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In Blood: Violations of the Integrity of the Pope's Image 2000–2020

Abstract

This article discusses two social performances, namely violations of the integrity of two works: Maurizio Cattelan's sculpture *La Nona Ora* (2000) and Jerzy Kalina's installation *Zatrute źródło* (Poisoned Spring, 2020). Based on performance analysis, the author seeks to establish what each intervention (action) was about and on whose behalf it was undertaken (aim). Using concepts taken from the works of Pierre Bourdieu and Manuel Castells, she explains the potential for scandal of both the works. The main context of the analysis is the image of John Paul II in Polish culture and public space; an additional context is provided by protests against the tightening of anti-abortion law (2020). The analysis reveals the mechanism of both events: the artworks disrupted (2000) / represented (2020) the order of legitimate culture, therefore triggering performative actions aimed at defending and maintaining (2000) / disrupting and changing (2020) the status quo. In both cases, the dominant image of John Paul II in the discursive space was violated (in 2000—by the artwork; in 2020—by the performance of women activists).

Keywords

social performance, scandal, legitimate culture, legitimate identity, religion, the Pope, Maurizio Cattelan, Jerzy Kalina, abortion

Abstrakt

We krwi: Naruszenia integralności wizerunku papieża 2000–2020

Artykuł dotyczy dwóch performansów społecznych, jakimi były naruszenia integralności prac Maurizio Cattelana *La Nona Ora* (2000) oraz Jerzego Kaliny *Zatrute źródło* (2020). Korzystając z narzędzi analizy działań performatywnych, autorka szuka odpowiedzi na pytania: na czym polegała interwencja (działanie) i w czym imieniu była dokonywana (cel). Korzystając z pojęć zaczerpniętych z prac Pierre'a Bourdieu i Manuela Castellsa, tłumaczy skandaliczny potencjał obu dzieł. Głównym kontekstem analizy jest wizerunek Jana Pawła II w kulturze polskiej i w przestrzeni publicznej; dodatkowy kontekst artykułu stanowi protest przeciwko zaostrzeniu prawa antyaborcyjnego (2020). Analiza odsłania mechanizm obu wydarzeń: dzieło sztuki zakłócało (2000) / reprezentowało (2020) porządek kultury prawomocnej, dlatego wywołało działania performatywne mające na celu obronę i utrzymanie (2000) / zakłócenie i zmianę (2020) status quo; w obu przypadkach doszło do naruszenia dominującego w przestrzeni dyskursywnej wizerunku Jana Pawła II (w roku 2000 – dzieło; w 2020 – performans aktywistek).

Słowa kluczowe

performans społeczny, skandal, kultura prawomocna, tożsamość prawomocna, religia, papież, Maurizio Cattelan, Jerzy Kalina, aborcja

In a 2011 publication on the relationship between contemporary art and the character and “phenomenon” of John Paul II, Roman Pawłowski concluded his reflection on the relationship between Polish theatre and the papal myth with a rhetorical opening:

Nevertheless, the question remains unanswered. As more information emerges about the Church's involvement in covering up cases of child sexual abuse by members of the clergy, supporting right-wing dictatorships, and engaging in questionable financial practices, it becomes increasingly important to examine the phenomenon of the Polish Pope in the context of these broader issues. The present moment is conducive to such an analysis, as the walls erected by the Church to protect itself from criticism are gradually being dismantled. At the same time, the space for artistic freedom is expanding, including in the realm of religious topics. The ruling acquitting Dorota Nieznalska of an offense against religious feelings represents a pivotal moment in this ongoing debate. It remains to be seen whether theatre artists will become more audacious in their treatment of matters pertaining to the Pope and the Church. I am unsure. Nevertheless, it is evident that this subject matter cannot be avoided.¹

From today's perspective, it is clear that the critic could not have been more wrong and right at the same time. Just three years later, mass demonstrations swept through Poland opposing (while the other side quickly started opposing the opposers) the performance of Rodrigo Garcia's play *Golgotha Picnic* which was scheduled to take place during the Malta Festival in Poznań (2014). Another three years passed, and there were public demonstrations both against and in support of Oliver Frljic's *The Curse* which was to be performed at the Teatr Powszechny in Warsaw (2017). In both productions, acts of social censorship were supported or provoked by an alliance between the government and the Church. In the same decade, Catholic symbols were subversively taken over during public demonstrations and protests, but not without controversy, and the creators of the “rainbow Virgin Mary” and “royal vagina” suffered legal consequences. Thus, contrary to Pawłowski's belief, a period of the exposure and criticism of the Church's various entanglements has been followed by a backlash—government representatives, along with a part of society, shifting to a defensive narrative, and confrontational measures being taken to defend the status quo.

¹ Roman Pawłowski, “W cieniu Ojca: Jan Paweł II jako bohater teatralny,” in *Otwarty tron: Sztuka współczesna wobec fenomenu Jana Pawła II*, ed. Agnieszka Tarasiuk (Wigry: Dom Pracy Twórczej, 2011), c.xli.

