Tom Heatley
BA (Hons) Photography

Aaron Schuman: “…ethnographer of the ethnographers...”?¹
An exploration of the curator’s relationship to the folk, through objects exhibited in: FOLK: A Personal Ethnography, 2014

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¹ (Schuman, 2014c)
² As outlined in The Precession of Simulacra (Baudrillard, 1994)
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Abstract

This dissertation outlines the extent to which Aaron Schuman became an ethnographer, through his collaboration with the Ethnographic Museum in Krakow while developing his exhibition *FOLK: A Personal Ethnography*. Through a discussion of the main themes in relation to four key objects from the exhibition, this dissertation explores how Schuman transcended through the different identifications of ‘folk’, as understood through the practice of ethnography. Finally, this dissertation explores how the Krakow Photomonth has expanded the multidisciplinary nature of research in contemporary photography.
The following dissertation will outline an understanding of the different agencies on display in the 2014 exhibition curated by Aaron Schuman, titled *FOLK: A Personal Ethnography*, as part of the 12th annual Krakow Photomonth. It will explore how his changing roles as an artist, curator and researcher among others, affect his primary role as mediator between the different circles involved in the research, planning and production of the exhibition. This dissertation will consider theories of art practice as research, in relation to Schuman’s interpretation and mediation of the discipline of ethnography through an art practice. In accordance with the collaboration presented, between art and ethnography, this dissertation will also apply theories of visual anthropology, in order to explore the value of the exhibition in relation to what is normally considered a non-art discipline. It will also consider the increasingly indistinct boundaries between research disciplines and look at how art and ethnography compare in a contemporary museum context. Primarily, the exploration will be carried out through an examination of selected objects from the exhibition, in order to look at how the exhibition transcends ethnography, the archive and art.

In order to provide a context for the exhibition that will form the primary discussion point in this dissertation, it is important to introduce the themes central to the curation of the festival as a whole, of which *FOLK: A Personal Ethnography* was one of 9 major exhibitions. Also the overall festival curator, Aaron Schuman explored photography’s close relationship to knowledge. Titled *Re:Search*, the exhibitions celebrated photography’s various roles in exploration and investigation. In the festival catalogue, Schuman introduces the festival theme in the essay, *Re:Search* 2014. It starts with a brief anecdote from when Schuman found a statue dedicated to Etienne-Jules Marey, a
figure famous for his part in the early developments of photography. The relevance of this story becomes apparent when he lists the various life achievements of Marey, and they are numerous. Schuman quotes that he was, among many: Member of the Academy of Sciences, Member of the Academy of Medicine, Professor of the College de France, Creator of the Graphic Method, and Inventor of Chronophotography and Cinematography. Within the world of photography, Marey is known, but in his life he was an influential researcher in many more fields of study than one could imagine.

Schuman starts the next section of the essay by saying that, in the subsequent weeks while he was developing ideas and researching for the Krakow Photomonth, he reflected on how so many of photography’s founding figures “...were not so much aesthetes in search of a new and expressive artistic medium, but were instead ambitious scientists researchers, scholars, and polymaths...” (Schuman, 2014a: 8). It is well known, but too often forgotten that the medium’s founders were chemists, classicists, etymologists, archaeologists, members of parliament, soldiers, farmers, engineers, philosophers, logicians, deacons and mathematicians. This is, of course, a description of the disciplines that just a handful of the inventors and practitioners of photography identified with, at the time of its creation. Schuman writes how, on reflection, he was reminded that, “...photography was a medium born from empirical curiosity rather than artistic ambition...” (Schuman, 2014a: 8). It was invented as a companion for a vast number of disciplines, intended to assist and enrich many forms of knowledge gathering.

However, it took decades for photography to develop integrity as an autonomous, and meaningfully creative medium, receiving criticism for lacking “...independent expressive merit in its own right...” (Schuman, 2014a: 8). Schuman quotes Baudelaire in the 1859 essay The Salon of 1859, stating, on the subject of photography, to “...let it be the secretary and clerk of whoever needs an absolute factual exactitude in his profession.” (Baudelaire, quoted by Schuman, 2014a: 9). Although it appears incorrect, a contemporary reader cannot, however, criticise Baudelaire for this analysis, as he was
essentially describing how photography was being used at the time; it was a tool, used by other fields of study.

