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# Ceci n'est pas un pape

## Mimesis and Mediatization in Papal Performances by Jerzy Kalina and Oliver Frljić

### Abstract

This article compares Jerzy Kalina's installation *The Poisoned Spring* (2020) and Oliver Frljić's performance *The Curse* (2017), analyzing how sculptures depicting John Paul II function in politically charged, mediatized performances. It maps layered modes of the papal image—object of worship, theatrical prop, commemorative monument, pastiche—and shows how their blurred status generates intense affect, public contestation, and legal disputes under Poland's law on “offending religious feelings.”

### Keywords

Karol Wojtyła—John Paul II, censorship, Oliver Frljić, Jerzy Kalina, religious feelings

## Abstrakt

### **Ceci n'est pas un pape: Mimesis i mediatyzacja w performansach papieskich Jerzego Kaliny i Olivera Frljicia**

Artykuł stanowi analizę porównawczą instalacji *Zatrute źródło* (2020) Jerzego Kaliny i spektaklu *Kłątwa* (2017) Olivera Frljicia, wykorzystujących wizerunek Jana Pawła II. Autor przedstawia strategie użycia medium rzeźby w obu performansach papieskich, zwracając uwagę na zacieranie granic między trybami istnienia rzeźby, ujmowanej jako między innymi: pomnik, figura świętego, przedmiot wykonawczy uczuć religijnych, rekwizyt teatralny, pastisz. Niepewny status rzeźby wytwarzał silne reakcje afektywne, protesty publiczne oraz stał się przyczyną prawnych dyskusji o obrażaniu „uczuć religijnych”.

## Słowa kluczowe

Karol Wojtyła – Jan Paweł II, cenzura, Oliver Frljić, Jerzy Kalina, uczucia religijne

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## Introduction

Pope John Paul II hurling a raised boulder (a meteorite?) at a red pond, right in the middle of Warsaw's city center: The installation *The Poisoned Spring* by Jerzy Kalina from 2020, commissioned by the National Museum in Warsaw, has become one of the most widely commented Polish artworks of the last decade. It has been called ugly, grotesque, and violent and has become the subject of hundreds of internet memes. *The Poisoned Spring* was meant to be a response to the installation *La nona ora* (The Ninth Hour) by Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan, exhibited twenty years earlier at Warsaw's Zachęta Gallery, which depicted a statue of John Paul II crushed by a meteorite. On December 21, 2000, Christian-National Union (ZChN) deputies Halina Nowina-Konopczyzna and Witold Tomczak vandalized it, "removing" the meteorite from the Pope's body and attempting to set his statue upright. Subsequent Jerzy Kalina installations have also received physical interventions—from liberals and feminists.

Meanwhile, *The Curse*, directed by Oliver Frlić in Teatr Powszechny in Warsaw in 2017, has been one of the most commented Polish theatrical productions of the last thirty years. In *The Curse* a statue of John Paul II is hung from a noose, in a scene depicting a kind of execution in effigie, with a placard reading "defender of pedophiles." This, one of the most famous scenes of the show, sparked street protests, as well as a series of political, legal, and administrative actions against the show's creators and the institution that produced it.

Both works appeared at the peak of the culture wars in Poland, then governed by the right-wing Law and Justice Party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość). This was a period of street demonstrations against the legal abortion ban (first the Black Protest, later the Women's Strike), as well as protests against the persecution of LGBTQ+ communities (for example, the Rainbow Night of August 7, 2020, when police violently suppressed demonstrations following the arrest of LGBTQ activist Margot). Jerzy Kalina explicitly stated the interpretive direction of his work and explained why the Pope stands in red water: "This is a sign of resurgent communism, which takes various forms but is trying to rise from the bottom. In my view it returns under the cloak of other colors, behaviors and actions."<sup>1</sup> When a journalist asked whether he was referring to the LGBTQ+ community—whom the right openly stigmatizes as an enemy—Kalina replied, "of course, among others." Meanwhile, the management of the Powszechny Theatre sought to soften the tone of the discussion surrounding Frlić's performance,

<sup>1</sup> Sebastian Łupak, "Wiemy, w kogo papież ciska głazem: W lewacką, czerwona ideologię," accessed March 25, 2021, <https://gwiazdy.wp.pl/wiemy-w-kogo-papiez-ciska-glazem-w-lewacka-czerwona-ideologie-pomnik-jan-pawel-ii-6557407328110721a>.

explaining that *The Curse* was directed at abuses within the Church, not at the Church itself.

The fact that, of the many artistic projects relating to the figure of John Paul II, the widest and most intense reactions were provoked by those involving a sculpture, a three-dimensional image of the Polish Pope, seems not coincidental and significant. Does the countless number of papal monuments contribute to this?

In 2005, after the death of John Paul II, there were at least 230 monuments to the Polish Pope in Poland.<sup>2</sup> In 2011, the Polish *Newsweek* estimated the number of monuments at eight hundred.<sup>3</sup>

I want to look at the various statuses that the sculpture of the Pope in particular, but also other objects with religious status—or similar—take on in the politically engaged performances of Kalina and Frlić. I understand *performance* broadly; the inclusion of Jerzy Kalina's installations within this concept is further allowed, I believe, by the context of this artist's overall oeuvre. The papal figure in *The Curse* can be considered through its various statuses. It can function in various modes, that is, as:

- 1) an object of worship;
- 2) an object of performance of religious feelings;
- 3) a theatrical prop;
- 4) a carrier of the image of a particular person; or
- 5) a work of art—a pastiche referring to a particular aesthetic.

Most important, however, is the blurring of the boundaries between these modes of functioning of the papal statue and the impossibility of clearly distinguishing between them. Does a statue of John Paul II at which a worshipful service is held become a cult figure? What if we are talking not so much about a service of worship, but about a theatrical montage taking place on the occasion of the unveiling of the statue, quoting passages from the papal liturgy? Situations in which boundaries been blurred between different modes of the functioning of Polish figures have occurred, of course, and before the artistic activities of Kalina and Frlić analyzed here—an example will be presented below from the early 1980s.

The medium of sculpture either within a theatrical performance or an artistic installation becomes entangled in a new web of tensions, in which the

<sup>2</sup> Kazimierz S. Ożóg, *Miedziany pielgrzym: Pomniki Jana Pawła II w Polsce w latach 1980–2005* (Głogów: Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Zawodowa w Głogowie, 2007), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Milena Rachid Chehab, "800 Janów Pawłów," *Newsweek*, April 23, 2011, <https://www.newsweek.pl/polska/800-janow-pawlow/gvz8n46>.

artistic institution, the law, and the political discourse of mass media play an important role.

Finally, the modes of functioning of sculpture in papal performances will correspond to three categories at the intersection of law, the humanities, and religion: offense to religious feelings, profanation, and blasphemy.

