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ANIMATING LOCAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH ARTISTIC PRACTICES IN POLAND: THE CASE OF DANIEL RYCHARSKI'S 'TOTEMIC' ANIMAL MURALS AND 'MONUMENT TO A PEASANT'

ABSTRACT

This article is devoted to contemporary art and local communities. The author introduces the case of Daniel Rycharski's relational art projects, focusing on his 'totemic' animal murals (2012) and Pomnik Chłopa (Monument to a Peasant, 2015). Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the Rycharski's home village Kurówko near Sierpc in 2014-2015 (Central Poland) and in the cities of Cracow and Warsaw where his work was presented in 2015-2016, the article explores how Rycharski's artworks generate a nexus of social relationships.

KEYWORDS

Rural Communities, Contemporary Art, Poland, Ethnography, Monuments

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INTRODUCTION

This essay is devoted to ethnographic examination of how contemporary, relational art practices can animate, enliven, or inspire the so-called local communities (Bourriaud 2012). Firstly, I will focus on the example of the 'totemic', animal murals created in a collaborative manner by Polish artist, Daniel Rycharski, in his home village (Łagodzka 2011). Secondly, I will describe his collaboratively made public 'gift-sculpture' (Sansi 2014) called *Monument to a Peasant*. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Kurówko near Sierpc, central Poland, where the artist works and comes from, as well as fieldwork conducted in Cracow and Warsaw where his works were presented,[1] I will examine the artworks''ability' to generate a nexus of social relationships in their vicinity. Moreover, inspired by the argument of Alfred Gell, I will argue that the notion of 'local community' can be approached as an ephemeral collective of human and non-human agents gathered in the vicinity of an art object (Gell 1998).

FIGURE 1: STANISŁAW ADAMSKI NEXT TO THE MURAL DEPICTING A SHADOW OF THE 'FISH-PIG'. PHOTO DANIEL RYCHARSKI, COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR.

According to Alfred Gell, artworks should be always examined in a wider context of social relationships (Gell 1998). However, Gell does not insist on treating art as a form of communication of locally shared and distributed meanings. According to the author there must not necessarily be a clear 'message' behind the art object. Neither does the visual side of the object necessarily have to be its 'language'. Studying art objects is, after all, not a matter of treating them as signs. For Gell, art is, most of all, the 'doing' which can be both human and non-human.

The definition of art introduced by Alfred Gell does not reduce its phenomenon to aesthetic preference, nor

[1] The documentation of Rycharski's murals was presented for the first time in 2012 in Galeria Sztuki Wozownia in Toru (curator: Dorota Łagodzka). In 2014 it was presented again as a part of the exhibition As You Can See: Polish Art Today curated by Sebastian Cichocki and Łukasz Ronduda in the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. Monument to a Peasant was originally created for the Art Boom Grolsch Festival in Cracow in 2015 and it was also presented in the Warsaw Museum of Modern Art as part of two exhibitions: Making Use: Life in Postartistic Times curated by Sebastian Cichocki and Kuba Szreder and Bread and Roses: Artists and The Class Divide curated by Łukasz Ronduda and Natalia Sielewicz (2016). In 2016 the artwork was also presented in Lublin, East Poland during the Open City Festival curated by Stach Szabłowski.

does it suggest that what we know as the art object is any form of expression legitimized by the art world. The anthropology of art is, as he puts it, the theoretical study of "social relations in the vicinity of objects mediating social agency" (Gell 1998: 7). Objects are active and so they should be treated as persons. It means that each of them is not only a tool of self-expression or a source of aesthetic pleasure, but has a real effect on people's lives; it has an agency. As stated by Gell, the agency is intentional and causes change in the vicinity of the actor. An art object is therefore "an embodied thought".

It is also worthwhile to recall Gell's metaphor of art works as 'traps'. For Gell, as said before, there is no aesthetic or institutional criterion according to which one may assess what should be considered an art object. The only reason for that will be treating art as a function of the power of classification. Therefore, as he argues, the reason for considering something as an art form will rather be its intentionality, and the degree to which it reflects on the complex, sensitive, very often intimate and crucial relationships between the person, the object and the world they live in. According to Gell, a good metaphor of an art work is a trap, because "The trap is therefore both a model of its creator, the hunter, and a model of its victim, the prey animal. But more than this, the trap embodies a scenario, which is the dramatic nexus that binds these two protagonists together, and which aligns them in time and space" (Gell 1998: 27).