In the next part of the essay, Schuman starts to relate these ideas to the contemporary context of photography, and potentially how photography has corrupted art, stating that “…this medium resides within a rather murky and convoluted grey area between fact and fiction…” (Schuman, 2014a: 9). Our understanding of photography has been expanded, with over a century of usage within many different contexts; as a practice photography has become increasingly complex, and beautiful in a much broader sense.

Schuman continues in describing photography as residing within, “…the objective and the subjective, [and] the empirical and the lyrical.” (Schuman, 2014a: 9). These poetic phrases reflect the ways in which photography has far surpassed the role of humble servant. Photography “…bears incredible potential to be both fruitful and insightful not only in general aesthetic and artistic terms, but also specifically in terms of knowledge and the search for it.” (Schuman, 2014a: 9). This is the main sentiment that informed the overarching theme by which the festival was curated, and influenced the 2014 Krakow Photomonth name, Re:Search. Schuman writes of the exhibiting artists and curators, that they all “…engage in research, and use photography itself as a primary starting point…” (Schuman, 2014a: 9) The exhibitions explored artists’ practices that engage in many areas of interest, covering what Schuman describes as a “…broad spectrum of artistic and scientific disciplines…” (Schuman, 2014a: 9).

The 2014 Krakow Photomonth celebrated photography’s role in research of every kind as an invaluable imaging tool, and so on reflection, Baudelaire was correct in many ways in his analysis of photography’s ability to document, through its impeccable ability to replicate reality. However, the Krakow Photomonth examined how photography is research, and how photographs relay knowledge in a lucid and poetic way. It proved that photography is certainly no longer a mere tool, benefiting other fields of study, in fact many of the exhibitions demonstrated how photography can be the dominant discipline, using the camera as a tool, and enlightening other subjects through research.
and connections. Schuman finishes the passage by describing photography as ‘an exceptionally unique and exciting form of study, inquiry, investigation, intensive searching - and research - in its own right’ (Schuman, 2014a: 9).

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As mentioned at the start, in addition to being the festival curator, Aaron Schuman had an exhibition of his own, which was hosted at the Ethnographic Museum in Krakow. The initial stimulus for the project was in order to explore his polish ancestry. As Schuman explains in the exhibition’s accompanying text, his maternal great-grandfather was born in the village of Cierpisz, 150km from Krakow (Schuman, 2014a: 133). He spent the first 22 years of his life there, before immigrating to the US.

In FOLK: A Personal Ethnography, 2014, Schuman worked across disciplines, in keeping with the festival’s main curatorial theme. He worked as an artist and curator, developing an exhibition that engaged in research, initially focusing on his ancestry. However, as this dissertation will discuss, the project transformed into something much more interesting and engaging. As an artist, resident in the ethnography museum, Schuman worked in an archive with photographs and artefacts, and in constant communication with the museum’s curators and researchers. His experience as a curator and artist was apparent in the way he seamlessly bridged the gap between art and ethnography.

It is important to note that previous to Schuman’s project, the museum had never collaborated with an artist in a similar way (Balhetchet, 2014: 67). Equally, it was a new experience for Schuman, working in an environment never before inhabited by artists. From the start, one could anticipate a fascinating connection forming between these seemingly disparate realms of knowledge.

In the introduction to Between Art and Anthropology, Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright draw on a poetic analogy to describe how two distinct disciplines, such as the ones brought together in
Schuman’s exhibition, can become interwoven, much like the flow of two liquid paints (Schneider and Wright, 2010). They write that, while two colours can maintain their original identities in places, together they can achieve new colours and forms. In artworks, paint can be overlaid, encrusted, veiled and sculpted, foregrounding its other qualities, rather than just its value as colour. In relation to art and anthropology, they explain that a joined separateness leads to new perceptions of both fields, which could not be accomplished without mixing with the other. Aaron Schuman’s exhibition exemplifies this in the way it translates ethnographic research and knowledge into artistic expression, using agency as if it were a tangible medium. He mediates between the museum and gallery (distinguished here as institutions of knowledge and art, respectively), engaging with, and exploring a wider perception of both ethnography and art.