## Monument or Statue of a Saint?

Kazimierz S. Ożóg wrote already before the death of John Paul II: “The erection of monuments to a living person carries dangers. In Poland, it is associated with totalitarian times. . . . It is also dangerous to treat papal monuments like statues of a saint—resulting in not always private prayers.”<sup>4</sup> It is the treatment of hundreds of sculptures of John Paul II more as statues of a saint than as monuments to a historical figure that distinguishes both the artistic phenomena discussed here and the subsequent spontaneous and illegal actions of activists on monuments to the Polish Pope from the toppling of monuments to colonizers accompanying Black Lives Matter protests in the US and western Europe, to which right-wing columnists have readily referred in their statements about the desecration of papal monuments. Both Frłjić’s performance and Kalina’s installation, moreover, were created not only after the death of John Paul II, but also after his canonization (April 27, 2014)—further blurring the distinction between the modes of functioning of papal monuments. In the end, each papal statue essentially became a statue of a saint.

“In Poland, it has not been customary so far to erect monuments to living people”<sup>5</sup> began Irena Grzesiuk-Olszewska’s article on the statues of the Polish Pope created so far in 1988, the tenth year of John Paul II’s pontificate. Her article, on “the first monument to Pope John Paul II on Polish soil,” erroneously pointed to a sculpture by Bronisław Chromy, unveiled in Tarnów on June 29, 1981. In fact, the first monument to the Pope in Poland is a much smaller sculpture realized by Jole Sensi Croci, standing in the courtyard of the archbishop’s palace in Krakow, unveiled in 1980.

However, it is the history of the Tarnów statue of John Paul II that shows how commemorations of the Pope gained cult status from the beginning. The

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<sup>4</sup> Kazimierz S. Ożóg, “Znak pielgrzyma: Pomnik Jana Pawła II i monumenty papieskie w innych polskich sanktuariach,” in *Pielgrzymowanie i sztuka: Góra Świętej Anny i inne miejsca pielgrzymkowe na Śląsku*, ed. Joanna Lubos-Kozieł et al. (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2005), 184.

<sup>5</sup> Irena Grzesiuk-Olszewska, “Pomniki Jana Pawła II w Polsce,” *Życie Chrześcijańskie w Polsce*, no. 10 (1988): 49.



The monument of John Paul II in Tarnów

monument was unveiled, as Irena Grzesiuk-Olszewska wrote, “on the day of St. Peter and Paul, . . . a month and a half after the attempt on the Pope’s life.” The author immediately inscribes the papal figure into both the liturgical calendar and the papal biography. Grzesiuk-Olszewska, while describing the monument, also recalled the course of the performative event of its unveiling. “Numerous of the faithful sent a telegram to the Pope assuring in it that they were praying for him, for a speedy recovery. At the end, a three-part oratorio was listened to. Its three parts referred to the following important dates: October 16, 1978—the election of Karol Wojtyła as Pope; June 2–10, 1979—the Holy Father’s visit to Poland; May 13, 1981—the assassination attempt on his life.”

What was this Tarnów “oratorio” by an unknown author? A local weekly reported the ceremony in 1981 as follows:

Afterwards, the Tarnów residents, gathered in crowds of about 10,000, listened to an oratorio consisting of three parts in the form of recollections of Pope

John Paul II's past work and activities. The oratorio recalled Karol Wojtyła's election to the throne of the See of Peter, his visit to the country (a fragment of the Pope's speech at Victory Square in Warsaw was played from the tape) and the attempt on his life during his audience. The oratorio ended with the national anthem *Poland Is Not Yet Lost*.<sup>6</sup>

From this description, the word "oratorio" appears to designate not so much a specific dramatic musical genre, but a certain form of verbal and musical montage.

Tarnów's sculpture of John Paul II immediately found itself in a dense web of performative practices. Among the performances in the theatre, masses in the cathedral, organ recitals, and speeches, particularly noteworthy is the recreation of John Paul II's voice from a recording during the "oratorio of memories" and the reading of a telegram. The use of a recording just from the Victory Square speech, one in which words about renewing "the face of the earth, this land" were spoken, seems to foreshadow the use of this text in subsequent papal performances. More importantly at this point, however, one can look at this procedure as an attempt at a kind of "animation" of the papal figure.

"As representations of real people, they serve as stand-ins for their subjects, literally re-presenting them by making them present again among us,"<sup>7</sup> notices Christopher P. Dickenson. "The three-dimensional image as offering a visually embodying medium could largely acquire the status of a means of provoking a mental reconstruction of the presence of the depicted person in the present time and present space, *hic et nunc*,"<sup>8</sup> states Mateusz Kapustka on the subject of medieval sacred sculptures. Kapustka, an art historian, analyzes the performative functions of movable sacred sculptures in the late Middle Ages in his work *Figura i Hostia*. These include, for example, palm donkeys with the figure of Jesus Christ sitting on them used during the opening procession of Holy Week, or figures of Jesus with movable hands that were carried from the cross to the Lord's Tomb during the Triduum ceremony. In Tarnów, in 1981, on the church feast of Saints Peter and Paul—as in the liturgical rites and dramas described by Mateusz Kapustka in the late Middle Ages—the statue comes to life and speaks in the voice of the holy man.

<sup>6</sup> Jerzy Rzeszuto, "Odstonięcie pomnika Jana Pawła II w Tarnowie," *Tarnowski Magazyn Informacyjny*, July 4, 1981, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher P. Dickenson, "Statues and Public Space," in *Public Statues Across Time and Cultures*, ed. Christopher P. Dickenson (New York: Routledge, 2021), 19.

<sup>8</sup> Mateusz Kapustka, *Figura i hostia: O obrazowym przywoływaniu obecności w późnym średniowieczu* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2008), 12.

The fact that the Tarnów monument is erected to a living person only encourages the process of the transformation of the monument into a sacred sculpture, a statue of a saint. After all, liturgical practices, like the reading of the papal telegram, are about communication—that's the word used here, as well as the Latin *communicare*—with the ongoing, living reality of the “Church triumphant” (in heaven), and not merely a “remembrance” or “commemoration” of past realities.

“In a Catholic church, portraying the deceased in sculpted form also creates an interplay of meaning between the various saints and representations of Christ on display, hinting at a shared existence on the spiritual plane,”<sup>9</sup> notes Christopher P. Dickenson, juxtaposing monuments, sacred sculptures, and grave figures. This observation is a part of a broader argument about the uniqueness of mimesis in the case of sculptures. “Statues are more than symbols because, unlike all other symbols, they look like us”<sup>10</sup> Dickenson writes. In the Catholic tradition, however, the special significance of statues may stem not only from their resemblance to three-dimensional human figures, but also from their historical origins. Figures as objects of worship have been present in Roman Catholic churches since at least the tenth century. Christianity was initially reluctant to worship statues because of their association with “pagan” idolatry, already rejected by Judaism. Religious statues gradually evolved from reliquaries, containers for the material remains of people revered as holy—fragments of corpses or clothes of the dead. Religious sculpture is thus close to humanity not only because of its visual resemblance, but also—at one time—its physical contact with the human body.