DANIEL RYCHARSKI'S 'TOTEMIC' ANIMAL MURALS

Daniel Rycharski was born in 1986 in Sierpc and he is a visual artist and activist who works in rural areas of Central Poland. Between the years 2005-2009 he studied graphic art at the Faculty of Arts, Pedagogical University of Cracow. After graduating from the university, the artist became a lecturer by the Department of Multimedia. In 2013 Rycharski received his PhD from the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow and since 2017 he is an assistant professor at the Szczecin Art Academy. From the very beginning he was interested in facilitating projects that involve participation of different 'local communities' gathered in the vicinity of his collaboratively made 'art objects'. After graduating from the Pedagogical University, Rycharski moved back to his home village where he started creating 'art-like' situations that would engage local participants.

For instance, he build a 'chapel' called *The Roadside Shrine Gallery* (2012) where he organized petite exhibi-

tions of works produced by different Polish contemporary artists in order to make fine art more accessible.[2] He made the *Multimedia Wild Boar and Bird Repellent* (2011) which was inspired by both – the artist's interest in video art and the local farmers' need to keep their fields secured from wild animals. In 2014 Rycharski made an interesting work inspired by the history of rural Poland: he created the *Gate Constructed to Celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the Abolition of Serfdom* which, until nowadays, is being exposed in the village of Kurówko. His interest in Polish peasants' history later evolved into creating a *Monument to a Peasant* (2015) accompanied by a para-institution also associated with the topic called the *Museum of Alternative Social Histories*.[3]

The village of Kurówko, where Daniel Rycharski comes from, is located in the rural, borderland area between two regions of central Poland: Masovia and Kujawy. In the past, the site was subjected to multiple archeological excavations. According to Daniel Rycharski, in his home village, for many years farmers would tell fascinating stories about spotting some mysterious, 'prehistoric' animals: "There was one story that still fascinates me: there used to be an animal that lived twenty years ago in the Smużewskie swamp, near Kurówko, which howled for nearly two years! Every day at the same time! Different scientists would come to investigate its kind, but no one could. And the howl was terrifying! That inspired me" (Dauksza 2016). When in 2009, after graduating from the Faculty of Arts at the Pedagogical University in Cracow, Rycharski moved back to the village as a part of his PhD project at the Cracow Academy of Fine Art, he started painting murals which depicted shadows of the mysterious animals approaching the households (Łagodzka 2011, Sural 2017).

What is interesting is that the animals did not represent particular species. They were neither domestic nor wild. The 'rabbit-fox' (picture no. 4), 'fish-pig' (picture no. 1), 'giraffe-stallion' (picture no. 3), 'goose-cat' soon appeared on the walls of barns, sheds and houses which all belonged to the members of the village community.

The murals of the mysterious, hybrid animals established a new set of relationships: Rycharski started from cooperating with his grandfather (picture no. 1), but soon other members of the community also joined the project, as they wished to receive their own paintings. For instance, the leader of the local government, *sołtys* Adam Pesta, also received a mural depicting a shadow of an 'elk-kangaroo' (picture no. 2).

[2] In 2012 Rycharski received an award presented by journalists from the Polish Radio Three called Kulturysta Roku for making contemporary art more accessible to the inhabitants of the rural areas of Poland.

[3] It is important to mention, however, that Rycharski did not only collaborate with the inhabitants of his home village. One of the most important 'communities' that he is involved with since 2016 is the community of Polish queer Christians represented by individuals as well as by the activist group called the Faith and the Rainbow (Polish: Wiara i Tęcza). Inspired by his collaboration with the Faith and the Rainbow Rycharski created several works on topic of queerness in provincial Poland, such as There is No Solidarity Without Justice (2016), Project Plaque (2016) and The Cross (2017).

FIGURE 2: ADAM PESTA WITH AN 'ELK-KANGAROO'. PHOTO DANIEL RYCHARSKI, COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR.