His exhibition also throws into question just whether the two disciplines are as disparate as they initially appear. Looking into another article, entitled Art/Anthropology: Practices of Difference and Translation, 2008, Anna Laine describes that the similarities between the two disciplines present an argument for which art and anthropology hold a very close resemblance. Contemporary social anthropology revolves around the mediation of experiences and intervention within a research environment, more than it is about a traditional model founded on ethnographic fieldwork. In applying this same idea to art practice, we start to see the similarity, as much of contemporary art attempts to express concepts, visually (or otherwise) articulating a mediation of the everyday human experience, or an engagement in wider cultural occurrences.

In the essay The Artist as Ethnographer, Hal Foster presents ethnography as a metaphor for some contemporary art practice, examining how the two disciplines can be conceived as the same. Unlike Laine, Foster choses to focus on the practice of an artist, and how it compares to that of an ethnographer, applying terminology normally associated with art discourse and critique in his arguments. This is demonstrated in a passage in which he uses the artist as an exemplar to suggest that the practice of the ethnographer could be like that of a “…collagist, semiologist, [or] avant-gardist?” (Foster, 1996: 180), of which all could be true. The act of extracting an object from a
community and transforming it, through means of an archive, into an artefact, is an act of appropriation. This is supported by a remark later in the text in which he talks about the contextual grounding of the ethnographic discipline, and the similarity that is found in the practices of artists “...whom aspire to fieldwork in the everyday.” (Foster, 1996: 180).

Schuman’s practice while at the ethnographic museum seems to relate with both Foster’s and Laine’s theories in the way he approaches the collaborative process as an artist, but effortlessly takes on the role of an ethnographer, which is evident in the curation of objects in the exhibition. One of the most prevalent themes in the exhibition was the illumination of the processes at the heart of the museum, making the façade of the institution transparent. Through taking on the role of ethnographer, though potentially subconsciously, he allowed what were behind the scenes - in the storage rooms, the archive of the museum and (most importantly) the work of the ethnographers - to become visible. The photographs and objects on display were selected and created by Schuman for their malleability to inform about their origins, as objects of ethnographic value, and their current states as artefacts; reflecting upon the archive and the transformation of the objects’ agency through museumification².

The way in which Schuman repurposed objects, and altered their meaning through the framework of this exhibition highlights his feelings about the malleable nature of the artefacts he came across in the ethnographic museum. When exploring the museum, the archivists would have offered knowledge about the origin and history of objects to Schuman. Where known, he would have been given details about their past purpose, much like the information one would gain from signs in traditional museum exhibits. However, his exhibition appears to use the objects in a very different way. It is clear from what we experience in his exhibition that when Schuman was presented with these objects, he could see beyond their history, and envisage their potential, exploring what they mean and how their agency has been influenced by their contemporary context.

² As outlined in The Precession of Simulacra (Baudrillard, 1994)
From this point, the continuation of the main discussion of this dissertation will be formed by means of a virtual tour of a selection of the objects and photographs that were exhibited in *FOLK: A Personal Ethnography*. The dissertation will explore themes as they become relevant, through discussing the various functions of the objects in the exhibition, and how they work as a group to project the curator’s intentions.

In his original proposal, reproduced in its original email format in the exhibition’s publication, Schuman wrote that he intended to build up a “...‘constellation’ of material in the gallery space...” (Schuman, 2014a: 152). This was evident in the exhibition, in which relationships between objects in the space opened up new understandings about, firstly the artefacts themselves, but arguably more importantly, the museum. Schuman wrote that his intention was to allow these new understandings to “develop and grow because they are sitting alongside each other” (Schuman, 2014a: 152). I intend to highlight the ways in which his reworking of artefacts and interpretations of knowledge have developed in the curation of *FOLK: A Personal Ethnography*, through picking out and discussing what could be considered the brightest stars in Schuman’s ‘constellation’.