The first statues of John Paul II also came into contact with the physically existing, corporeal John Paul II. The close presence of the person depicted is inscribed in their stories. The first papal monument, a sculpture by Jole Sensi Croci standing in the courtyard of the Kraków curia since 1980,<sup>11</sup> came to Poland together with John Paul II. According to a recurring story, it was a previously received “gift from Italian artists”<sup>12</sup> given by the Pope during his pilgrimage to his homeland. The statue in Tarnów, on the other hand, had to wait a while to “meet” its original. “The Holy Father saw his monument six years later, during the papal visit to Tarnów in June 1987, when he visited the cathedral basilica and presided over Eucharistic Vespers in the square next

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<sup>9</sup> Dickenson, “Statues and Public Space,” 21.

<sup>10</sup> Dickenson, 20.

<sup>11</sup> A. L., “Pomnik Ojca św. Jana Pawła II,” *Hejnal Mariacki*, no. 12 (1980): 7.

<sup>12</sup> *Sculpture di Jole Sensi Croci: mostra a Prato* (Prato: Centro promozionale artistico culturale Prato, 1983).

to it,"<sup>13</sup> the local press wrote on the forty-second anniversary of the monument's unveiling.

The thesis that the first monuments to John Paul II are also his relics may at first seem too bold. However, the literature on the subject is familiar with cases of objects such as a canoe, helicopter, or car being presented as papal relics.

Perhaps it is also because of this ancient proximity to the body that sculptures, to a greater extent than, for example, two-dimensional paintings, are attributed what Joanna Tokarska-Bakir calls "the invisible power of mimesis." "Magical" mimesis and "neutral" mimesis—as, using quotation marks, Tokarska-Bakir calls them—are difficult to separate precisely and permanently: "their proximity and common precultural source permanently bind them together."<sup>14</sup> In this anthropologist's view, the model of religiosity is a game—involving the blurring of the distinction between the presenter and the represented. The researcher describes the indistinguishability of the material image and the deity it depicts occurring to some extent in the folk worship of sacred images; however, she does not consider this game of indistinguishability to be a phenomenon of the past or typical only of pre-modern cultures. "However, are there not behaviors characteristic of illiterate readers?"<sup>15</sup> asks Tokarska-Bakir, and lists practices typical of fan cultures: the cult of autographs and memorabilia, "fanatical imitation of celebrities," and "the modern industry of gadgets and mascots." John Paul II as a Catholic saint and, at the same time, as a pop-culture figure for years, an image reproduced by the souvenir industry and manufacturers of ever-new gadgets links the two worlds cited by Tokarska-Bakir—religion and modern mass culture.

Mateusz Kapustka states that "the possible 'magic' of a given image, which often consists of various social and political intentions, is determined primarily by its individual visual form." For my purposes, what matters most is the way social intentions intertwine and are expressed through political, legal, artistic, and institutional performative acts.

Kapustka has been criticized for imagining medieval audiences' reactions rather than reconstructing them from sources when analyzing the performative functions of sacred sculptures in the fourteenth–fifteenth centuries. Writing about how the statues-figures of the saint-sacred sculptures depicting John Paul II

<sup>13</sup> Paweł Chwat, "To jeden z symboli Tarnowa: Minęły 42 lata od odsłonięcia pomnika Jana Pawła II obok tarnowskiej katedry," June 29, 2023, <https://tarnow.naszemiasto.pl/to-jeden-z-symboli-tarnowa-minely-42-lata-od-odslonienia/ar/c1-9376595>.

<sup>14</sup> Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Obraz osobliwy: Hermeneutyczna lektura źródeł etnograficznych* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych "Universitas," 2000), 41.

<sup>15</sup> Tokarska-Bakir, *Obraz osobliwy*, 21.

function in a theatrical or installation context, we have a much easier task. Both *The Poisoned Spring* and *The Curse* have produced a large archive of reception testimonies. These include testimonies and statements submitted to judicial and law-enforcement authorities. Because of the peculiarities of Polish legislation concerning the offence of offending religious feelings, these testimonies must attempt to define the sculpture's mode of functioning in aesthetic, religious, and legal terms.

### "Pain of Pains" and "Nervous Laughter"

Statements from critics about *The Curse* are extremely affective. And it's not just about the passage from Temida Stankiewicz-Podhorecka's review, cited many times after the premiere as an anecdote, who stated in the pages of *Nasz Dziennik*, among other things: "[I] felt as if I had been beaten and dipped in the mud" and "I experienced the pain of pains and felt completely helpless, because I was unable to do anything to stop this venomous, frenzied assault on me."<sup>16</sup> The matter of the affective reception of *The Curse* is much more serious.

Also, critics emphasizing the artistic importance of *The Curse* have at the same time accentuated the emotional weight of its reception, among them Paweł Dobrowolski:

Each scene of this play knocked me into my seat. I felt myself getting baked on my face and getting breathless. . . . Nervous laughter, which at times I was unable to contain, did not bring discharge. In fact, it was even more irritating, because it infected other viewers. God, why are they laughing again? Idiocy! I also felt a growing tension: what if they are the ones who are right? I left the performance barely alive.<sup>17</sup>

In liberal Catholic magazine *Tygodnik Powszechny*, Dariusz Kosiński confessed: "It's been a long time since anything in the theatre hit me as hard as this *Curse*."<sup>18</sup> Kosiński, like Dobrowolski, noted in his text on *The Curse* that he is a practicing

<sup>16</sup> Temida Stankiewicz-Podhorecka, "Wynajęta miernota przeciwko Polakom," *Nasz Dziennik*, March 11–12, 2017, 13.

<sup>17</sup> Paweł Dobrowolski, "Porozmawiajmy o religii," *Dialog*, no. 5 (2017), <https://www.dialog-pismo.pl/w-numerach/porozmawiajmy-o-religii>.

<sup>18</sup> Dariusz Kosiński, "Przekraczanie fikcji," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, March 7, 2017, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/przekraczanie-fikcji-147018>.

Catholic. But authors distant from the Church also wrote about strong affectations. Paweł Soszyński noted: “the following scene of oral sex with a statue of John Paul II performed by Julia Wyszyńska no longer comes off as ridiculous; its realism, the methodicalness of the actress’s gesture is deeply affecting, it is terrifying.”<sup>19</sup> And in Soszyński’s case, the encounter with *The Curse* also triggered a need for religious self-definition: “Something happens that also shakes me, although I am an atheist.”

Reports of the intense emotional experience associated with the reception of *The Curse* include the creators of the play, too. Dramaturge Joanna Wichowska spoke of “discomfort”: “the discomfort I also feel when watching some of the scenes of the play, which I myself co-created: the beheaded cross or the scenes featuring the figure of the pope. . . . This discomfort is for me a criterion for the validity of what we do in the play.”<sup>20</sup> Again, we see that it is, among other things, the presence of the papal statue that catalyzes the affect.

The discomfort that Joanna Wichowska speaks of may stem from the problem of the intertwining of “magical” and “neutral” mimesis that Tokarska-Bakir wrote about. Paweł Dobrowolski, not coincidentally, described *The Curse*, among other things, as a “brilliantly directed voodoo ritual” in the already quoted text. At the same time, Wichowska pointed out in the quoted conversation with Marcin Kościelniak that this “magic” is a result of socialization: “I recognize in myself norms and boundaries that I have been taught all my life not to cross; I have internalized them, and I feel that the fight against them will never be ultimately won.”

