ According to a handful of websites that feature her work, Farr is greatly influenced by her experiences with synesthesia, which causes her to associate colors with specific numbers. Although she does not discuss this factor on her website, Farr’s work clearly illustrates how color impacts the geometry and mathematics of her work (and vice versa). One could also consider whether or not Western notions of sacred geometry have influenced Farr’s craft practice. See: Aaron Berger’s article, “Kristin Farr’s Colorful, Diamond-Patterned Paintings, Sculpture, and Illustration.” Kristin Farr provides us with an example of how geometry plays a key role in creating hex signs in this video: KQED Art School, “Painting Magic Hexagons with Kristin Farr | KQED Arts.” *Youtube* video, 11:57. November 5, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gpnmZc7F9M>.

Farr's work as linear design and color can be understood and incorporated into the lived environment by a larger audience.

On her social media profiles, Kristin Farr constructs images of barn stars and hex signs as representations of joy, geometric complexity, and expansive, larger-than-life works of folk art. Farr asserts that her "just for nice" hexology practice aims at giving "people good vibes," and inspiring feelings of "pure joy, delight, and nostalgia for cozy times".⁹¹ Because of the lighthearted themes of her hex signs, Farr's designs remain accessible to wider audiences and are readily commodified.⁹² For example, in her 2015 custom watch collection *Farr Out*, Farr's hex sign designs transformed into material, utilitarian objects available for purchase.⁹³ She has also applied her designs to laptop cases, leggings, surfboards, and t-shirts. Adapting to the demands of national and global markets, Farr proves that the handmade can take on numerous forms and involve mass production without neglecting the history of the object or the presence of its maker. Like the eccentric hexologist Johnny Ott whose work appeared earlier in this essay, Farr does not shy away from making a profit off of her hex signs through the commoditization of her work or sharing her practice with others on social media sites.

⁹¹ I find myself questioning what Farr means by "cozy times". Perhaps she is speaking to the ideals that surround the image of the Pennsylvania German community. See: Kristin Farr, "Q&A with Livewire Artist: Kristin Farr," Interview by Vanessa Wilson, July 6, 2016, The Midway Gallery. <http://www.themidwaygallery.com/blog/2016/7/6/q-a-with-livewire-artist-kristin-farr>.

⁹² Without any obvious symbolic qualities or use value, Kristin Farr's hex sign murals and gallery work seemingly perform the role of uncomplicated, purely aesthetic decorations. To support this idea, David Brett writes the following: "Divorced from any practical or useful ends, it (decoration) becomes significant only of itself. Only then are we free to see it as beautiful. Disinterest is the precondition of the experience of the beautiful, necessary but not in itself sufficient." See: David Brett, *Rethinking Decoration: Pleasure and Ideology in the Visual Arts* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 21.

⁹³ Farr refrains from calling her work psychedelic, but also uses slang phrases like "far out" that are often associated with 1960s culture.

In releasing her designs to commercial businesses, Farr expands her audience, shares her identity as a folk artist, makes a living, and exposes others to Pennsylvania German culture. Simply put, “a commodity is anything intended for exchange” and while Kristin Farr produces pieces fit for gallery exhibitions, her hexology practice allows her work to transform into sellable products.⁹⁴ In creating commodities out of her designs, Farr participates in monetary exchange and, although more abstract, the exchange of identities, knowledge, and experiences. One could argue that by moving in and out of spheres of exchange, the mass production of paraphernalia featuring Farr’s work “does not exhaust” the “biography” of hex signs as the objects have always been “culturally regulated” and remain constantly “open to individual manipulation”.⁹⁵ Working alongside rather than against capitalist economies, Kristin Farr takes advantage of the opportunity to promote her hexology practice and expand her viewership. Rather than adhere to certain economic ideals associated with craft and the handmade, Farr freely explores various processes of production in order to share her work and make a profit, all of which remain important aspects of daily life for many folk artists and craft practitioners engaging with capitalist economies and cultural institutions.

Mass production remains woven into the history of hex signs as it made possible the invention and popularity of the objects. Capitalism and the souvenir market greatly aided in the growth of the tourist industry in Pennsylvania and the subsequent recognition of the region’s German culture. To expand upon the role of craft and folk art in capitalist society, art historian Erin Morton writes the following:

⁹⁴ Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction,” in *The Social Life of Things*, edited by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9.

⁹⁵ Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction,” 17.