In one corner of the gallery space, there was a large collection of small 35mm black and white photographic prints (see fig. 1, 2). Arranged in an informal scatter, they were predominantly snapshots of ethnographers carrying out field research. Schuman requested that that, out of a vast collection, these specific negatives be scanned for the exhibition, as they seemed to show something very interesting that other printed and digitized photographs in the archive didn’t.
Firstly, it is important to note that these images were taken near the end of the rolls of film, using up the spare frames after formal documentary images had been made. In fact, 20 rolls of untouched negatives, which since their arrival in the archive, had never seen the light of day (Balhetchet, 2014). One can presume that these photographs were not made with the intention of public display, and therein we find the reason why they had never been printed. The selection of images chosen by Schuman repeatedly depicted researchers fooling about with artefacts, along side more serious pictures, showing the process of the ethnographers collecting knowledge. Some of the images depict makeshift set-ups for photographing artefacts in the field, and ethnographic photographers capturing cultural events. However, the main interest in these images for this discussion does not necessarily come from what is depicted alone; it is the specific focus they are given as a group, which was highlighted by Schuman through their unanticipated retrieval from the archive.

As a group of images they are particularly successful at providing an insight into the experience of the ethnographic field researcher; this is certainly the intention behind Schuman’s selection. It is in keeping with a broader excavation of the museum and its workings, as described by Schuman in the festival’s catalogue. He wrote that he was “…interested in exploring the traditional customs, culture, materials, and origins of the museum’s collection…” (Schuman, 2014a: 149), making the façade of
the institution transparent in exhibiting objects, images and artefacts that gave as much insight about the ethnographers as the folk represented in the archives.

In the snapshots, the synchronous depiction of the ethnographers with objects found in the process of field research, combining the traditional items with contemporary photographic equipment and research tools, seems to conceptually place the ethnographers more closely in the environment they are studying than the museum they have come from. Through focusing on this juxtaposition of folk (the studied people and the ethnographers), Schuman highlights his detachment from either. As an external mediator, Schuman was able to pick up on the value of the images as documents of the ethnographers, which would otherwise have been left unnoticed. In this way he has interpreted the images as fruitful artefacts, despite the disregard they previously received in the museum’s archive. This view is consistent with a theory of visual anthropology developed by Elizabeth Edwards, quoted by Sarah Pink in Doing Visual Ethnography, in which she stated that “…the defining essence of an anthropological photograph is not the subject matter as such, but the consumer’s classification of that knowledge…” (Edwards in Pink, 2001: 50). For Schuman, these photographs reveal a considerable amount of knowledge about the ethnographers, and their work with the people at the
centre of their research, even though they were originally taken as simple snapshots. The photographs were not taken with ethnographic intention, but they have received agency as ethnographic artefacts in their selection for the exhibition.

When discussing the depiction, in these photographs, of the museum’s ethnographers engaged in research, Schuman writes that they are “…preserving what may potentially be lost as contemporary modernity (from where they come) encroaches on these regions, cultures and communities.” (Schuman, 2014a: 149). It is apparent in his motives for the exhibition as a whole that Schuman is attempting to achieve a similar outcome, relating to whom he calls the museum people (Schuman, 2014a: 145). Within the museum, changes in the way things are archived, and transformations in how the museum works, as a public institution, are an inevitable future development. Schuman’s actions regarding these photographs are an attempt to preserve the rich culture within the museum as it, too, ineludibly conforms to contemporary modernity. This selection of photographs specifically embodies this sentiment, through their focus on the diaristic documentation of the museum’s staff in the field.