Finally, this brief review of affective reactions to *The Curse* shall conclude with Agata Adamiecka-Sitek’s article. “I experience the image of the falling cross as an act of righteous revenge, and it’s deeply satisfying,”<sup>21</sup> the researcher confessed (the Polish version of the text even referring to “euphoria”<sup>22</sup>), situating herself within the polarization projected in the text. In her analysis, Adamiecka-Sitek describes her feelings by referring to “‘iconoclastic jouissance,’ . . . to delight at the destruction of idolatry.”<sup>23</sup> She describes the scenic actions on the Pope’s statue as “a shock effect that’s impossible to rationalize.”

<sup>19</sup> Paweł Soszyński, “Kto ściał krzyż”, *dwutygodnik.com*, no. 205 (2017), <https://www.dwutygodnik.com/arttykul/7040-kto-scial-krzyz.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Marcin Kościelniak, “Kościół jest w nas: Z Joanną Wichowską rozmawia Marcin Kościelniak”, *Didaskalia*, no. 138 (2017): 6.

<sup>21</sup> Agata Adamiecka-Sitek, “How to Lift the Curse? Oliver Frljić and the Poles,” English issue, *Didaskalia* (2020): 22.

<sup>22</sup> Agata Adamiecka-Sitek, “Jak zdjąć kłatwę? Oliver Frljić i Polacy”, *Didaskalia*, no. 139–140 (2017): 4–5.

<sup>23</sup> Adamiecka-Sitek, “How to Lift the Curse?”, 21.

## Between the Church and the Prosecutor

Jacek Sieradzki is therefore right to call *The Curse* “an extremely cleverly constructed emotional bomb.”<sup>24</sup> Only, “emotions” or “feelings” in this case are not only something experienced during or after the performance—and not only something whose trace remains in the archives of the theatrical performance, if only in reviews. As “religious feelings” have become a criminal law concept, present in the Polish Criminal Code,

Whoever offends the religious feelings of other persons by publicly insulting an object of religious worship, or a place designated for public religious ceremonies, is liable to pay a fine, have their liberty limited, or be deprived of their liberty for a period of up to two years.<sup>25</sup>

This provision is, as lawyer and art historian Jakub Dąbrowski and lawyer Anna Demenko write, “a post-Enlightenment version of the old crime of blasphemy.”<sup>26</sup> Polish constitutionalist Jacek Sobczak states bluntly, “the offense of insulting religious feelings, capitalized in Article 196 of the Penal Code, sees a provision derived from the content of Article 172 of the Penal Code of 1932, criminalizing blasphemy of God.”<sup>27</sup>

The case of *The Curse* brought to the surface these archaic roots of the modern law. Thus, for example, Catholic priest Marek Gancarczyk protested the showing of *The Curse* in Chorzów in a Catholic newspaper, stating:

In addition to the people of Chorzów and Christians, but also all people of good will, there is one more injured party in the whole affair. It is the Lord God. . . . Staging *The Curse* certainly shatters social peace and sows confusion, but above all it offends God. For the theatre management and actors, this is perhaps an incomprehensible argument. But it is true.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Jacek Sieradzki, “Do hymnu,” *Dialog*, no. 5 (2017), <https://www.dialog-pismo.pl/w-numerach/do-hymnu>.

<sup>25</sup> Ustawa z 6.06.1997 Kodeks karny, Dz.U. 1997, nr 88, poz. 553, z późn. zm., art. 196. Translation based on a statement of the European Court of Human Rights from September 7, 2017. Application no. 8257/13 Dorota Rabczewska against Poland, lodged on January 21, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Jakub Dąbrowski and Anna Demenko, *Cenzura w sztuce polskiej po 1989 roku*, vol. 1, *Aspekty prawne* (Warszawa: Fundacja Kultura Miejsca, 2014), 328.

<sup>27</sup> Jacek Sobczak, “Wolność ekspresji artystycznej: Regulacje europejskie a rozwiązanie polskiego systemu prawnego,” *Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne* Lxviii, issue 2 (2016): 252–253.

<sup>28</sup> Marek Gancarczyk, “Cena sławy,” *Gość Niedzielny*, August 3, 2017, <https://www.gosc.pl/doc/4072824.Cena-slawy>.



Still from the material about *The Curse* in Polish television TVP, 2017

Gancarczyk's statement is a religious commentary in a denominational magazine. Quite clearly, however, the same logic is also present in the expert report on *The Curse* commissioned by the prosecutor's office and made by Prof. Eugeniusz Sakowicz, a theologian at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University. In his report, Sakowicz writes about an "objective" offense to religious feelings:

In the objective aspect, the words and behavior of actors who attacked religiousness with vulgarities and obscenities constitute an offense to religious feelings. The subjective aspect will be revealed, moreover, in offending the sensibilities of religious people.<sup>29</sup>

The word "objective" can, of course, be understood in many ways. For example, in acquitting the creators of the graphic "Our Lady of the Rainbow"—used during the LGBTQ+ protests in 2019 and 2020—the court noted that, to consider an act as an insult to religious feelings within the meaning of Article 196 of the Penal Code, it must "involve such behavior that was commonly perceived as insulting, taking into account the beliefs prevailing in the cultural circle

<sup>29</sup> Eugeniusz Sakowicz, *Ekspertyza spektaklu teatralnego. Olivier Frljić. Klątwa*, 2018, May 29. Prosecutor's office file of *The Curse*. From the archives of Teatr Powszechny, Warszawa. Copy of the files from the District Prosecutor's Office of Warsaw-Praga, reference numbers: PO 1 DS 39.2017; D-11-2250/17.

from which the victim originated.”<sup>30</sup> The not entirely clear juxtaposition in Sakowicz’s quoted opinion of the offended “sensibilities of religious people” and the abstract “religiosity” that has been “attacked,” however, seems to be of a different order.

In the case of blasphemy, write Jakub Dąbrowski and Anna Demenko, “the victim of the perpetrator’s act is God himself.”<sup>31</sup> In the case of insulting religious feelings, on the other hand, there is a concept in legal doctrine of so-called “executive objects,” i.e. objects on which crimes under Article 196 of the Criminal Code are executed. If we go back to the former Penal Code and the crime of blasphemy cited by Jacek Sobczak, we find a foreshadowing of today’s “executive objects”: “the active defilement or defilement of the Holy Sacraments, the Holy Cross, Holy Relics, Holy Images, and other objects considered sacred by individual Christian churches.”

The statue of John Paul II and the cross “playing” in *The Curse*, from the theatre’s point of view, are props, but from the point of view of lawyers demanding legal protection in the form of a ban on the play these artifacts are objects of religious worship. The statue and the cross were also photographed by a police technician at the direction of the prosecutor’s office as potential physical evidence, which gives them yet another status.