In essence, the term ‘folk art’ evokes a pattern of, a process with, and a relationship to capitalist modernity and artistic modernism that is decidedly presentist in its scope—even if such categorization also continuously looks back to a past that always seems a more fertile ground for folk art production than the present moment.⁹⁶

As a cultural practice and folk art, hexology inherently provokes in its participants a desire to look to the past for inspiration in order to reconstruct and manipulate the objects in the present. Hex signs have always moved through capitalist economies and looked both backwards and forwards while doing so. Identifying with folk artists, Kristin Farr utilizes mass production to push the limits of her handiwork while simultaneously referencing her heritage and, perhaps unintentionally, art movements of the 1960s that impacted advertising, architecture, and fashion.⁹⁷ Existing within the realms of amateur craft and folk art, the work of Kristin Farr does not necessarily inhabit “an anti-modern space,” as seen in the hexology of Hunter Yoder, nor does it act as “a secure refuge from the idea of capitalist dominance and homogeneity.”⁹⁸ Instead, her ongoing contribution to and participation in capitalist economies “is integral to and embedded in the experience of daily life” as well as “modern labour and production.”⁹⁹ Kristin Farr’s mural work and collaborative exhibitions demonstrate that hex signs and craft objects “can move in and out of the commodity state” and transform as needed.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Erin Morton, “Introduction,” in *For Folk's Sake: Art and Economy in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016), 11.

⁹⁷ Kristin Farr, “Q&A with Livewire Artist: Kristin Farr,” Interview by Vanessa Wilson, July 6, 2016, The Midway Gallery. <http://www.themidwaygallery.com/blog/2016/7/6/q-a-with-livewire-artist-kristin-farr>.

⁹⁸ Stephen Knott, “Space,” in *Amateur Craft: History and Theory* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 45.

⁹⁹ Knott, “Space,” 45.

¹⁰⁰ Appadurai, “Introduction,” 13.

Aligning her hexology practice within the discourse of craft and folk art, Kristin Farr's participation in gallery exhibitions also complicates the value of her work as well as her identification as a contemporary folk artist. When a work of art or object enters and lives in a gallery space, the monetary worth of the piece often increases substantially.¹⁰¹ Historically, distinct hierarchies of identity and value exist between works of art presented in galleries, souvenir art, and the folk art created by artists living in rural regions. Souvenir art gains value based on the individual, subjective experiences and memories attached to the object.¹⁰² Often, folk art is purchased and brought into exhibition environments or institutional spaces, which shifts its financial value, as well as the perceived value and hierarchical status of the work. In constructing her identity as a folk artist, the value of Farr's work shifts in a similar manner as it leaves the urban environment and enters a gallery space. Yet, as she *willingly* participates in gallery exhibitions and the mass production of her designs, Kristin Farr maintains control over how, where, and in what form her hexology work appears.

To argue against Farr's use of mass production and participation in late capitalist economies, one could consider the discussion previously addressed in the historical context sec-

¹⁰¹ As seen in Farr's work, the boundaries between art, artifact, and commodity often intersect and blur. The following excerpt aids in expanding upon this trend: "Definitions of art, artifact, and commodity typically occur at such interstitial nodes-sites of negotiation and exchange where objects must continually be reevaluated according to regional criteria and local definitions. At each point in its movement through space and time, an object has the potential to shift from one category to another and, in so doing, to slide along the slippery line that divides art from artifact from commodity." See: Ruth B. Phillips, and Christopher B. Steiner, "Art, Authenticity, and the Baggage of Cultural Encounter," in *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial Postcolonial Worlds*, edited by Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1999), 15.

¹⁰² On the subject of souvenirs, Michael Haldrup makes the following statement: "...tourist studies have generally subscribed to a conception of souvenirs as material mementoes, touchstones of memory, that enable narratives of distant times and places to be re-told and re-lived in..." Hex signs certainly fit into this description. See: Michael Haldrup, "Souvenirs: Magical Objects in Everyday Life," *Emotion, Space and Society* 22 (2017): 53.

tion of this thesis. The impact of exploitation on particular members of the Pennsylvania German community by businesses in regions like Lancaster county brings into question the ripple effect of Farr's, and others, involvement in the mass production of hex signs. One could also argue that in engaging with companies with questionable labor practices and homogenizing the image of hex signs, Farr contributes to the exploitation and manipulation of both industry workers who produce her commodified designs *and* the Pennsylvania German community.¹⁰³ In response to this trend, Erin Morton explains that:

The relevance for culture in general, and the categorization of folk art in particular, under late capitalism is that an object of 'pride' (in this case, the local material culture of self-taught people) moves from a substantive marker of cultural identity, for example, in the construction of a national or regional tourism infrastructure and into a source of 'profit,' which treats cultural production instead as a technical skill that needs economic management.¹⁰⁴

Objects of identity and pride are easily manipulated into a source of profit as well as the individuals who have the skills to produce them for a capitalist economy.¹⁰⁵ However, Farr's ancestral connection to German-speaking settlers in Pennsylvania could rebut this argument as Pennsylvania Germans participate in the exploitation of their culture and lived environment. To push this

¹⁰³ For her apparel line, Kristin Farr used Skyou, an online company that outsources labour to factories in China. While this group claims to participate in fair labor standards, one must always question what fair means to companies that mass produce products in a short period of time. According to their website, Skyou helps manage factories for companies like Nike and Puma, both of which have participated in questionable labor practices. See: Skyou, "About." <http://www.skyou.com/> (accessed February 1, 2019).

¹⁰⁴ Morton, *For Folk's Sake*, 12.

¹⁰⁵ It is interesting to consider how craft and folk art infiltrate capitalist economies in numerous ways and how crafters are not supposed to make a profit off of their work. On this subject, Morton makes the following statement: "Museum curators and art historians have tended to codify folk art as the art of common, uneducated, or untrained people who produce purposeful work for their own everyday use. A key factor in maintaining this definition has been the pervasive...notion that the so-called folk artist must avoid selling for profit and use the work within community settings until those knowledgeable of the art world and its institutions arrive to help navigate this complex commercial and creative system." See: Morton, *For Folk's Sake*, 17-18.

point further, one should consider the fact that hex signs came out of and continue to thrive within processes of commoditization, manipulation, and mass production.

Farr's work also importantly intersects with notions of authenticity as discussed by Steiner and Phillips by begging the question of whether it would be deemed authentic by the Pennsylvania German community and whether the answer is relevant. Does it matter if the artist refers to her folk art practice as hexology if it does not feature motifs historically and currently used by barn star and hex sign makers? Does geographic location determine authenticity? In contrast to Hunter Yoder, Farr is not preoccupied by notions of an imagined authenticity to determine her identity and role as a hexologist working outside of the Pennsylvania German community. Instead, she uses contemporary and historical hexology as inspiration for her creative practice and to connect with her familial heritage in the present. As seen in the "World's Largest Hex Sign" located in Massachusetts, location does not determine the authenticity of Farr's work. For Farr, identity construction occurs in processes of retrospection and reinterpretation; while she uses different techniques in her designs, Kristin Farr's work makes possible the continuation of the hex sign and barn star disciplines. By separating herself from the familiar, Pennsylvania German symbols associated with the objects and participating in various modes of production, Farr allows hex signs to gain new meaning and adapt to cultural, political, and economic shifts in the United States.

Kristin Farr's hexology branches out from the geographically-specific culture of the Pennsylvania German community, simultaneously building upon and challenging the histories and identities associated with the craft practice. Inspired by color, geometry, and heritage, Farr reinvents hex signs as representations of nostalgia, joy, spontaneity, and place-making. Allowing

her work to shift between exhibition spaces, urban environments, and systems of mass-production, Kristin Farr complicates conceptions of where and in what form hexology can exist. Although Farr's work differs visually from the hex signs found in gift shops and on barns in southeastern Pennsylvania, her artistic practice remains connected to the history of and debate that surrounds the folk objects. Seemingly separate from the pastoral idealizations and anti-modern values that often correlate with notions of craft, Farr's hex sign work, regardless of the spaces it inhabits or the forms it takes on, responds to the rural backstory of the folk discipline and its role in the capitalist economy of the United States. Farr's identity as a craft practitioner and hexologist illustrates the ways in which the discipline continues to thrive and transform within the capitalist economy of the United States.