This abbreviated—necessarily incomplete, simplified, and pointillist—account of the decade responds to Pawłowski’s hypothesis, and at the same time reveals a troubling confluence of issues that this text will address. This will be revealed through a description of the scandals surrounding the image of John Paul II. I intend to make two events the subject of analysis—the damage done to Maurizio Cattelan’s sculpture *La Nona Ora* (*The Ninth Hour*) at the hands of Polish MP Witold Tomczak (2000) and the destruction of the integrity of Jerzy Kalina’s installation *Zatrute źródło* (*The Poisoned Spring*) by feminist activists (2020). The two works in question² were linked when the creator of *The Poisoned Spring* declared that his work was a direct response to Cattelan’s piece.³ Thus, Kalina wanted to establish a unilateral “dialogue” between *The Poisoned Spring* and *La Nona Ora*. The activists did not overtly refer to the MP’s act. However, I believe that the juxtaposition of the performances that violated the integrity of the two works can unveil the mechanisms that govern sociocultural reality more clearly than an analysis of the relationship between Cattelan’s and Kalina’s works. The analysis of the events surrounding the works will be structured by the following questions: What did the performance entail? Who was the “we” that carried out the action? What was the reason for the actions? And what were their consequences?⁴ My goal is not so much to reconstruct the events in detail or to fully chronicle the reception of the works’ receptions, but to highlight the contexts of MP Tomczak’s performance and the happening staged by the activists regarding *The Poisoned Spring* in order to complexify the mechanisms that determined their scandalous nature.⁵

Integrity of the Work, Integrity of the Image

Among the many representations of John Paul II in public spaces, especially in the form of monuments, whose very presence has become the subject of

² I use the terms “sculpture” and “installation” interchangeably for both works, as do the art historians and critics quoted in the article.

³ Kalina acknowledged this in a statement at the installation’s unveiling.

⁴ This is a similar tactic to that proposed by Shannon Jackson, who proposed “to think about each component part of such a phrase. So first, I would actually like to break down and complicate what we think we might mean by ‘The Way,’ by ‘We,’ by ‘Perform,’ and by ‘Perform Now.’” “The Way We Perform Now,” *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 3 (2014): 53, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767714000059>.

⁵ This is the word the activists used to describe their action. If one accepts, following Źmijewski, the characterization of the MP’s attack on Cattelan’s sculpture as “a response expressed in the language of performance,” then a similar qualification is due to “protest in blood.” For this reason, I will use the term performance for both events in the rest of the text. See Artur Źmijewski, “Stosowane sztuki społeczne,” in *Na okrągło: 1989–2009*, ed. Aneta Szyłak and Jan Sowa (Wrocław: Korporacja Ha!art, 2009), 325–340.

critical discussion⁶ and artworks,⁷ one has played a particular role in the history of post-1989 Polish culture. Maurizio Cattelan's sculpture *La Nona Ora* is the most widely recognized work on the theme of John Paul II, and "certainly the only one that has had a genuine effect," as Sebastian Cichocki, a member of the curatorial team of the canceled exhibition *Otwarty tron* (Open Throne), notes.⁸

Maurizio Cattelan's installation *La Nona Ora*—previously presented by the artist in other countries⁹—was exhibited at the Zachęta National Gallery of Art as a part of the exhibition *Uważaj, wychodząc z własnych snów. Możesz się znaleźć w cudzych* (Be Careful When You Step Out of Your Own Dreams. You May Find Yourself In Someone Else's), which opened in December 2000 and was curated by Harald Szeemann.¹⁰ A few days after the opening of the exhibition, on December 19, 2000, Wojciech Cejrowski, a Polish right-wing pundit, writer, and TV host, tried to cover the statue of the Pope with a white cloth as if he were dead, in the presence of TV cameras, but was stopped by security.

Two days later, Witold Tomczak, a member of parliament from the right-wing party Porozumienie Polskie, supported by Halina Nowina Konopka, another MP from the same organization,¹¹ effectively damaged the work by removing the meteorite from the piece, but his actions also caused the figure's left leg to fall off.¹² The performance was photographed by journalists from the *Super Express* tabloid. The photograph that was taken shows the sculpture already damaged, with the meteorite lying nearby, while the "actors" of the event are captured in motion, wearing black suits. Against the backdrop of this group of three,

⁶ Kazimierz S. Ożóg, *Miedziany Pielgrzym: Pomniki Jana Pawła II w Polsce w latach 1980–2005* (Głogów: Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Zawodowa, 2007); Kazimierz S. Ożóg, "Święte pomniki w pejzażu Polski po 1989 roku," *Studia Teologiczno-Historyczne Śląska Opolskiego*, no. 33 (2013): 153–169.

⁷ For example, the works of Peter Fuss: *Monuments* (2007), *Santo Subito* (2007/2017).

⁸ Sebastian Cichocki, "Otwarty tron: Sztuka współczesna wobec fenomenu Jana Pawła II," in Tarasiuk, *Otwarty tron*, xLi.

⁹ A miscommunication contributed to the scandal surrounding Cattelan's work: the media, including the Polish Press Agency, reported that the Italian artist's work consisted of a sculpture of the Pope crushed by a meteorite and a video of a copulating couple. This was not true; *La Nona Ora* had been presented alongside another work at an exhibition in London.