In recovering and scanning these snapshots, Schuman could be seen as establishing a legacy within the museum. He selected these photographs from a part of the archive that may not have survived future developments, such as the inevitable digitization of many parts of the collection. This reflects Schuman’s sense that the knowledge and insight that the museum people retain in their memory will be lost when they eventually leave the institution, because of the gaps in the material archive. So much of what the museum is about, including the sense of real importance placed on the “…preservation of traditional arts and cultures…” (Schuman, 2014a: 148), is not retained in the artefacts and documentation alone. Schuman focused on this theme in the exhibition, and in the process created a lasting impact on the museum’s future
Two of the photographic snapshots, discussed above, depicted sickles found by the ethnographers while engaged in field research. The first is held in the hand of a researcher, visually describing how the object looks while in use (see fig. 3). In the second image, the sickle is placed on the ground, on a patch of cleared dirt, providing the photograph with a plain background. I mention these photographs specifically because of their distinctive pictorial connection to another piece on an adjoining wall in the exhibition.

![Fig. 3. Snapshot depicting an ethnographer holding a sickle while doing in field research.](image1)

![Fig. 4. Negative print of a photograph of two sickles retrieved from the archive.](image2)

Schuman exhibited a photograph of two sickles from the museum, printed as a negative (see fig. 4). The significance of the negative image is not immediately apparent. It is clear, however, that the function of the image is metaphorical rather than purely illustrative. This is made apparent when reading an email exchange between Schuman and the ethnographic museum, in which one curator briefly mentions a thought prompted by Schuman’s choice to include the two photographs of sickles. Magdalena Zych writes that in Polish, a crescent moon is commonly called ‘sierp księżyc’, meaning ‘sickle of the moon’. In gaining this piece of knowledge, Schuman’s artistic response now becomes very interesting. Through producing a negative image of the objects,

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3 Reproduced in the festival catalogue (Schuman, 2014a: 155).
he allows the sickles to resemble crescent moons. He has created a visual metaphor based on a folk saying as the basis for an art piece.

In an exhibition where many other pieces are purely illustrative, or provide visual information, this photograph functions in a very different way. This piece stands out visually, beautifully yet indirectly offering research knowledge. The presentation of ethnographic knowledge through metaphor is a significant example of Schuman's ability to resolve research through an art practice, acting as a mediator between the two defined disciplines of ethnography and art.

To an extent, the image of the sickles simultaneously demonstrates Schuman's independence from ethnography, and shows his understanding of the objects’ agency as ethnographic artefacts. The photograph reveals more about his connection to the museum, through an objective artistic interpretation of a piece of knowledge he gained from his interactions with the curators. This piece exemplifies how he acted as a mediator between the museum and art, using a common visual language to bridge the hiatus between disciplines, allowing it to be appreciated in a shared context.

However, if we now consider that Schuman's role in the production of this piece extends beyond that of just mediator, the interest in this piece deepens. In Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s essay *Objects of Ethnography* (1990), she sets out a theory that describes how when ethnographic artefacts are exhibited, it is appropriate to refer to them as fragments. The essay is introduced with a rhetorical question, asking why one would save something whose value lies somewhere other than in its appearance. Her response is that through an adoption by an academic discipline, the object gains autonomy. She writes, “Objects become ethnographic by virtue of being defined, segmented, detached, and carried away by ethnographers.” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1990). Expressed differently, ethnographers create artefacts of objects through detaching them from their original context, transforming their agency by fragmenting a material culture.

To relate this back to the piece currently under discussion, we move forward in the essay to a passage exploring *The Limits of Detachment* (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1990). Here, the author
examines the boundaries of ethnography’s ability to produce artefacts that embody the ephemeral or intangible subjects of ethnography, such as storytelling, values, speech and rituals. Most of these examples rely on second order, mimetic representations to document subjects that cannot be detached from reality.

At the heart of Schuman’s negative image of the sickles is a metaphorical illustration of an intangible subject. He has detached an ethnolectic phrase from its origin, and brought it into the museum as an art object. It appears then, that in making the negative photograph of the sickles, Schuman has not only created an art piece, but an ethnographic artefact.