As in Mateusz Kapustka’s study of the functioning of sacred figures in the late Middle Ages, looking at the reception of *The Curse* we see the sculpture functioning “between artistic imagery, ritual and theatre, and at the same time in all three areas simultaneously.” The cross in the play is a form of monument of John Paul II, it is “a religious object of worship falling on the boards of the theatre,” as the Ordo Iuris lawyer wrote, and it is a theatrical prop.

It is the “religious feelings” themselves—the affects rendered into legal language—that perform here, becoming a tool for the reconciling of the modern subject with an archaic concept of an offended deity. Like the “executive object” in legal discourse, the construct of “religious feelings” functions as a device to mediate between the world of representational signs and the religious world in which the depicted exists as objective, material reality rather than as mere symbol. This vehicle is meant to reduce the tension between the subjective experience accentuated, for example, in Catholic modernism, and the traditional universality (or, *nomen omen*, “catholicity”) of the norm of what has been called “divine law” for centuries.

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<sup>30</sup> Jakub Dąbrowski, “Wyrok jak kazanie: Specyfika stosowania artykułu 196 Kodeksu karnego a sprawa ‘Tęczowej Matki Boskiej’” *Czas Kultury*, no. 3 (2022): 43–54.

<sup>31</sup> Dąbrowski and Demenko, *Cenzura w sztuce polskiej po 1989 roku*, 1: 328.

Polish political Catholicism accentuates feeling, but not as an individual, subjective experience, which was declared to be placed at the center of religious life by so-called “Catholic modernism” or later Catholic personalism. “Religious feelings” which are today a tool of the culture wars are understood in the most objectified way possible. A kind of collective psychic entity is supposed to arise from the offended persons, their legal interest treated as if it were a deity’s legal interest. It is as if this is a new version of the Church as the “Mystical Body of Christ” adapted to the age of identity politics and mass affect.

### Theatre Ticket as Evidence

The subjectivization of the laws on insulting religious feelings and the subjective manner in which they are applied led to specific actions by lawyers in the case of *The Curse*. Among the evidence submitted to the court, the law firm Parchimowicz & Kwaśniewski, associated with the farright Ordo Iuris Institute for Legal Culture, filed “copies of tickets for the performance of *The Curse*, issued on February 19, 2017, along with a copy of the receipt confirming the purchase of tickets dated February 16, 2017.” The attorneys argued that this evidence was presented

on the grounds of: being spectators of the performance by the applicant; violation of the applicant’s religious feelings, right to dignity and honor, right to freedom from hate speech against Christians and discrimination on the grounds of faith; [and] public insult to objects of religious reverence and acts of religious worship during the performance.

The above quote is from one of the motions filed by attorneys of those who filed a notice of the possibility of the committing of a crime of the offence of insulting religious feelings, seeking so-called security—i.e. a ban on playing the show until the court verdict. (The Warsaw-Praga Regional Court did not grant the motion.)

The clash of religious and secular orders, as happened in *The Curse*, resonates particularly strongly precisely in the legal actions that followed the performance. At the same time, somewhere between these orders there remains the order of art, with its attendant ambivalences of mimesis. Significantly, the letters submitted by the attorneys directly refer to the status of the sculpture of the Pope present in the performance, considering it a sacred figure:

The statue of St. John Paul II used during the performance *The Curse* directed by Oliver Frlić as it depicts the canonized pope is an object of worship. Moreover, it should be noted that every Pope is, for Catholics, the one who, by the will of Jesus Christ himself, heads the Catholic Church.

Unsurprisingly, for judicial purposes attempts have been made to reconstruct the events of the performance and its broader context. Filing a complaint for an alleged offense of insulting religious feelings requires lawyers representing the complainants to consider and document the audience's role and reactions.

Reconstructing in their argument a specific situation of direct reception of a performance by Oliver Frlić, the lawyers sought both to demonstrate that it met the criteria for offending religious feelings present in legislation and jurisprudential practice, and to extend the significance of the destructive impact of *The Curse*, as far as possible beyond the dimension of a single communicative situation, or even a specific religion. At least one of the people coming forward as being affected by the offense of offending religious feelings did not belong to the Catholic Church, but to another religious community. In a letter sent to the court, the lawyers indicated, "The applicant is a practicing Protestant. For the last 10 years of his life he has practiced his faith, taking part in individual and collective religious practices. . . . Faith is an integral part of his life."

In the case of the "practicing Protestant," as in other cases, the argument focused on objects of religious significance visible on the scene. The statement present in the Parchimowicz & Kwaśniewski law firm's motion is not surprising: "For him [a practicing Protestant], the sheared cross in *The Curse* performance is a central Christian symbol, speaking of redemption and God's love for man."

Much less obviously, however, the next sentence continues the argument thus:

The figure of Pope John Paul II profaned during the performance was obviously presented to the audience as a symbol of God's covenant with man, which also offends the religious feelings of the applicant, who opposes the presentation of what he believes to be good [sic!] and sacred in terms of an obscene sexual act.

It is difficult to find a source in the Protestant tradition that would indicate that a sculpture depicting the Bishop of Rome is a "symbol of God's covenant with man"; it is also difficult to understand how, within *The Curse*, a statue of John Paul II would allegedly be "obviously presented to viewers" as such a symbol.

Such alleged "obviousness" or heuristics are interspersed with a meticulous reconstruction of the circumstances of the reception of the performance. Even

the moment of leaving the performance before its conclusion is subject to detailed description here:

The applicant, feeling offended by the content of the performance, left the Powszechny Theatre at the moment when the “cross cutting” began. After he left, the resounding bang of the object of religious reverence falling on the theatre’s boards could be heard.

This excerpt shows a liminal moment. The person complaining about the insult to his religious feelings is already outside the audience, but he can still hear what is happening on stage. He finds himself, as it were, between two groups: those whose religious feelings have been offended within the theatrical situation, which technically makes it possible to prove the offense, and those whose outrage stems from the indirect reception carried by the media echoes.

Perhaps the most vivid summary of the attitude of the latter was found in the “Open Letter of the Doctors of the Słupsk Area,” issued against the presentation of *The Curse* in Słupsk:

Just as a loving mother suffers when her child is insulted, even though she is not present at the event, so too are Christians, who harbor feelings of love for God and people, inflicted with pain when persons and symbols of the faith are abashed.<sup>32</sup>

The pathos and archaic language of this should not obscure the concept that the historically evolving definition of theatrical performance, as well as the increasing emphasis placed on the affective aspect and mediatization in the reflection on the performing arts, may eventually lead to the consideration of the mediated reception of performance also in the practice of proving the commission of the crime of insulting religious feelings.

After all, what if both *Ordo Iuris* lawyers and Polish courts someday accept that—as Joanna Krakowska, for example, wants, and with which I agree in principle—a theatrical performance is not so much just what happens at a given moment on stage, but simply an act of establishing a discourse? In this view, “performance understood as discourse” situates itself beyond “answering the question of how the performance looked, just examining how it worked.” The concept “transcends the age-old antinomy between eyewitnessing and mediation,”

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<sup>32</sup> Bogumiła Rzeczkwoska, “Słupscy lekarze apelują o odwołanie spektaklu *Klątwa*,” *Głos Pomorza*, September 18, 2017, <https://encyklopediateatru.pl/artykuly/264076/slupsk-lekarze-apeluja-o-odwolanie-spektaklu-klatwa>.