¹⁰ The choice of the internationally respected Szeemann to curate the exhibition, which was the centerpiece of Zachęta's centennial celebration, was determined not only by considerations of prestige, but also by his experience in organizing thematically similar exhibitions and the effectiveness of the strategies he employed: "In the 1990s, he struggled with 'national' exhibitions: the *Visionäre Schweiz* exhibition in Zurich in 1991 (on the 700th anniversary of the founding of the Swiss Confederation) was intended to illustrate the 'spirit of Switzerland,' as was *Austria im Rosennetz* in Vienna in 1996. Here Szeemann freely juxtaposed art from different epochs with objects bearing traces of history." Karol Sienkiewicz, *Zatańczą ci, co drżeli: Polska sztuka krytyczna* (Warszawa: Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej, 2014), 329.

¹¹ Sienkiewicz, *Zatańczą ci, co drżeli*, 330.

¹² It was reportedly intended to divert the attention of the already vigilant security. Tomczak and Nowina Konopka won parliamentary seats on the list of the then ruling post-Solidarity Electoral Action coalition.

a static, reclining statue of the Pope, dressed in white, catches the viewer's eye. Next to the sculpture, the MP left a letter addressed to then-Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek, Culture Minister Kazimierz Michał Ujazdowski, and Justice Minister Lech Kaczyński. According to Jakub Dąbrowski:

it brought up issues that are regularly raised by opponents of contemporary art: the financing of the exhibition with taxpayers' money, the denial of the artistic value of the work, and the demand that the exhibition be closed, the director of the institution fired, and that she be prosecuted for the offense against religious feelings. But new issues were also raised—the accusation that the exhibition was anti-Polish was reinforced by anti-Semitic undertones.¹³

The scandal over Cattelan's sculpture led to another parliamentary letter, this time signed by Tomczak, Nowina Konopka, and eighty-nine other members of parliament. The letter called for “restoring a respectable aspect to Polish national culture” and objected to “unsavory provocations against its values.”¹⁴ The main performer, as well as one of the leading ‘actresses’ involved in the event, suffered some consequences. The prosecutor's office charged Tomczak with the crime of intentionally damaging the sculpture, i.e. damaging the protected integrity of the work of art. In return, the Minister of Culture offered Anda Rottenberg a deal, as a result of which she resigned from her position as director of the Zachęta National Gallery of Art.

Adam Ostolski argued that it was the MP's attack that earned the sculpture a place in the history of contemporary art in Poland.¹⁵ According to Łukasz Zaremba, both acts of violation of Cattelan's work—Cejrowski's and Tomczak's gestures—proved counterproductive, for instead of blanketing the work,¹⁶ they unveiled it in a layered manner.¹⁷ Removed from the exhibition, it continued to attract media attention as well as political and social interest. Its visibility was further impacted by the process of reproducing the performance, and in doing so, indirectly, the work itself. Through his actions, the MP created a new image

¹³ Jakub Dąbrowski, *Cenzura w sztuce polskiej po 1989 roku: Artyści, sztuka i polityka*, vol. 2 (Warszawa: Fundacja Kultury Miejsca, 2014), 298–299.

¹⁴ Quoted in Sienkiewicz, *Zatańczą ci, co drżeli*, 341. Sienkiewicz emphasizes that one-fifth members of the Polish Parliament signed the letter.

¹⁵ Adam Ostolski, “Sztuka jako polityka prowadzona innymi środkami,” in *Skuteczność sztuki*, ed. Tomasz Załuski (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2014), 212–213.

¹⁶ Cejrowski tried to do this literally; the “covering” of the deputy Tomczak was an attempt to remove from the work an element suggesting the Pope's weakness.

¹⁷ Łukasz Zaremba, *Obrazy wychodzą na ulice: Spory w polskiej kulturze wizualnej* (Warszawa: Bęc Zmiana, 2018), 110–120.



PHOTO JERZY GLADYKOWSKI

Marek Sobczyk,
*Eurodeputies Attack
Installation: Dance,*
2008,

ZACHĘTA—NATIONAL ART
GALLERY

of the sculpture, captured by documenting the moment of its destruction. The most widely reproduced and best-known are two coexisting photographs of *The Ninth Hour*, one “official” showing the work horizontally, the other a photograph of two security guards running toward MP Tomczak with the work clearly visible in the background. Cattelan’s sculpture has long been present in the public sphere thanks to the years-long spectacle that was the seemingly endless trial, until its conditional dismissal (2016) and a presidential pardon (2017). The lifespan of the scandal was also extended by two artworks, a painting by Marek Sobczyk, *Eurodeputowani atakują instalację (Taniec)* (Eurodeputies Attack Installation: Dance, 2008), and the project *Polka podnosząca meteoryt z papieża. 21:37 (A Polish Woman Lifting a Meteorite from the Pope. 9:37 PM)* by The Krasnals collective (2011). In 2020, *La Nona Ora* was given new life when an “answer” to Cattelan’s work—Jerzy Kalina’s installation *The Poisoned Spring*, was installed in front of the National Museum in Warsaw.