CONCLUSION

As expressed in the diverse work of contemporary folk artists Hunter Yoder and Kristin Farr, hex sign makers imbue their work with new meaning based upon individual and collective experiences. Ambassadors of Pennsylvania German culture, these folk objects have undergone numerous evolutions and continue to expand as markers of cultural identity and signifiers of shifting communities in rural and urban regions of southeastern Pennsylvania and across the country. While hex sign makers may look to the past for visual inspiration, their current interpretations respond to the changing political, economic, and social climates of the United States as well as their experiences as Pennsylvania Germans living within or outside of the state's borders. Identity remains a determinant component in the practice of creating hex signs as each object speaks to the beliefs, customs, and histories of the creator. The artistic choices made by hexologists illuminate their desire to strengthen their bond with their community's lived environment, identity, and ancestral pasts.

This study of a settler-colonial craft practice makes clear how hex signs continue to function as important and increasingly complex emblems of Pennsylvania German identities. Existing within a culture that has roots in both European and American history, hex signs and barn stars act as key markers of individual or communal identity and territory. I argue that hex signs have shaped and continue to shape regional communities in Pennsylvania and national culture in the United States of America. By exploring facets of the historical and contemporary production of folk objects, this thesis points to the ways these craft practices contribute to the construction and maintenance of identity. Though often misinterpreted as simplistic, naïve, or vanishing, craft

continues to impact and influence the ever expanding and nonlinear web of history. Existing on the cusp of public and private, conservative and liberal, craft aims to manipulate. For this reason, craft functions as a valuable tool in the formation of identities that shift and transform. With each transformation, whether by an individual or group within the Pennsylvania German community, hex signs gain new layers of meaning.

Exploring hex signs through a craft studies lens has opened up perspectives on the processes of identity construction in relatively small regions in the United States and the development of folk culture in Pennsylvania more broadly. This study offers a rich area of further research which includes how hex signs will continue to visually transform, gain new meaning, and impact local and national identities and economies. It is meant as a contribution to material culture theory, economic and political histories, craft studies and art history. It has asked why hex signs, and for that matter barn stars, remain a symbolic form of expression for the artists who produce and the communities that cherish them. Craft scholarship often questions where a practice will go to next, how it will transform, and whether or not the genre itself will disappear with the technological advancements that continue to change the world. Moving forward from the analysis presented in this thesis and considering the future of hex signs, I believe that artists will continue to interpret, manipulate, and reimagine these objects as they find themselves adapting to external and internal experiences.

Figures



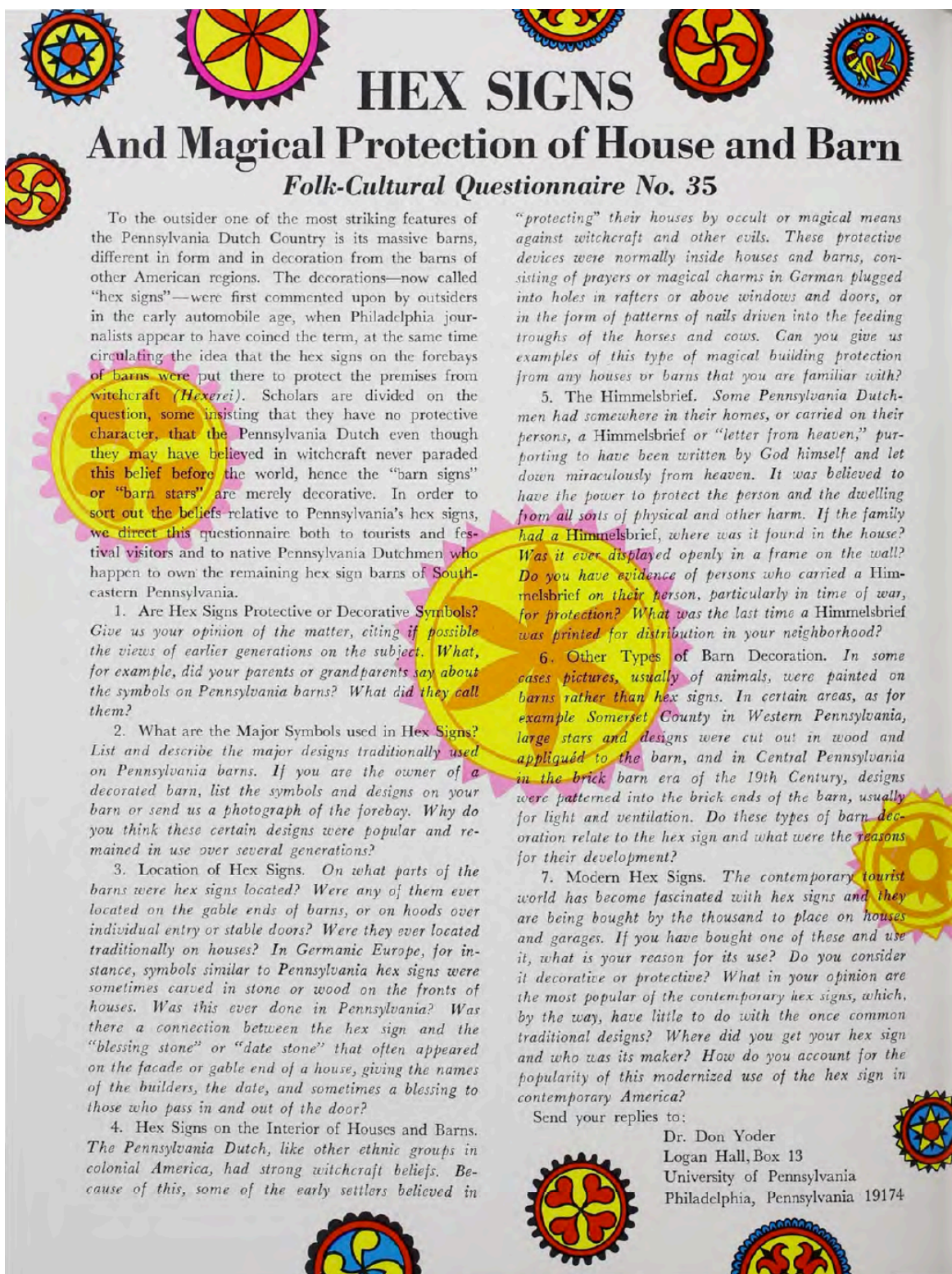
Fig. 1: Brenna Tuel, "Barn Stars near Kutztown, Pennsylvania," Digital Image, December 27, 2018.