Krakowska writes; “the discourse is constituted equally by testimonies based on direct experience, as well as myths and legends, registrations and mediated accounts.”<sup>33</sup> In such a case, the theatrical ticket attached to the legal brief as evidence might not be so necessary.

## Ceci n'est pas un pape

The reverse of the reading of *The Curse* presented above are statements that seek to undermine the status of the figure used in the play as a vehicle for the image of a specific person, John Paul II, and at the same time as a sacred sculpture.

“This is not John Paul II or the Pope, but a figure resembling him, symbolizing the Church,” said actress Julia Wszyńska in an interview with *Gazeta Wyborcza*. *Polityka*'s reviewer Aneta Kyzioł wrote about “a statue in the shape evoking association with Pope John Paul II, such as are abundant in Poland, with the difference that this one has an artificial penis attached.” Critic Łukasz Drewniak cautioned: “This is not a realistic scene involving porn actors. At the right backstage there is a plaster figure standing in profile on a trolley, a sculptural nightmare, with something attached that from a distance looks like a rod, but it's probably an artificial penis.”<sup>34</sup> In turn, Maciej Nowak in a column ironically wrote: “If someone associates a huge, Shrek-like obese figure with the greatest authority of Polish Catholicism, it means that he remains at the level of idolatrous worship. If he compares licking the long and thin garden strobe sticking out of it with oral sex, he has probably never done it.”<sup>35</sup>

“This is not a pope,” the quoted commentators repeat, generalizing: *Ceci n'est pas un pape*. The gesture of undermining mimesis here has an obvious defensive intent. If we decisively detach the signifier from the signified—if the offended is not a pope, a saint—there will be no basis for either talking about “blasphemy” or “offense to religious feelings.”

As Weronika Szczawińska noted in her analysis of the reviews of *The Curse*, this type of journalistic strategy, on the one hand, can help protect the play from the charge of offending religious feelings, but on the other hand, can lead to a softening of the meaning of the play, which would come to be only about the

<sup>33</sup> Joanna Krakowska, *PRL: Przedstawienia* (Warszawa: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, 2016), 8–12.

<sup>34</sup> Łukasz Drewniak, “K/140: Głatwa. 15 głos w wiadomej sprawie,” *teatralny.pl*, February 27, 2017, <https://teatralny.pl/opinie/k140-glatwa-15-glos-w-wiadomej-sprawie,1882.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Maciej Nowak, “O pożytku z oglądania spektakli,” *Gazeta Wyborcza: Stołeczna*, March 8, 2017, 2.

criticism of distortions in the bosom of the church institution, while the “essence of Catholicism” would remain untouched. “Why can’t Catholic symbols be treated simply as symbols of power—one of its varieties, religious power”<sup>36</sup> Szczawińska asked, “not making them dummies, theatrical, contractual props without power, but symbols of real power, which should be fought against?”

Szczawińska advocated understanding *The Curse* as a “radically secular” performance, rejecting the critics’ discourse. To the authors of the reviews of the performance, Szczawińska repudiated “the impossibility of operating in a completely secular sphere, which would allow us to go beyond the narrative of ‘blasphemy’ and its absence, and move the discussion from the sphere of the sacred to the domain of tensions and social relations.”

From my perspective, however, such an approach would be too simple. The power of *The Curse* is the power of profanation, the play deriving its affective capital from the religiously rooted effect of obliterating mimetic difference. As Agata Adamiecka-Sitek wrote: “Here is the most important Polish totem, a figure worshipped like a tribal deity. . . . disgraced and lynched, in a way that evokes the worst historical associations,” describing what happens in *The Curse* to the figure of the Pope as “an act of symbolic violence with which it is impossible to identify.”<sup>37</sup>

Michał Łuczewski, in turn, notes,

What sets the play in motion is the scene of hanging the statue of John Paul II, which has already been commented on many times. What crowns the whole thing is the cutting down of the cross. Let us not be misled by the fact that the object of violence here has become an artificial puppet and the symbol of the cross, and not a living person. Such a substitution does not invalidate the original character of the ritual, but only confirms it. For the ritual consists in repeating the foundational murder by substituting a human victim and finding a substitute victim to represent it: an animal, a plant, or just a figure or object.<sup>38</sup>

The feminist scholar’s take is surprisingly not far from the interpretation of these scenes presented by the conservative Michał Łuczewski, writing from completely different political positions.

<sup>36</sup> Weronika Szczawińska, “Uświęcanie: Polska krytyka teatralna a język religijny,” in *Teatr a kościół*, ed. Agata Adamiecka-Sitek, Marcin Kościelniak, and Grzegorz Niziołek (Warszawa: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, 2018), 82.

<sup>37</sup> Adamiecka-Sitek, “How to Lift the Curse? Oliver Frljić and the Poles,” 25.

<sup>38</sup> Michał Łuczewski, “Klasa średnia łupana,” *Teatr*, no. 4 (2017), <https://archiwum.teatr-pismo.pl/6076-klasa-srednia-lupana/>.

## Outside the Frames

Jerzy Kalina and Oliver Frlić are united by a full awareness of the broad, mediatized circle of influence of their art, one that extends beyond the immediate audience. In Frlić's case, this has been repeatedly stated in interviews. For example, to *Gazeta Wyborcza* the director said:

I want my performances to go beyond the framework of theatre, of fiction. But after all, I can't control what happens later in the public debate or on the street. I give the initial impulse, and the debate lives its own life. For example, an important actor in this broader, public performance was public television.<sup>39</sup>

Kalina, on the other hand, identified in an interview that “there has been a sudden surge of new means of expression in all media. These are advanced technologies that accelerate the processes of creation and their dissemination. Today an artistic fact is being created, and still today it circulates around the world.”<sup>40</sup> Although the quoted words were spoken more than four years before the creation of *The Poisoned Spring*, it is hard not to think that in the case of Kalina's “papal” installation this is exactly what happened. This also links *The Poisoned Spring* to Cattelan's work, with which it was intended as a polemic. *La nona ora* at the Zachęta exhibition in 2000 likewise became a scandal before the show even opened, fueled by radio and television coverage.<sup>41</sup>

Awareness of the importance of mediatization for the art of both artists is confirmed not only by declarations, but by artistic practice itself. Frlić has repeatedly provoked street and political protests and has also used the institution itself as an element of performance. For half a century, Jerzy Kalina has practiced art interacting with public space and its other actors. Kalina worked with public television back in the communist era. The first, temporary version of the installation *Passage*<sup>42</sup>—today known as *Monument to an Anonymous Passer-By* in Wrocław—was commissioned by Polish public TV and created as part of the TV program *Vox Populi* in December 1977.