The act of destroying a sculpture and its legal consequences is a curious occurrence to be analyzed from the perspective of law and art studies, while

attempts to explain Tomczak's action have also led to alternative interpretations of Cattelan's work. Jakub Dąbrowski, the author of a monograph on censorship in post-communist Polish art and its legal aspects, has treated Tomczak's performance as an act of affective reception and placed it in the categories of neuro-aesthetics.¹⁸ According to the researcher, the viewer made a (double) identification, that of the effigy with the Pope and that of himself with the suffering man. Thus, he rushed to the Pope's aid for two reasons: first, because the head of the Church, the Polish Pope, should be respected, and second, because this is what one does when one sees a person lying down, suffering. MP Tomczak's behavior has most often been described as an (effective) attempt to gain media attention and political favor with his electorate ahead of upcoming elections. However, Łukasz Zaremba aptly noted that "an attempt to gain recognition, fame, and visibility, to boost the polls, to gain political capital—this is an explanation that is . . . unsatisfactory,"¹⁹ because the iconoclast fulfills a greater task, "which is to see the image itself as the object and center of the dispute."²⁰ More interesting, therefore, are the less pragmatic interpretations of the event, which seek the reasons for the attack in the symbolism of Cattelan's work, referring to the way in which the Pope's death is depicted and placing the sculpture in a passionist, mystical, or messianic context. Two tendencies can be distinguished in the attempt to frame this symbolism.²¹ In the first, Cattelan was accused of blasphemy, as he saw in the image of the Pope crushed by a meteorite an expression of divine retribution or that God is not in control of the order of the universe, since the titular ninth hour is, according to the Gospel, the one in which Christ cries out "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me." The second interpretive trend, the affirmative one, emphasized the Pope's resemblance to Christ—here the meteorite symbolizes the sins of all humanity, which the Pope takes upon himself and consequently either "falls under the weight of the cross" or dies at the same hour when, according to the Bible, Christ died on the cross for the sins of the world.

The curator of the exhibition and the director of the Zachęta Gallery, who both championed the work, also attempted to defend it on the basis of an affirmative interpretation. Szeemann directly suggested such an interpretation, saying that in the face of modern societies "not guided by spiritual goals, the Pope is

¹⁸ Dąbrowski, *Cenzura w sztuce polskiej*, 314.

¹⁹ Zaremba, *Obrazy wychodzą na ulice*, 110.

²⁰ Zaremba.

²¹ The analyses of the events cited in the articles by Piotr Piotrowski, Karol Sienkiewicz, and Jakub Dąbrowski, and the press statements quoted by them allow such a synthetic conclusion.

bearing the weight.”²² Rottenberg, on the other hand, admitted that recalling the incident of actor Daniel Olbrychski’s attack on Piotr Uklański’s installation *Nazis* and the subsequent order issued by the Minister of Culture, Kazimierz Michał Ujazdowski, to place a commentary explaining the meaning of the work next to it, this time she anticipated such gestures and asked the pastor of the Polish Artists’ Priesthood for a “Christian interpretation of Cattelan’s work”:

It was very insightful, coherent, and in line with the message of the Church. . . . According to Father Niewęglowski, Cattelan’s sculpture is an allegory of the papal mission in contemporary society. The symbol of the Pope falling under a boulder alludes to the symbol of the death of Christ, who dies for the sins of mankind. . . . Cattelan touches on human weakness, and asks whether man can live up to this elevated function of the Roman pontiff.²³

Zachęta’s director also admitted that even at the planning stage of the exhibition, *Uważaj, wychodząc z własnych snów*, she discussed with the curator the risks involved in showing this work.

Indeed, Rottenberg sensed that showing Cattelan’s work in Poland would bring down fire from heaven on her. Those who knew Szeemann’s intentions advised her not to show the sculpture. But Zachęta’s director . . . did not try to convince him. She preferred a discussion. She said: “Cattelan is not Polish.” “But the Pope is,” replied the Swiss curator. He could not imagine saying anything about Poland without mentioning John Paul II.²⁴

The dialogue between Rottenberg and Szeemann helps to define another set of arguments that have appeared in commentaries linking the violation of Cattelan’s work to the “inappropriate” use of an image of John Paul II that is precious to Poles. Piotr Piotrowski wrote about this, emphasizing that *The Ninth Hour* was a “visual shock” and showed that “the Poles . . . proved to be completely incapable of discussing and analyzing their visual relationship with the Pope.”²⁵

²² Quoted in Anda Rottenberg, “Dziewiąta godzina papieża,” interview by Roman Pawłowski, in Tarasiuk, *Otwarty tron*, LXXXVIII.

²³ Rottenberg, “Dziewiąta godzina papieża,” LXXXVII.

²⁴ Sienkiewicz, *Zatańczą ci, co drżeli*, 330–331.

²⁵ Piotr Piotrowski, *Agorafilia: Sztuka i demokracja w postkomunistycznej Europie* (Poznań: Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, 2010), 269.