Fig. 2: Brenna Tuel, "Barn Stars near Kutztown, Pennsylvania," Digital Image, December 27, 2018.



Fig. 3: Brenna Tuel, “Hex Signs at Pennsylvania Dutch Gift Haus in Shartlesville, Pennsylvania,” Digital Image, December 27, 2018.



HEX SIGNS

And Magical Protection of House and Barn

Folk-Cultural Questionnaire No. 35

To the outsider one of the most striking features of the Pennsylvania Dutch Country is its massive barns, different in form and in decoration from the barns of other American regions. The decorations—now called “hex signs”—were first commented upon by outsiders in the early automobile age, when Philadelphia journalists appear to have coined the term, at the same time circulating the idea that the hex signs on the forebays of barns were put there to protect the premises from witchcraft (*Hexerei*). Scholars are divided on the question, some insisting that they have no protective character, that the Pennsylvania Dutch even though they may have believed in witchcraft never paraded this belief before the world, hence the “barn signs” or “barn stars” are merely decorative. In order to sort out the beliefs relative to Pennsylvania’s hex signs, we direct this questionnaire both to tourists and festival visitors and to native Pennsylvania Dutchmen who happen to own the remaining hex sign barns of Southeastern Pennsylvania.

1. Are Hex Signs Protective or Decorative Symbols? Give us your opinion of the matter, citing if possible the views of earlier generations on the subject. What, for example, did your parents or grandparents say about the symbols on Pennsylvania barns? What did they call them?
2. What are the Major Symbols used in Hex Signs? List and describe the major designs traditionally used on Pennsylvania barns. If you are the owner of a decorated barn, list the symbols and designs on your barn or send us a photograph of the forebay. Why do you think these certain designs were popular and remained in use over several generations?
3. Location of Hex Signs. On what parts of the barns were hex signs located? Were any of them ever located on the gable ends of barns, or on hoods over individual entry or stable doors? Were they ever located traditionally on houses? In Germanic Europe, for instance, symbols similar to Pennsylvania hex signs were sometimes carved in stone or wood on the fronts of houses. Was this ever done in Pennsylvania? Was there a connection between the hex sign and the “blessing stone” or “date stone” that often appeared on the facade or gable end of a house, giving the names of the builders, the date, and sometimes a blessing to those who pass in and out of the door?
4. Hex Signs on the Interior of Houses and Barns. The Pennsylvania Dutch, like other ethnic groups in colonial America, had strong witchcraft beliefs. Because of this, some of the early settlers believed in “protecting” their houses by occult or magical means against witchcraft and other evils. These protective devices were normally inside houses and barns, consisting of prayers or magical charms in German plugged into holes in rafters or above windows and doors, or in the form of patterns of nails driven into the feeding troughs of the horses and cows. Can you give us examples of this type of magical building protection from any houses or barns that you are familiar with?
5. The Himmelsbrief. Some Pennsylvania Dutchmen had somewhere in their homes, or carried on their persons, a Himmelsbrief or “letter from heaven,” purporting to have been written by God himself and let down miraculously from heaven. It was believed to have the power to protect the person and the dwelling from all sorts of physical and other harm. If the family had a Himmelsbrief, where was it found in the house? Was it ever displayed openly in a frame on the wall? Do you have evidence of persons who carried a Himmelsbrief on their person, particularly in time of war, for protection? What was the last time a Himmelsbrief was printed for distribution in your neighborhood?