The artist also used public walls of the semi-neglected, abandoned and ruined houses, which belonged to those members of the village community who were no longer present (picture no. 3). It remains crucial to point out that, in the past, some of those buildings belonged to the persons who, just like the mysterious, hybrid animals, were treated as odd and subjected to gossiping and storytelling practices (for example, as I heard in the village, some of them were described as 'queer', another one was said to be 'dissolute').When considering the murals as 'totems' I would like to refer to the so called 'totemic question' which was an important issue for late 19th and the early 20th century anthropologists. According to Durkheim, and as it was later referred by Radcliffe-Brown, the question of totemic representation is, most of all, the question of identification with a particular, social group or family (Durkheim 1995, Radcliffe-Brown 1952). For Radcliffe-Brown totemism is, in general, a specific kind of relation between man, animals, plants and objects (Radcliffe-Brown 1952). It can take very different forms, as there are many totemic systems. The animal can be classified as either eatable, or uneatable. But what remains essential is that the specification of this kind is never the same as the one put forward by another group. The attitude to totemic animal, associated with a particular group, is always distinctive, and, according to Radcliffe-Brown, it makes each group individual.

Lévi-Strauss's idea of totemism is different from the ones that were put forward by his predecessors, although it is worthwhile to notice that it owes them a lot of inspiration (Lévi-Strauss 2010). According to Lévi-Strauss, the question of totemism is not an issue of human relation with the natural world – for Lévi-Strauss, the idea of 'nature' itself has been socially constructed. Therefore, there is no ontological connection between a totem and a group/clan – it is arbitral. Totemic animals or objects do not exist in the way that could be seen as fully comparable or similar to the way of being specific to human.

FIGURE 3-4: GIRAFFE-STALLION' AND 'RABBIT-FOX'. PHOTOS WERONIKA PLIŃSKA.

Totemism is nothing else but an example of classification (Lévi-Strauss 1995: 89). There is neither an ontological, nor empirical connection between the 'significant' and 'signified'. It is the difference that creates a system. Differences, or, in other words, the pairs of binary oppositions – the pairs of opposite and distinctive features – are at the core of systemic approach. By this we mean that, firstly, there are no animals which resemble each other (because they all share animal behavior), then ancestors which resemble each other (because they all share ancestral behavior), and lastly an overall resemblance between the two groups; but on one hand there are animals which differ from each other (in that they belong to different species, each of which has its own physical appearance and mode of life), and on the other there are men – among whom ancestors form a particular case – who

also differ from each other (in that they are distributed among different segments of society, each occupying a particular position in the social structure). The resemblance presupposed by so called totemic representations is "between these two systems of differences" (Lévi-Strauss 2010: 77).

The animals painted by Rycharski in his home village do not represent particular species. Instead, they are monstrous and could even cause fear diminished by the fact that the artist depicts only their shadows (see: Kowalski 2010). However, by choosing to depict only the shadows, Rycharski questions the issue of animals' visibility. Just like the stories told by the artist's grandfather and other members of the community, he therefore suggests that the animals appear only after breaking the distance between the storyteller and his/her listener.

In one of his interviews, the artist stated that hybrid animals painted on the walls of his home village represent disappearing distinctions between contemporary rural and urban communities in Poland: "On one hand it was a metaphor of an urban-peasant. Despite the fact that I come from the village and lived all my childhood there, during the years of my university studies I moved to the city and then back to the village, so I feel like I am a hybrid myself. I have features of someone who belongs to the village and someone who belongs to the city. On the other hand, the Kurówko is an urban-rural hybrid itself. It is difficult to talk about traditional 'rusticity' anymore. The community adapted many patterns of 'urban' behavior and the village became a melting pot" (Dauksza 2016).

It is important to underline, however, that even if the artist claimed that he wished to void the strict distinctions, his art practice, nevertheless, highlighted some of them, for instance those between the members of the village community. What remains crucial is that his work mediated the enmeshed nexus of relationships built on similarities and differences. As he stated in a conversation with me: "Whenever I come to Kurówko and spend more than three-four days there, my taste changes completely! For example, when my grandmother shows me what she bought, a tablecloth or something, and asks the opinion, I say that I like it without analyzing this".

I saw the murals in 2014 for the first time, when I was invited to Kurówko for a trip organized by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. The trip was a part of the artist's participatory art project called *The field game* curated by Szymon Maliborski which was organized not only to

show the murals in their original context. In cooperation with the local contributors, Rycharski prepared a set of *field games*, such as: "fertilising the field with manure" or "gathering edible weeds" to entertain "visitors from Warsaw". Among those who participated in the project were mainly his contemporaries: young, urban professionals working for the leading art and cultural institutions in Warsaw. However, as I discovered quite soon, taking part in the competition made many of the participants recall the times which they spent in rural Poland when they were children. As I realized, many of those who answered the call for participation either grew up in the villages, or had an experience of visiting their grandparents who were farmers. It seemed to me therefore that the main topic of *The field games* was kin-based social relationship, as the aim of the project was to bring together those who Rycharski imagined as the 'descendants' of Polish peasants and their forgotten 'ancestors'. It is also important to stress that since the majority of participants were employees of cultural institutions, his project also aimed at renegotiation of the conditions under which contemporary 'new folk art' can be created.