Attempts to explain Tomczak's performance were therefore often closely tied to interpretations of *The Ninth Hour*. This calls into question one of the most common arguments used to explain scandals surrounding contemporary art, which, incidentally, has also surfaced in discussions regarding the MP's performance.²⁶ Whenever a work of art comes under attack—especially one motivated by a conservative worldview—it is argued that art is either misunderstood or simply incomprehensible. Such an assumption would imply that the scandal that occurred in Zachęta was on a communicative level, whose cause, as conceptualized by Ernst van Alphen, would be the unfortunate nature of a performative act of speech or a performative gesture.²⁷

In fact, it would seem that it was just the opposite—the scandal unfolded because Witold Tomczak had perfectly mastered the existing code and correctly recognized that Cattelan's sculpture was a disruption of the Pope's image, which was formed, and supported, by a legitimate culture. Legitimate culture, according to Pierre Bourdieu,²⁸ can be understood as culture that is official and sanctioned by social institutions, culture that, through education, law, an established canon, and a universally established and accessible aesthetic (primarily that which dominates public space, as well as that which is legitimized by national museums and art galleries) dictates prevailing patterns (of speech, behavior in public spaces, of reading—and thus of interpreting patterns as well). I interpret “scandal” as the effect of an attempt to disrupt legitimate culture and legitimate identity. Legitimate identity, a concept taken from the work of Manuel Castells, is “introduced by the dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalize their domination vis-à-vis social actors.”²⁹ In other words, it is about maintaining invisible domination by prescribing the reproduction of an attitude that corresponds to those in power. For Polish legitimate culture, the hegemony of the Catholic Church within the symbolic realm is an important factor.³⁰ Therein, religious values are placed at the top of its hierarchy, as evidenced, in part, by

²⁶ After the events surrounding Ukiński's exhibition and Cattelan's work, Zachęta's management decided to include explanations of the meaning of the works in exhibitions and, in selected cases, a warning that the work might be perceived as drastic. See Dąbrowski, *Cenzura w sztuce polskiej*, 294.

²⁷ See Ernst van Alphen, “Performatywność prowokacji: Przypadek Artura Żmijewskiego,” trans. Roma Sendyka, in *Krytyka jako interwencja: Sztuka, pamięć, afekt*, ed. Katarzyna Bojarska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2019), 251–266.

²⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984); Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage Publications, 1977).

²⁹ Cf. Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 8.

³⁰ I see the dominant historical politics as an equally important discourse for culture and legitimate identity, but there is no competition here, as the two discourses are mutually reinforcing.

Poland's provision for the protection of religious feelings in state law. And it is through the lens of these values that the dynamics of social spaces are established, declaring them the foundation of identity, the touchstone of morality, and the building blocks of the community. Polish visual culture present in public space has been subordinated to this system (or, in the language of Jacques Rancière, a *regime*)³¹ of symbolism, as evidenced, among other things, by the widespread presence of religious symbols in public institutions or in the incorporation of Catholic ceremonies into public celebrations.

The image of the Pope, in today's legitimate culture, involves both aesthetic-visual issues (the erection of monuments that are very similar in form) and, or even above all, a series of associations with John Paul II and the qualities attributed to him. They consist of: political prowess, especially his merits in the overthrow of communism; a status of unquestioned authority, especially in the moral sphere; an ability to bring order to social relations by seeking unity and reconciliation; personal qualities, such as kindness, his smile, gentleness, respect for every human being; and dignity, manifested primarily in the way he accepted sacrifice and suffering, the assassination attempt, his illness, and his death.³² Thus framed, the persona of the Pope is presented as a moral authority for all Poles, believers and non-believers alike, and becomes a point of reference in the formation of their identity.³³ Consequently, the Pope is not so much a person as a figure, an instrument through which ethical dilemmas are arbitrarily neutralized and moral disputes resolved. The idea that the figure of John Paul II has a key influence on the legitimate identity of Poles is a starting point from which to structure questions about the norms of public life, as well as a premise that justifies the need to include Catholic views in the dominant media discourse and in legislation.³⁴

Thus, the scandal surrounding Cattelan's work began with MP Tomczak's belief that the work violated the "integrity of the image" of the Pope. I formulate the

³¹ See Kuba Szreder, "Pożegnanie z latami go.: W poszukiwaniu nowych formuł zaangażowania," in Szyłak and Sowa, *Na okrągło*, 413–426.

³² See "Jan Paweł II w pamięci i w życiu Polaków," Research Report, Polish Public Opinion Research Center, April 2010, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K_047_10.PDF; Anna Szepke, "Przemoc symboliczna w polskim dyskursie publicznym: Jan Paweł II – 'papież z Polski,'" *Przeegląd Socjologiczny*, no. 1 (2003); "Jan Paweł II w pamięci Polaków po dziesięciu latach od śmierci," Research Report, Polish Public Opinion Research Center, March 2015, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2015/K_046_15.PDF; "Pamięć o Janie Pawle II ciągle żywa," Research Report, Polish Public Opinion Research Center, October 2018, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2018/K_135_18.PDF.

³³ "Jan Paweł II i jego nauczanie w życiu Polaków," Research Report, Polish Public Opinion Research Center, March 2012, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2012/K_044_12.PDF.