6. Other Types of Barn Decoration. In some cases pictures, usually of animals, were painted on barns rather than hex signs. In certain areas, as for example Somerset County in Western Pennsylvania, large stars and designs were cut out in wood and appliquéd to the barn, and in Central Pennsylvania in the brick barn era of the 19th Century, designs were patterned into the brick ends of the barn, usually for light and ventilation. Do these types of barn decoration relate to the hex sign and what were the reasons for their development?
7. Modern Hex Signs. The contemporary tourist world has become fascinated with hex signs and they are being bought by the thousand to place on houses and garages. If you have bought one of these and use it, what is your reason for its use? Do you consider it decorative or protective? What in your opinion are the most popular of the contemporary hex signs, which, by the way, have little to do with the once common traditional designs? Where did you get your hex sign and who was its maker? How do you account for the popularity of this modernized use of the hex sign in contemporary America?

Send your replies to:

Dr. Don Yoder
Logan Hall, Box 13
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19174

Fig. 4: Don Yoder, “Hex Signs And Magical Protection of House and Barn: Folk-Cultural Questionnaire No. 35,” *Pennsylvania Folklife* XXIII, Folk Festival Supplement (1974): Inside Front Cover.



Fig. 5: Katherine Milhous, *WPA Pennsylvania Art Project poster promoting Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, showing an Amish Family*, 1936-1941, Colored woodcut on poster board. United States Library of Congress.



Fig. 6: LeRoy Gensler, "Paint me a hex sign in reverse," *Pennsylvania Folklife XXIII*, Folk Festival Supplement (1974): 45.



Fig. 7: Unknown, "Milton J Hill at work, painting 'hex' signs," *Shire Valley Legacies*, 20th Century. <https://www.shirevalleylegacies.com/Community/Families/Hill-Family/Hill-Milton-J--Gertrude-D-Straus/i-H25PN5Z/A>.



Fig. 8: Unknown, “At right is Dr. Alfred L. Shoemaker, the founder of the Kutztown Folk Festival. At Left is Hex Sign artist Milt. Hill,” *Berks-Mont New*, June 19, 2017. https://www.berksmontnews.com/opinion/a-look-back-in-history-the-kutztown-folk-festival-is/article_371a1472-cc51-5ad1-a017-39bc728debe7.html.



Fig. 9: Unknown, "Prof. Johnny Ott, Hexologist from Lenhartsville, Penna. and Jacob Zook, The Hex Man of Paradise, Penna., bring you 'Good Luck Signs' for every situation from 'sore feet' to the 'farmer with unhappy pigs' to 'mother-in-law troubles,'" 20th Century. Postcard.



Fig. 10: Hunter M. Yoder, *Whirling Sun Hex 12" Round*, 21st Century. Acrylic on wood, 12 in. diameter. The Hex Factory: Hunter M. Yoder. Accessed September 1, 2018. <https://www.huntermoyer.com/apps/webstore/products/show/6160735>.



Fig. 11: Hunter M. Yoder, *Black Sun & Oppositional Pairing of the Elder Futhark*, round, 21st Century. Acrylic on wood, 12 in. diameter. The Hex Factory: Hunter M. Yoder. Accessed September 1, 2018. <https://www.huntermoyer.com/apps/webstore/products/show/6160802>.



Fig. 12: Kristin Farr, “made a magic in 2 days flat with my friends. thanks again, boyz! spinning in denver till 9/9,” *Instagram*, September 5, 2018. <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bj-10V0HQ4z/?taken-by=kristinfarr>.