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Continuing on this meandering tour of Schuman’s constellation of objects and images, we visit a photograph displayed in very close proximity to the previous object discussed. In the exhibition, there was a large photograph of a magnifying glass displayed on the wall next to the sickle image, which, as this section will unpick, can also be considered an ethnographic artefact (see fig. 5). The next object is an example of where Schuman has extended his role in the collaboration with the museum beyond that of an artist, and could be considered an ethnographer in the creation of this second ethnographic artefact.

When Schuman first discovered the magnifying glass, it wasn’t in the archive, like most of the other items in the exhibition. At first, the curators of the museum were puzzled by his interest in the object, as it signified a wider sense that they were as much the object of Schuman’s attention as the material artefacts (Balhetchet, 2014: 67). As one of the photographs in the exhibition’s publication illustrate, the object was found on a desk next to a computer, belonging to one of the

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\(^4\) Used here to describe a spoken phrase, which was found to be shared within a culture at the focus of ethnographic research.

\(^5\) (Schuman, 2014a: 152)
ethnographers. Although, elsewhere in the exhibition, photographs of other items from this curator’s workspace are on display, the magnifying glass was given greater illumination, through being presented separately from the other photographs, printed at a larger scale, and exhibited alongside the original object.

![Magnifying Glass](image)

*Fig. 5. Photograph displayed in the exhibition, depicting a magnifying glass found on the desk of one of the ethnographers in the museum.*

The object’s fascination begins visually, with its intriguing, unintentional imitation of the aesthetic of an object from the archive, with a worn wooden handle, roughly engraved with a penknife, and a crooked wire loop at the end. The way the handle is fastened to the glass at the end with tape has
the DIY look of a tool fixed up by one of the folk at the centre of the museum’s ethnographic
collection. It appears obvious at first that the magnifying glass is another artefact from the archive.
However, when we realise that it is in fact a contemporary object, this aesthetic leads to us to doubt
our preconceptions about the object’s agency. The agency it would have shared with the other
objects in the archive, as ethnographic artefacts, is somewhat dissipated in the knowledge that it
was recovered from the workspace of a museum curator rather than the museum’s collection. Of
the artefacts in the exhibition that were recovered from the archive, the agency of most were
created by the people who made and used them, and then altered when they were taken as
artefacts by ethnographers.

The magnifying glass can, however, be seen in the same light, considering Schuman’s various roles in
the production of the exhibition, including his own sense of becoming an ethnographer, as
expressed in an interview the online platform *FK magazine*. Schuman expressed that throughout the
project he sometimes felt that he became an “ethnographer of the ethnographers” (Schuman,
2014c), as the people in the museum became as important to him as the people at the centre of the
museum’s ethnographic research, whom he’d originally been interested in because of his ancestral
connection. In isolating the object from its original context, the magnifying glass was transformed
from a tool of ethnography to an ethnographic artefact.

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The objects so far discussed all share a common theme, which is that of illuminating the processes
behind the façade of the ethnographic institution, focusing on the ethnographers behind the
creation of museum displays and mediation of their knowledge. However, in selecting certain
objects, this discussion has focused on the role of the curator, and the various ways he mediated
between different disciplines. There is an object on display in the exhibition that in many ways
signifies Schuman’s position as mediator, presented in the form of a figure identified by Schuman as a self-portrait. This brings us to discuss the final object from the ‘constellation’.

On a large section of the gallery wall space, just around the corner from the magnifying glass there were two shelves supporting 15 small dolls made predominantly from wood and wire, and dressed in miniature items of clothing (see fig. 6). Unlike some of the items discussed so far, the dolls were extracted from the museum’s archive. They are original artefacts, retrieved by ethnographers when working in the field, and appropriated by Schuman for the exhibition. Directly next to the shelves were a series of photographs, taken by Schuman specifically for the exhibition, depicting nine of the dolls individually (see fig. 6). The photographs were grouped in two sets of four, with an isolated single image in between. It is the puppet depicted in the isolated picture that will form the basis for the next section of this dissertation.