³⁴ "W dwadzieścia lat później: Polacy o Janie Pawle II i jego nauczaniu w rocznicę pielgrzymki do wolnej Polski," Research Report, Polish Public Opinion Research Center, June 2011, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2011/K_065_11.PDF.

concept of the integrity of a legitimate image with reference to the MP's performance in Zachęta. It resulted in damage to a work of art, the integrity of which is protected by law. The integrity of the image of John Paul II is not subject to such protection. However, the act of defending it demonstrated that it is protected by its inclusion in the legitimate culture founded on its integrity. Therefore, the MP's action was ultimately aimed at stopping the attack on the legitimate identity of Poles who, according to the dominant culture, are considered Catholic, or share Catholic values. However, the aim, was not only to defend the cultural (religious) feelings of Poles, but also to defend the tools used by the institutions of power to legitimize their decisions.³⁵ The MP later explained that he removed the meteorite because it was "expected" by his constituents, and that his actions were clearly justified, "given who the Holy Father John Paul II was and what... he did for Poland and the Poles."³⁶ The damage to the sculpture was done by him as an MP, not as an "ordinary citizen," and an outraged Catholic. Thus, in this case, the "we" of the performance can be defined quite precisely—it was done on behalf of those in power in the political and symbolic hierarchy.

The exegesis of the work, commissioned from Anda Rottenberg, must also be placed in this context. The fact that the director of the Zachęta National Gallery of Art requested an explanation written from a Catholic perspective indicates something more than a mere sign of succumbing to the dominant cultural narrative. On the one hand, with this gesture, Zachęta's director negated any critical discussion of the dominant image of the Pope that had been written into the exhibition of Cattelan's work, while at the same time undermining the credibility of art criticism and the critical potential of contemporary art.³⁷ Second, the gesture had a devastating effect on the dispute over Zachęta's role as a national art institution—by putting forward a "Christian interpretation" of the work, the gallery upheld the standard of legitimate culture, in which the Catholic worldview becomes the model of interpretation. In a way, Rottenberg thus contradicted the determination with which she had been building Zachęta's program and the distinctive character of the gallery's activities in the field of public art since 1993. At the beginning of the 1990s, in the dispute over Zachęta's future profile³⁸ and its role in the construction of Polish cultural identity, two

³⁵ For this perspective, it is less important whether the deputy was a member of the ruling or opposition party, but rather that he belonged to the political class.

³⁶ Dabrowski, *Cenzura w sztuce polskiej*, 295.

³⁷ In this context, Dabrowski also wrote of the belief that the public lacked interpretive preparation and was treated "like children." See Dabrowski, *Cenzura w sztuce polskiej*, 292–293.

³⁸ Jakub Banasiak describes the process in detail, "Jaka galeria narodowa? Spory o czwana Zachęta," in *Proteuszowe czasy: Rozpad państwowego systemu sztuki 1982–1993: Stan wojenny, druga odwilż, transformacja ustrojowa*

arguments clashed: that of the previous director Barbara Majewska, an advocate of the traditional model of art, and that of Anda Rottenberg, an advocate of the avant-garde, partly contestationist model.³⁹ According to Jakub Banasiak's definition, this was a dispute over the idiom defining Polish art after 1989.⁴⁰ Rottenberg's resignation from her post ends this discussion and confirms the triumph of the dominant cultural models.

Protest in Blood

In 2020, the fifth year of the United Right government, disputes are once again raging over the direction and management of state art institutions. The National Museum in Warsaw is one of the institutions whose new directors were appointed by the Minister of Culture without a competition procedure. Katarzyna Kasia describes this process:

However, some conclusions can already be drawn from an examination [of the course taken up by cultural institutions under the United Right government, J. B.]. First, the changes introduced in recent years are not substantive, but purely ideological. Second, they expose a fundamental deficit when it comes to producing noteworthy right-wing contemporary art.⁴¹

Commissioned by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and displayed in front of the National Museum building, Jerzy Kalina's *The Poisoned Spring* reveals the intertwining of a strong ideological charge and the aesthetic weakness of right-wing contemporary art. Thus, the same "we"—in terms of identity, views, and position in the social hierarchy, not necessarily in a personal sense—that defended the model image of the Pope in 2000 is responsible for its appearance in public space. At the unveiling of the installation on September 24, 2020, the author explained that it was a direct response to Cattelan's sculpture. The life-size figure of John Paul II was placed in a fountain basin lined with red fabric and filled with water. The Pope holds a meteorite above his head, as if he were about to hurl it into the pool. The artist intended this to be an image of the Pope's

(Warszawa: Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej, 2020), 465-474.

³⁹ Finally, in 1993, after several years of wrangling, Rottenberg's vision prevailed, and she took over as director.

⁴⁰ Banasiak, "Jaka galeria narodowa," 474.

⁴¹ Katarzyna Kasia, "Polityka kulturalna PiS-u: Wymiana kadr, słabnące instytucje," *Kultura Liberalna*, no. 597 (2020), <https://kulturaliberalna.pl/2020/06/16/polityka-kulturalna-pis-u-wymiana-kadr-slabnace-instytucje/>.

triumph over communism, and the redness of the water to evoke associations with the hammer and sickle flag.