Fig. 13: Kristin Farr, *Untitled*, November 16, 2016. Kristinfarr.com. Accessed September 8, 2018. <http://www.kristinfarr.com/2016/11/16/b5446so9g1fddh0g9u602899t2cvlr>.



Fig. 14: Kristin Farr, “ME AND THE KID! WE DID IT! ❤️ of #powwowworchester #world-slargesthexsign#b+b #allthewayup,” *Instagram*, September 1, 2017. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BYhUWunHJth/>

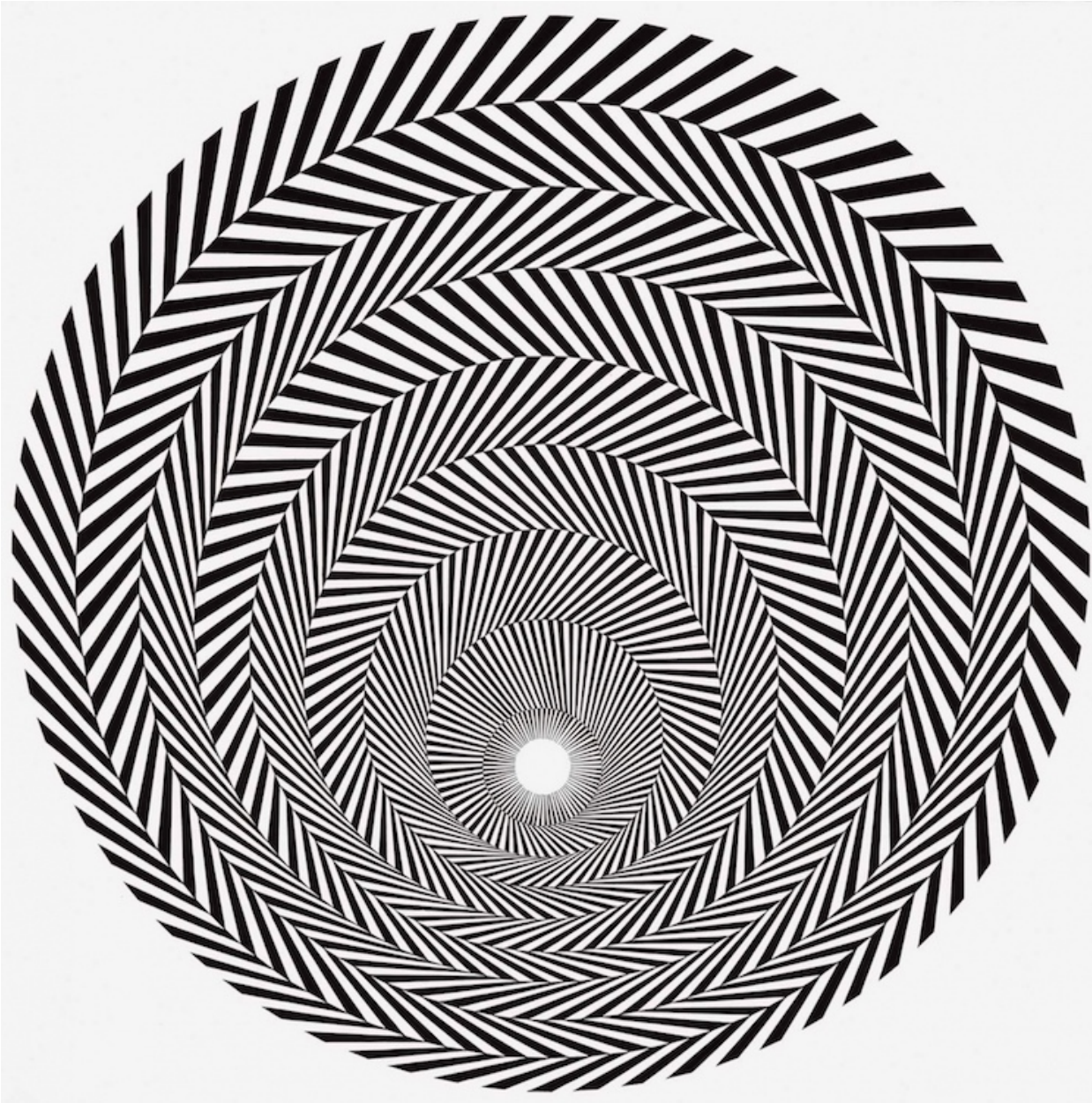


Fig. 15: Bridget Riley, *Blaze 4*, 1964. Emulsion on hardwood, 42 9/10 × 42 9/10 in (109 × 109 cm). Humlebæk, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art. Accessed January 2, 2019.