In 2017, Daniel Rycharski was awarded with the prestigious Polityka Passport in the visual arts category for his collaboratively made artwork called the *Monument to a Peasant* (2015). This work was prepared, once again, in cooperation with Szymon Maliborski from the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. However, this time, the artist cooperated not only with his family members and neighbors from Kurówko, as well as with Warsaw professionals such as myself,[4] but also with a local, outsider artist Stanisław Garbarczuk. Rycharski also consulted farmer activists who organized a protest camp in front of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister in Warsaw against the former government of the Civic Platform (2015). Since I was personally involved in the process, I will, once again, examine the public sculpture's 'ability' to generate a nexus of social relationships in its vicinity.

THE MONUMENT TO A PEASANT

Monument to a Peasant was inspired by the sixteenth century graphics of Albrecht Dürer who designed a project of an anti-monument intended to commemorate the failure of the peasant uprising led by Thomas Müntzer. What inspired Daniel Rycharski was the certainty that, in the recent years, many Polish authors underlined the fact that ordinary Poles would identify themselves with noblemen, while the majority of society has peasant roots.

[4] As a PhD student writing about Rycharski, I became a project consultant together with anthropologist Tomasz Rakowski. My PhD thesis based on the findings stemming from this and similar research projects was defended in 2017 at the Institute of Polish Culture, University of Warsaw.

When looking at the history of the Commonwealth it is important to realize that in Poland all noblemen were treated as equals. However, despite the fact that in popular culture the period of Polish history between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is often called the epoch of the 'noblemen democracy', it would be hard to pretend that the Polish state was, at that time, in fact democratic in modern terms (Leder 2014, Sowa 2011, Kuligowski 2016). The reason is because, unlike the noblemen, starting from the sixteenth century, Polish peasants were forced to provide unpaid labor (the so-called serfdom) to the landowners. What is more, because of the extensive harvesting methods used by the landowners, over time, peasants were subjected not to emancipation, but to the further limitation of their personal freedom. According to anthropologist Waldemar Kuligowski, "As a result, a landowner become both owner and a judge of peasants who lived on his land" (Kuligowski 2016: 113). Moreover, the noblemen (and clergy of the noble descent) believed that their genetic origin was different from serfs, which made them superior to the peasants, due to the popular ethno-genetic belief that noblemen were descendants of the Sarmatians, while peasants were said to come from the Dacians or the Gepids (Kuligowski 2016: 116). According to Kuligowski, "even in a Bible-based version of this conviction, the predecessor of the nobility was Japheth, while the predecessor of the peasants was Noah's son Ham, who had been cursed by his father (actually also a farmer) and degraded, together with his descendants, to the level of slaves, *servi servorum*" (Kuligowski 2016: *ibidem*).

Over the centuries, Polish nobility and peasants were therefore perceived as two different ethnic groups with a completely different set of freedoms and obligations. According to many scholars, this is also why the history of peasants' long-term economic exploitation still affects Polish social structure. For instance, anthropologist Ewa Klekot stressed the fact that the serfdom transformed into a long-term dependency. That is why, according to the author, it is not only the position of someone who used to dominate over the other that nowadays requires critique and compensation, but also the position of someone who was subjected to the long-term subordination. From this perspective, the issue of identification with the ruling class history is not 'innocent' – it is a matter of the 'self-orientalization' (Klekot 2014).

However, anthropologist Roch Sulima interestingly pointed out the that gesture of bringing back the issue

of the "peasants' historical harm" into discussion is not new; what is new is that nowadays the conversation engages not only the narrow circle of urban intellectuals, but also those who currently live in the villages and their descendants (Kot 2013). Following the argument made by Sulima, I would like to argue that in his art practices Daniel Rycharski intends, at the same time, to connect and confront the generation of his urban contemporaries with their 'forgotten' serf 'kin' or 'ancestors'. As recounted by Daniel Rycharski: "In the past peasants were perceived as animals, they did not have a right to vote, they could not express themselves through artistic means. Nobody communicated with them this way, because they were not perceived as full members of society. Following the argument of Andrzej Leder, we work in favor of them – we give a voice to those who were voiceless" (Plińska 2015). When explaining why he decided to create the *Monument to a Peasant* in his home village and then to present his work in Cracow and Warsaw, Rycharski stated: "Before my intention was to create a sense of community in Kurówko (…). This time I decided to do just the opposite – to piss off, to provoke people (…) because this time I am going to tell them right in the face who they are and where they come from. And then, they will realize that they don't know where they are from. And since they don't know (…) they also have no future because they don't know where they go."