<sup>39</sup> Witold Mrozek, “Malta 2017: Oliver Frlić: Nigdzie nie zetknąłem się z czymś takim, co zrobił minister Gliński. A problemy z cenzurą miałem w różnych krajach,” *Wyborcza.pl*, June 13, 2017, <https://wyborcza.pl/7,112395,21957846,malta-2017-oliver-frljic-nigdzie-nie-zetknalem-sie-z-czymys.html>.

<sup>40</sup> Jerzy Kalina, “Rozmowa Jadwigi Siatki z Jerzym Kaliną,” in: *Wańka wstawiła*, ed. Jadwiga Siatka et al. (Poznań: Galeria Miejska Arsenal, 2016), 23.

<sup>41</sup> Jakub Dąbrowski and Anna Demenko, *Cenzura w sztuce polskiej po 1989*, vol. 2, *Artyści, sztuka i polityka* (Warszawa: Fundacja Kultura Miejsca, 2014), 287–289.

<sup>42</sup> Maria Jeżewska, *Jerzy Kalina: Nawigacja sztuki* (Wrocław: Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, 2003), 112.

PHOTO KRZYSZTOF GONCIARZ



Protest by feminist activists at the installation *The Poisoned Spring* by Jerzy Kalina, October 23, 2020

Despite these parallels, the mediatization of Frjlić and Kalina’s papal performances proceeded in an almost symmetrically opposite manner. *The Curse* was presented by opponents according to the right-wing–populist logic of “degenerate elites,” characterized by cultural alienation and practicing a so-called “pedagogy of shame.” This rhetoric was helped by the institutional logic of the repertory theatre, the “theatre of the cultural city” Dariusz Kosiński once called it<sup>43</sup>—an institution associated with prestige, with ticketed admission, in addition, after the appearance of signals of danger additionally cordoned off by security. On the other hand, the government TV station, subordinate to the party institutions—TVP, which distributed them—was responsible for the dissemination of the Frjlić meme, i.e. the circulating excerpt from the recording of fellatio on the statue of John Paul II, or his “execution,” as of February 21, 2017. It was therefore the “old,” top-down medium which attracted with it a rash of online hateful reactions and street demonstrations. The recordings from TVP Info were also recognized—by a decision of the Warsaw-Praga District Prosecutor’s Office on June 14, 2017—as material evidence.

At the same time, media coverage reinforced the show’s message. As Piotr Morawski wrote, *The Curse* set “other media in motion, forcing them . . . to constantly reproduce the spectacle and reproduce the message being sent (papal fellatio, cutting down the cross, collecting money for Kaczyński’s assassination) even in a distorted (the distortions are rather intentional, by the way) and simplified form.” Whether the distortions in the media coverage tended to obscure the spectacle or, on the contrary, amplified the message remains debatable.

<sup>43</sup> Dariusz Kosiński, *Performing Poland: Rethinking Theatres and Histories*, trans. Paul Vickers (Aberystwyth: Performance Research Books, 2019).

Michał Łuczewski, commenting on *The Curse*, stated that crucial to the meaning of Frljić's performance is the distortion accompanying mediation, the liking

to take the most violent scenes out of context and have them repeated countless times in media coverage, until they take on a life of their own and lead to public outrage. The protesters understood very well what the director was doing, while the defenders knew neither what he was doing nor what they themselves were doing. Perhaps even the main obstacle to understanding *The Curse* was that they . . . watched it. This is because it allowed them to focus on side plots and scenes, rather than on what is the essence of the performance: the archaic violence that the director cared about and that the protesters unerringly sensed.<sup>44</sup>

Łukasz Drewniak recognized the underlying structure of *The Curse*'s specific nuance:

Frljić's performance has been constructed really cleverly. It is shovel-like and aggressive only in second-hand accounts. It is blasphemous only in the eyes of people who have not seen it. It is radicalized in their imagination. However, viewed in person, it gives the impression of being woven from mere parentheses and quotation marks.<sup>45</sup>

And here it is worth asking to what extent the parentheses and quotation marks have been noticed in the reception of Jerzy Kalina's work.

*The Poisoned Spring*, as an object set in public space, in the center of Warsaw, was mediatized from the bottom up even before its official opening. While the role of professional "liberal" media cannot be underestimated here, it may be largely secondary to the grassroots energy of social media. Kalina positioned himself on the edge, on the borderline between the prestige-bearing noble institution of the National Museum and the street. He benefited from both street visibility and institutional backing.

Kalina's work provoked, just like *The Curse*, a series of reactions in the public space. While performative responses to *The Curse* included political demonstrations, processions, masses, and propitiatory prayers and sermons, the counter-performances aimed at *The Poisoned Spring* included both actions

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<sup>44</sup> Łuczewski, "Klasa średnia łupana"

<sup>45</sup> Drewniak, "K/140: Głątwa: 15 głos w wiadomej sprawie."

interacting directly with the material artwork and numerous humorous on-line transformations.

Three of the counter-performances aimed at *The Poisoned Spring* seem particularly relevant to me:

The meme “Why Popes Can’t Live Together” juxtaposed takes on the works of Kalina and Cattelan, reversing their chronological order in the form of a short picture story—so that the John Paul II of *The Poisoned Spring* hurled a boulder at the John Paul II of *La nona ora*. It points to the intertextual nature of Kalina’s work, at the same time redirecting the vector of the papal gesture, or rather—the papal attack.

On the other hand, the action of the activist of the “Lotna Brygada Opozycji” (Flight Brigade of the Opposition), who added a large rubber duck to the papal pond on September 20, 2020, was maintained in a convention operating with commonly accepted symbols of power (the duck as a reference to the party leader Jarosław Kaczyński—*kaczka* meaning *duck* in Polish—coming from the same order as the ritualized cry “Down with the duck-dictator”), while at the same time being close to the tradition of happening protests in carnivalesque, comic poetics, often associated with the Orange Alternative in Wrocław, and continued after the political changes by the right-wing Alternative Action “Naszość” in Poznań. Kalina himself did not shy away from similar strategies—one may recall here the work *Catapult* from October 1978, when Kalina shot the facade of the University of Warsaw with cabbage heads to celebrate the election of John Paul II to the See of Saint Peter.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, in a performance realized by Warsaw high school students on October 23, 2020, young women lie down in the red liquid, using hand gestures to try to “defend” themselves from the papal boulder attack. The action was photographed, distributed, and probably also organized by youtuber Krzysztof Gonciarz. It was part of the Women’s Strike then underway across Poland after another tightening of abortion laws in Poland. In this way, Pope Kalina’s gesture was used as a visible expression of the symbolic violence behind Polish political Catholicism.

Maria Poprzęcka notes that

the punishing gesture of Moses, raised in anger at the sight of the Israelites dancing around the golden calf, is not the only association of an art historian

<sup>46</sup> Jeżewska, Jerzy Kalina: *Nawigacja sztuki*, 216.

trying to peel away from current commentaries. If we look at the gesture from the perspective of the tradition of Christian imagery, it becomes clear that the figure lifting a large stone over his head is making a terrible gesture. This is the gesture of stoning.<sup>47</sup>

Stoning in Gospel imagery is a form of execution aimed at a woman and her sexuality—the oft-cited beginning of chapter eight of St. John’s Gospel speaks of an attempt to kill an “openly sinning woman” in this way.