<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/bridget-riley-blaze-4-1>.

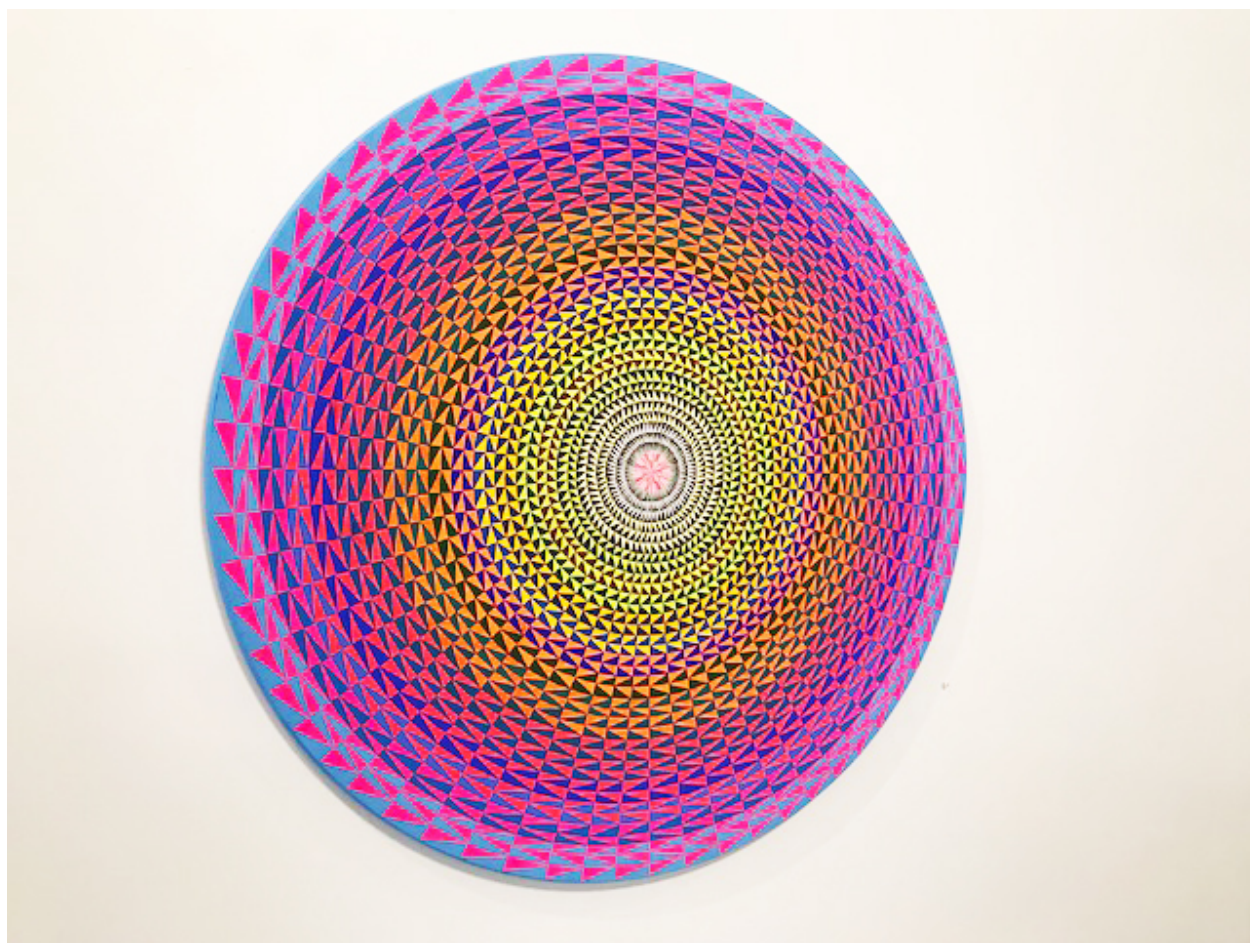


Fig. 16: Kristin Farr, *Untitled*, 2018. San Francisco, First Amendment Gallery. Accessed January 8, 2019.



Fig. 17: Kristin Farr, *Untitled*, 2018. San Francisco, First Amendment Gallery. Accessed January 8, 2019.

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