In my opinion, *Monument to a Peasant* belongs to the group of artworks which in his book *Art, anthropology and the gift* Roger Sansi described as the 'gift-sculptures' (Sansi 2014). As I see it, while working on the monument, Rycharski facilitated the process of gift-exchange. Firstly, he gave away his own privilege by resigning from the position of the only author. Secondly, the participants of his project responded with their own 'counter-gifts' such as their personal engagement in the process of making of the *Monument*. The participants also made 'offerings'; some of the objects found in their farms and households later became parts of the artistic installation.

As a result, the *Monument* emerged as community artwork that is as a materialization of the enmeshed nexus of relationships between different collaborators.

The *Monument to a Peasant* was made as an assemblage of objects. On the top of the composition, the artist placed a hyperrealist figure of the Pensive Christ sitting on an empty milk can. The sculpture was made out of epoxy resin by Rycharski, together with contemporary sculptors Dorota Hadrian and Łukasz Surowiec.

The face of the figure was 'borrowed' from the local 'prototype', the leader of Kurówko, Adam Pesta, depicted in his own, private garments and cap. The empty milk can used to belong to Pesta, who can no longer sell his own product as it is too difficult for him, as a petty farmer, to meet the EU requirements.

To construct the frame of the *Monument*, Rycharski decided to use a mechanical device which he found in the workshop of the local outsider artist and constructor Stanisław Garbarczuk in the nearby village of Gorzewo. The unused lift replaced the original column designed by Dürer. Thanks to the lift, it was possible for the viewers to go up and down and they could give the figure a close look, or even touch it. Moreover, the lift is an electric device that requires cooperation of two or three people to start the engine, so the *Monument* also became a sort of device itself. The lower part of its construction consisted of another machine used by farmers – the 'column' was placed on a muck spreader. Rycharski decided to use the muck spreader after consulting his project at the Farmers' Protest Camp in Warsaw. The peasant activists wanted the *Monument* to make a pilgrimage throughout the country, as if the artwork were a holy icon. The activists who spoke with me, Rycharski, and curator Maliborski in Warsaw, said that the *Monument* should travel from one village to another so that every farmer could "express his own sorrows". According to the activists, contemporary "peasants' harm" means something different to everybody.

The activists, most generally, protested against introducing the new law that would enable landowners to buy property everywhere in the EU without protecting the rights of the local, individual farmers. However, some of them said that the "peasants' harm" of today is also the fact that elderly farmers have very little contact with young people (including their own family members) and that many of them remain unmarried.

As I mentioned before, the *Monument* emerged as an assemblage of objects decorated with a chain that Adam Pesta used to use when he still had a cow, and with pitchforks, the "weapon of the weak" of the most popular kind. Rycharski also added a contemporary serf emblem: the artist used a painting made by Stanisław Garbarczuk entitled: "He used to fly despite the bondage". The painting resembles a Polish national emblem, although the eagle depicted by Garbarczuk, unlike the national one, is lacking feathers and is chained. Nevertheless, the coloristic

painting also brings to mind the costume of the mythical firebird designed by Léon Bakst for Serge Diaghilev's the Ballet Russes. According to anthropologists Ryszard and Joanna Tomiccy who investigated a variety of Slavic cosmologies, the flying, mythical creature associated with fire and lightning was called Żmij in this part of the world. The divine creature was responsible for bringing wealth, fertility and harvest, as well as for protecting households (see: Tomiccy 1975: 39–40).

FIGURE 5: CEREMONY OF THE MONUMENT TO A PEASANT EXPOSITION IN KURÓWKO IN SEPTEMBER 2015. PHOTO DANIEL RYCHARSKI, COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR.

What is important is that the creature, which was often depicted as a rooster or as an eagle with a snake tail, was also known for fighting dragons, by which the bird repeated the cosmological act of creation (Tomiccy 1975: 40).