This is a spring that is a form of defilement, of impurity. It is an attempt to redden the continent and the world. . . . And now, when such a crazy battle over symbols is taking place, and religious symbols are being violated in such a cruel, inhumane, and degrading way, I'm surprised that we've been so quiet for so long. That's why I, among other things, created this. I would say that such expressions of behavior must be stopped.⁴²

The Minister of Culture commissioned this work on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the birth of John Paul II:

His election to the See of Peter had a decisive influence on the social unification of Poland at that time, which soon led to the rapid development of the liberation movement and, as a result, the overthrowing of communism in Central and Eastern Europe. . . . Even those who do not affiliate themselves with the Catholic Church should objectively evaluate the achievements of the Polish Pope, if only in the field of social science, and also point out, even after the overthrow of communism, the dangers posed by the current of change, which so often lacks spiritual values, dangers which, along with tradition, are the main unifying force of the Polish national identity.⁴³

The explicit intention to perpetuate the Pope's image found additional expression in the exegesis found on government websites:

Jerzy Kalina recreated the figure of John Paul II in a realistic way, without aestheticizing it. . . . In Kalina's portrayal, John Paul II is not a helpless old man crushed by a meteorite, but a titan with superhuman strength.⁴⁴

The marriage of realism and heroism did not yield good results; a work that was a stylistic and symbolic failure emerged. It immediately became the subject of parody, especially in the form of online memes. But just as quickly it became

⁴² See Tomasz Urzykowski, "Papież zniknął z dziedzińca Muzeum Narodowego: Gdzie się podziała figura Jana Pawła II z głazem?," *Wyborcza Online*, November 9, 2020, <https://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/7,54420,26495877,papiez-zniknal-z-dziedzina-muzeum-narodowego-gdzie-sie-podziala.html>.

⁴³ See "Zatrute źródło Jerzego Kaliny na dziedzińcu MNW," Ministry of Culture and National Heritage communication, September 25, 2020.

⁴⁴ "Zatrute źródło Jerzego Kaliny na dziedzińcu MNW."



PHOTO NOIZZ.PL

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

the object of interpretive subversion. Within days of the unveiling, left-wing columnists began asking whose blood was in the fountain. Apparently, it did not occur to the author and patrons of *The Poisoned Spring* that the pool would be associated not with “the wave of communism flooding Europe,” but rather with blood. Meanwhile, questions immediately arose in the public space as to whether it was the blood of the innocent, i.e. the victims of sexual abuse and pedophilia among Polish priests, or perhaps the blood of women deprived of reproductive rights by the Church. In this way, *The Poisoned Spring* was used to point out further scandalous entanglements of the Church.

The whole situation took on a new context when on October 22, 2020 the Constitutional Tribunal ruled that the principle of the permissibility of abortion for embryo-pathological reasons was unconstitutional, providing yet another

example of the government working against the law and outside the law.⁴⁵ A day later, a group of anonymous feminist activists staged a performance: young women, some of them high school students, entered the “bloody” pool of *The Poisoned Spring* and assumed half-lying poses, shielding themselves from the potential impact of the boulder that the figure of the Pope was about to throw at them. Some turned their heads, as if they did not want to look at the stone. The National Museum’s guards intervened, interrupting the performance, detaining the activists, closing the gate of the museum’s courtyard, detaining anyone who could be connected to the action, including the photojournalist accompanying the women, and notifying the police. The activists described their action as a protest against the tightening of the anti-abortion law. The women were mostly dressed in black, a reference to the color of the Women’s Strike protests, also referred to as the Black Protests. In these events, black has a double meaning—it is an expression of mourning and a reference to the tradition of women’s demonstrations on social issues, established in the 1860s, during and after the fall of the January Uprising, as part of the protests against the partitioners of Poland.⁴⁶ The female activists took on the role of weak subjects, an act that is significant in itself and answers the question of the “we” in the performance.⁴⁷ Placing the installation in a public space that somehow invited interaction and intervention mobilized the weak “we” into action. The play of the literal, red water—blood; meteorite—stone; raising the hands above the head—readiness to throw, highlighted the aesthetic shortcomings of Kalina’s work, and at the same time contributed to the success of the performative action. I understand the activists’ performance as a protest, in the most general sense, according to Dariusz Kosinski: a spectacle that interrupts the celebration of power and manifests opposition to it.⁴⁸ With their action, the activists highlighted a troubling nexus: the institutions of the secular state legislating under the dictates of church authorities. For, as Bożena Umińska-Keff and Wanda Nowicka point out, “a law prohibiting abortion can only be justified on religious grounds.”⁴⁹ The anti-abortion policy pursued by the Church, of which John Paul II was one

⁴⁵ See “Kryzys państwa prawa” and “Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet: październik–listopad 2020,” *Czas Kultury*, no. 4 (2020).

⁴⁶ Patryk Zakrzewski, “Czarny Protest a.d. 1861,” *Culture.pl*, May 10, 2017, <https://culture.pl/pl/artukul/czarny-protest-ad-1861>.