In her analysis, Poprzęcka draws an emphatic conclusion: “Kalina, by putting down the Pope and making him throw a stone, turned a martyr into an executioner.” When Poprzęcka, an art historian, according to her stated intention, “peels away from current commentaries,” her reception becomes very serious. Meanwhile, the final mode of treating the sculpture of John Paul II in performance which I want to discuss here is pastiche.

Jerzy Kalina stated his intention rather plainly. “The aesthetic formula I have adopted stems precisely from Cattelan’s work,” the artist explained in an interview with the Catholic newspaper *Gość niedzielny*: “I myself never used a style taken out of church or bazaar kitsch. Cattelan used a wax figure, rubbing up against not the best taste. I didn’t go that far, but my work contains a clear stylistic quotation from that realization”<sup>48</sup> Kalina claimed.

The action of right-wing politicians around *La nona ora* was addressed in 2007 by artist Artur Żmijewski in the manifesto *Applied Social Arts*. Moreover, he considered these actions subversive.

Tomczak and Konopczyna demonstrated they could ‘read and understand’ the strategies of art, and were capable of using them. Once Tomczak and Konopczyna learned how to perpetrate a transgression, and violate the taboo associated with gallery spaces, they simply responded ‘in kind’ using the language of gestures and visual action, the language of performance.<sup>49</sup>

“Subversive strategies ‘are the best example of Benjamin’s proposed shift of emphasis from ‘content’ to ‘apparatuses of production’ that enable one to use ‘foreign’ representations in making one’s own work” Żmijewski further stated,

<sup>47</sup> Maria Poprzęcka, “Na oko: Kamienowanie,” *dwutygodnik.com*, October 2020, <https://www.dwutygodnik.com/arttykul/g170-na-oko-kamienowanie.html>.

<sup>48</sup> Szymon Babuchowski, *Papież nad czerwoną wodą*, „Gość niedzielny”, October 8, 2020, <https://www.gosc.pl/doc/6562935.Papiez-nad-czerwona-woda>.

<sup>49</sup> Artur Żmijewski, “The Applied Social Arts,” *artmargins.com*, July 30, 2007, <https://artmargins.com/the-applied-social-arts/>.

quoting Łukasz Ronduda. Quoting from Cattelan, the capture of “foreign representation” in Jerzy Kalina’s *The Poisoned Spring* proved to be exceedingly successful—the parentheses and quotation marks, cited above in the reception of Frljić’s performance, virtually disappeared in the reception of Kalina’s installation. Poprzęcka analysed Kalina’s sculpture, stating: “The figure of the Pope is naturalistic—you can count the buttons on the white cassock. It differs from the hundreds of monuments to St. John Paul II erected in Poland only by the gesture of hands raised above his head, carrying a large stone.”

Meanwhile, Jerzy Kalina’s art often distanced itself from mimesis, but also from the carriers of official poetics, as, for example, in *Socfiction*, a work from 1979. Małgorzata Maliszewska, artist and privately Kalina’s wife, poses in a series of photographs against the backdrop of the sculptures of female workers adorning Warsaw’s Palace of Culture and Science. *Socfiction* juxtaposes a real inhabitant of the socialist state with her image, presented in the poetics of social realism.

Pastiche, to say after Fredric Jameson, is “speech in a dead language.” Still, in the case of *Socfiction*, one can speak of parodic intent, see the intention of ridicule, the conviction—accompanying, as Jameson writes, parody—“that there exists something ‘normal’ compared with which what is being imitated is rather comic.”<sup>50</sup> The Socialist Realist poetics in *Socfiction* were arguably meant to be, on the one hand, a sign of the continuity of the system—from the Stalinist crimes of the 1940s and 1950s to the just-ending decade of Gierek’s moderate prosperity—and on the other hand, an ironic symbol of socialism, seen in anti-communist optics as “the world in reverse.”

However, if Kalina’s pastiche of what he perceived as an anti-Catholic sculpture by Cattelan in 2020 also pastiches “the hundreds of monuments that Saint John Paul II has erected in Poland,” what does this say about the significance of the papal statue today? If the statue of John Paul II in *The Poisoned Spring* is not a representation of the saint, but a meta-level interception, can it be subject to profanation? Can it be blasphemy? Such an opinion also appeared among liberal Catholics. Paweł Dobrowolski observed that Kalina’s installation, presented without commentary from the artist or curator, “arouses controversy and provokes discussion of the most difficult topics.” Dobrowolski also stated that it “may even offend the religious feelings of Catholics.”<sup>51</sup> To conclude: although

<sup>50</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983–1998* (London: Verso Books, 1998), 3.

<sup>51</sup> Paweł Dobrowolski, “Źródło memów: Zatrute źródło Jerzego Kaliny,” *magazynkontakt.pl*, September 26, 2020, <https://magazynkontakt.pl/zrodlo-memow-zatrute-zrodlo-jerzego-kaliny/>.

Art intervention by Lotna Brygada  
 Opozycji at the installation *The  
 Poisoned Spring* by Jerzy Kalina,  
 September 26, 2020

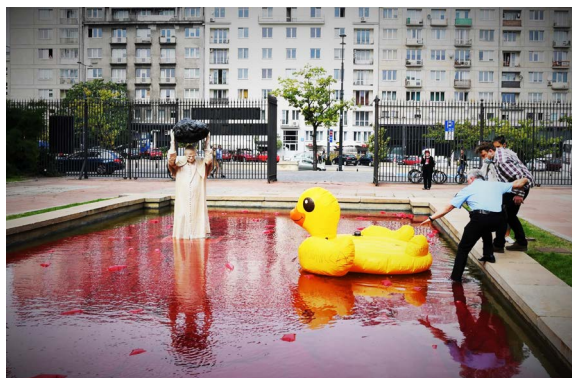


PHOTO ROBERT KUSZYŃSKI/OKO.PRESS.

Kalina's work is an installation rather than a monument, and the figure of John Paul II it includes is intended to be a quotation, the mere deployment of the papal figure consistently reveals its potency, occupying a gray area between worship and irony and evoking emotions that are widely propagated through mediatized reception.

In its extreme phase, capitalism is nothing but a gigantic apparatus for capturing pure means, that is, profanatory behaviors. Pure means, which represent the deactivation and rupture of all separation, are in turn separated into a special sphere

—wrote Giorgio Agamben in his essay *In Praise of Profanation*, a text that ends with a call for “the profanation of the unprofable.”<sup>52</sup>

In such a view, the paradox of the performances around the Pope's statues would lie in a switching of places. Frłjić, a declared communist, treats the sculpture of John Paul II as a mimetic, sacred representation; Kalina, who professes conservative Catholicism, treats it as a pastiche, the signifier separated from the signified. Profanation would thus be possible in the theatre, and on the museum's doorstep the game would remain, in which both Kalina and the creators of the mocking performances turn, to speak after Agamben, of “pure means”—whose final commodification and alienation takes place in the space of social media.

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<sup>52</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 86–87.

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