All of the dolls represent figures from the community from which the ethnographers acquired them. This included a dancing couple, hunters and shepherds, elderly figures and children. Presumably, all of the puppets selected to be photographed were chosen based on their photogenic qualities. However, the photograph displayed in isolation from the others, depicting the doll referred to as the ‘scholar puppet’ (see fig. 7), is primarily included as a self-portrait figure within the exhibition (Schuman, 2014b).
To start with, in presenting the photograph of the scholar larger than the photographs of any of the other puppets, and presenting it in relative isolation, is an example of how Schuman has projected his subjective understanding onto the object. In the exhibition, the scholar puppet is made to appear detached from the rest of the puppet folk, representing Schuman’s own feelings of detachment from his ancestral folk. However, the projection of Schuman’s underlying connection to the puppet folk is maintained in placing the scholar photograph centrally in the overall arrangement of photographs on the wall. It is also visible in the exhibition of the puppets themselves, on the shelves adjacent to the photographs, where the scholar joins the group without physical isolation. Schuman’s adoption of this figure as a self-portrait is an artistic act, subtly influencing our perception of the artefact through its display along with the other puppets, and the parallel display of photographic representations.
On further inspection, we initially see that in adopting one of the puppets as a means to represent him, Schuman is suggesting an inclusion within the village folk, whom the puppets are based upon. As museum artefacts, traditionally the dolls were seen as items that can directly teach us something about a culture. For example, they could inform an ethnographer about the people who crafted and subsequently used them, what they meant and how they were used. Here it is necessary to note that the understanding of these objects, as ethnographic artefacts, is that each puppet may directly resemble a village member, and as a group, they represent village folk. However, Schuman seems to discard their agency as artefacts and directly engages with them as if he were part of the culture from which they were extracted. With his polish ancestry being an initial stimulus for the project, it is hard to imagine, initially, that the puppet does not in some way intentionally represent Schuman’s personal identification with the people characterised.

This idea is consistent with what Schuman expressed personally about his adoption of the scholar puppet as a self-portrait. In fact, Schuman engages strongly in the connection the puppets create between his ancestors, and the folk represented by the dolls. His experience of detachment from his polish ancestors seems to be signified by this one doll. He talks about the connection he feels towards the scholar puppet, specifically, in an interview with the online magazine *MagentaMag*, saying that “…of all the people represented by these puppets that would have lived in this village … he’s kind of an outsider, and he’s the one I feel the closest to…” (Schuman, 2014b). The figure characterised by the scholar puppet represents a tangible distance from the other dolls. They form portrayals of a group of folk who do physical activities and have a clear role in a traditional polish community. Sometimes they represent family structures, or people engaging in activities. The scholar or professor doll is alone in his, relatively modern, occupation, placing him on a conceivably different social level to the rest of the community represented. Schuman’s association with the outsider doll goes some way to describing his feeling of lacking a connection to his ancestral culture; perceptively, his life in a modern society makes him an outsider from his folk.
So, we see a simultaneous building of both: a tangible connection to the people who made the puppets, who are in many ways a reflection of his ancestry; but also, figuratively, a description of his detachment, through pointing out the scholar’s relative distance from the folk. However, there is a third way in which Schuman’s identification with the puppet functions. Adopting the scholar puppet as a self-portrait is also a way in which Schuman placed himself in the museum, allowing him to express a sense of inclusion within the archive, and importantly, within the museum folk. Representing himself through an artefact from the museum’s archive expresses his notably stronger connection to the ethnographers than the people central to the ethnographers’ research.

The inclusion of the scholar puppet can be seen as an important visual embodiment of Schuman’s mediating role in the museum. His collaboration with the archivists to understand the ethnographic value of objects ultimately informed his use of artefacts and his adaption of their agency to reflect upon the museum as an institution of knowledge.