The official exposition of *Monument to a Peasant* took place in Kurówko in September 2015. When I arrived there, what I saw, at first, was the excited crowd of people wearing elegant clothes: voluntary fire fighters in their gala uniforms, the borough leader (*wójt*) of Gozdowo, local leader of Kurówko and many others. In addition, members of Rycharski's own family and other citizens of Kurówko were also there. The artist's grandfather, Stanisław Adamski, was busy protecting the bonfire and barbecue. His mother, Ewa Maciejewska offered plenty of cups of tea and coffee. His father, Marek Rycharski, helped support the lift. At the beginning of the ceremony, Rycharski and Maliborski offered each participant a small, triangular, national flag, which was used in

the region as a decorative motif during the pilgrimage of the holy icon from Częstochowa, which happened to visit Kurówko for the first time in forty years right before the exposition of the *Monument*. The first opening speeches were made by the curator and by the borough leader. Adam Pesta also spoke with emotion expressing his pride about the fact of being honored with a monument. People from Kurówko recognized the resemblance immediately – they talked about the figure as if the *Monument* itself was their friend, neighbor or relative.

FIGURE 6: MONUMENT TO A PEASANT IN FRONT OF THE MUNICIPAL OFFICE IN GOZDOWO. PHOTO FILIP CHROBAK, COURTESY OF DANIEL RYCHARSKI.

Right after the opening speeches, Rycharski offered everyone a souvenir photograph. Later on, everybody was welcome to use the lift and go up to see the figure. When I saw the sculpture from a very close distance, I realized that the effect that it casts upon the viewer is somehow powerful as I also wished to touch it. I felt as if the sculpture was also depicting my ancestor, or, at least, a rarely visited kin, who I happened to forget about. After the opening ceremony in Kurówko, the *Monument* also visited other, surrounding villages, thanks to the assistance of voluntary fire-fighters. For me, probably the most important event was the moment in which it was 'parked' by the Municipal Office in Gozdowo. The office workers, immediately stopped their work and together with the borough leader posed for a photograph taken by the artist in front of the *Monument*. At that festive moment, I realized

that the majority of workers were women.

They came out of the building smartly dressed and smiling, yet led by a man. This was for the first time that I realized that the same hyperrealist sculpture which triggers emotion can also make me feel uncomfortable with its presence. For example, when a male team of reporters from the regional channel of the national TV station came to Kurówko on the next day, one of them, a tall man, shook my hand to say hello without even looking my way. The reporter probably ignored me since he expected that the topic of his conversation with Rycharski and the artist's collaborators will be stereotypically associated with 'masculinity': history, politics, society... Nevertheless, what was also interesting, was that the same reporter insisted that the figure of the peasant Pensive Christ placed on the top of the construction was watching him 'from above', as if it were expressing some kind of superiority.

Later on, when the reporter and the leader of Kurówko, the curator, and the artist all climbed to the top of the *Monument*, I realized that the construction does, indeed, represent a certain hierarchical order and therefore it gives an opportunity to reverse it. What is interesting is that the artwork was also interpreted this way by local farmers. According to them, when standing in front of the Municipal Office in Gozdowo, the artwork raised the social status of an ordinary peasant above that of the borough leader. Hence, I would assert that the art object made by Rycharski became a "monument of transition" of some sort.

Following the argument made by an art historian, Krzysztof Pijarski (2015), with respect to the Polish context, there is a vital need for renewing the definition of what the monument is. As stated by the author: "Hence the idea of the 'monument'. The scare quotes around the word do not denote our inability to tell what a monument is, but rather the tentative or performative nature of our monuments; they were not designed and built as such, but were discovered and then inscribed as monuments of transition. This act of inscription has very much to do with artistic practice, with the tradition or paradigm of the readymade." (Pijarski 2015). In Cracow, *Monument to a Peasant* was exhibited in front of the National Museum during the Grolsch ArtBoom Festival in 2015.

There, as I observed it, many people would pass, looking a little surprised, as if this kind of object should not stand in their way. It was usually the elderly, smartly dressed couples that stopped by the artwork. After a short while they already knew: "This is a peasant! They show

it on television", "Why the village leader, anyway?", "I heard on the radio that he is real!". One of the viewers stated with consideration: "A Monument to the Peasant...? I do not really know why. Perhaps if it were standing somewhere on the outskirts...?". Hence, according to this interviewee, the monumental building of the Cracow National Gallery did not seem to be a 'proper' surrounding to place *Monument to a Peasant*.

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