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As a means to conclude the discussion set out here, we need to consider the extent to which the themes outlined are a reflection of the exhibition’s title: FOLK: A Personal Ethnography. In relation to the first three objects specifically, it is appropriate to begin with understanding the definition of ‘folk’, and how these objects interpret the word. Schuman outlined, in his proposal to the museum, that the English language has several definitions for the word ‘folk’, namely:

- members of one’s family (especially one’s parents, grandparents, and direct lineage);
- of or relating to the traditional art or culture of a community or nation;
- relating to or originating from the beliefs and opinions of ordinary people;
- down-to-earth, unpretentious people.

(Schuman, 2014a: 148)
Returning to the photograph of the sickle, where Schuman created an ethnographic artefact, using a visual metaphor to translate a spoken phrase. Ethnographers have ascertained knowledge of the phrase from research in a community; in other words, they uncovered a folk phrase. Here, the word ‘folk’ is used primarily to describe that the phrase originates from the traditional culture of a community.

The folk phrase discussed above was uncovered as part of a wider research practice in which ethnographers seek to preserve the traditional culture of a down-to-earth, unpretentious people. This is an activity highlighted in the display of the snapshots of ethnographers at work, gathering objects and documenting the traditional customs of a folk community. However, as discussed previously, Schuman also included them because of their depiction of the ethnographers, another community that he recognised as unpretentious and down-to-earth, bringing us to the conclusion that the ethnographers are also folk – the museum folk.

The word ‘folk’ can also be used here to describe the traditional art and culture of the ethnographers, which Schuman illuminates in the exhibition of the photograph of the magnifying glass. The appropriation of a tool of the discipline, effectively transforming it into an ethnographic artefact, allows Schuman inclusion within the museum folk. His act of detaching the magnifying glass from its original context, carrying out fieldwork in the museum, exemplifies his personal identification with the ethnographers.

Taking a step further away from the exhibition, and Schuman's actions as an ethnographer, as evidenced in the three objects just discussed, go some way to demonstrating his ‘personal ethnography' as outlined in the exhibition title. The scholar puppet epitomises all of what the title means. It describes Schuman's personal transcendence of folk, beginning with his anticipation of identification with his ancestral community, which turned out to be hard to find, as he discovered a stronger identification with the ethnographers. The exhibition demonstrated how he ended up simultaneously collaborating with and studying the museum folk, still retaining the external perspective of the discipline of photography.

Through this discussion of the functions and agency of four objects from FOLK: A Personal Ethnography, this dissertation has highlighted the different roles Schuman has embodied throughout the research and conception of his exhibition. He entered the project as a photographer, artist, and curator, intending to research a family history, and concluded in producing an exhibition that engaged with and entangled disciplines new to him. The focus of the project shifted from a
Primarily, this dissertation has examined Schuman's adoption of the role of ethnographer, in his simultaneous collaboration with, and study of, his colleagues in the museum. From subtle transformations of objects’ agency to the creation of ethnographic artefacts, he has illuminated the intricate and fascinating culture that populates the ethnographic museum’s offices and archives. Just as described in the metaphor referenced at the beginning of this discussion, Schuman sculpted agency as if it were an artist's medium, allowing his exhibition to transcend photography and ethnography, and the two disciplines to flow like two liquid paints (Schneider and Wright, 2010).

The exhibition he created cannot be described as either ethnographic or photographic alone. As an artist he has employed a practice akin to an ethnographer, field-working in the museum. As an ethnographer and a photographer, he has engaged in research, which proved that disparity between the disciplines is trivial. In fact, in looking more broadly at the curation of the festival, it seems that Schuman questioned disparity between photography and any discipline involved in research.

Returning to the festival’s catalogue, and Schuman wrote about the many disciplines that the photographic medium’s founding members originated from. Schuman’s curation of the 2014 Krakow Photomonth demonstrated how members of the contemporary photography scene are branching out, and engaging with different subjects, and reflecting photography’s multidisciplinary history. FOLK: A Personal Ethnography was no exception. Following the medium’s founders in embarking on another multidisciplinary collaboration, Schuman brought to the expanding field of contemporary photography another branch of knowledge.
Bibliography


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