⁴⁷ Ewa Majewska, *Kontrpubliczności ludowe i feministyczne: Wczesna „Solidarność” i Czarne Protesty* (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Książka i Prasa, 2018).

⁴⁸ See Dariusz Kosiński, *Teatra polskie: Historie* (Warszawa: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, 2010).

⁴⁹ Bożena Umińska-Keff and Wanda Nowicka, “Aborcja,” in *Encyklopedia gender: Płeć w kulturze*, ed. Monika Rudaś-Grodzka et al. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, 2014), 20.

of the leading voices and strongest advocates—summarizing his teaching in this regard in the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (1995)—has translated into the way laws are made and the constitution interpreted in a secular state.

In 2020, unlike twenty years earlier, it was not the work, but the attackers who carried out the disruption of the legitimate culture and identity that the installation represented and reinforced. According to Manuel Castells, identities of resistance emerge and function in opposition to legitimate identities, which under certain conditions can become an identity project.⁵⁰ Resistance identities are created by social actors who remain in devalued and/or stigmatized positions as a result of the actions of power and the dominant symbolic order. Castells includes feminist movements among these identities. An identity project emerges when these actors, by redefining their position in society, attempt to transform the entire social structure. It seems that such an attempt was made by the activists in front of the National Museum, joining a larger group protesting against the Constitutional Tribunal's ruling of October 20, 2020.

The Language of Protest

The performance was part of scattered but massive protest actions that took place across the country, by women and men of different ages, and with varying economic and cultural capital.⁵¹ Being consciously part of a constellation of other gestures distinguishes the activist women's action from Tomczak's interventions and has a substantial impact on their significance. Although the core of the October–November 2020 events were mass street demonstrations that testified to the power of resistance and were carried out according to the templates of political protests, their form and meaning as a whole were also influenced by numerous individual actions. The silent performance thus resonated with the language of the protests.

The relationship between the activist women's performance and the protest slogans can be examined by means of an interpretive experiment. The simplest constellations are formed by slogans that—like the pool in the activists'

⁵⁰ Castells, *The Power of Identity*, 8.

⁵¹ Placing the performance in the panorama of dispersed protest actions, I am inspired by the way Kosinski analyzed the demonstrations of opposition to the logging of the primeval Bialowieza Forest (keeping in mind all the differences between the events of 2017 and those of October and November 2020). Dariusz Kosiński, "Konfederacja leśna na scenie zdecentralizowanej," in *O jeden las za daleko: Demokracja, kapitalizm i nieposłuszeństwo ekologiczne w Polsce*, ed. Przemysław Czaplinski, Joanna B. Bednarek and Dawid Gostyński (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Książka i Prasa, 2019), 247–262.

performance—evoke associations with blood: “You have blood on your hands,” “Poland, stop wishing for my blood,” etc. But there were also banners with far more complex connotations.

First, I would like to recall the highly resonant semantic use of a quotation from the Gospels (Luke 22:19; Matthew 26:26; also retold in St. Paul’s letter: 1 Corinthians 11:24): “This is my body.”⁵² In the biblical scene, Christ uttered these words while instituting his own sacrifice, which according to Christian doctrine is the simultaneous institution of the Eucharist. At every Mass, the priest delivers this line during the transubstantiation.⁵³ Thus, “This is my body” operates here according to J. L. Austin’s logic of the performative: a particular formula uttered by the right person under the right circumstances ensures “fortuity,” produces a real effect in reality. The appropriation of this quote by the protesting women changes the meaning of the performative, although, I believe, it retains the potential for fortuity. The words “This is my body” in the mouths of the protesters, who refuse to submit their bodies to external decision-making, becomes a denunciation of the word in a double sense: in the sense of establishing autonomy and self-determination—as an expression of one’s name or identity determinants, one’s sexual orientation, political views, or professed religion—as well as in the sense of refusing to be subordinated—denouncing obedience or servitude. Therefore, they can be associated with the acts of apostasy which were committed during the months of the protests. The subversive strategy of hijacking the performative owes its power to a change of vector: the words uttered by Christ led to the institution of sacrifice, while the words written on the banners of the women protesters express the refusal of sacrifice.⁵⁴

The second of the protest strategies, also interesting in the context of the performance, is expressed by the slogan “Koniec dziadocenu,” which translates as “End the Boomercene.” This term was created along the lines of one of the most important and widely discussed concepts of recent decades—the Anthropocene, which ceased to function as a category of geological description, and began to organize the collective imagination as a philosophical and social concept. It

⁵² The banner resonated with other slogans related to the body, such as: “My womb, my right;” “My body, my choice;” “Keep your distance from my womb;” and “Keep your paws off our wombs;.”

⁵³ One of the elements in the sequence of rituals performed over the wafer is elevating it above the head. This gesture in visual culture is one of the most commonly associated images of a priest—hands raised above the head, holding the wafer in his hands—but is at the same time not too far from the posture in which the Pope is portrayed in the sculpture by Kalina (and Barbara Piela, who collaborated with him).

⁵⁴ This brings to mind another slogan: “Why don’t you focus on the body of Christ?”

also became part of a whole series of “-cenes”⁵⁵—Capitalocene, Oliganthropocene, Misanthropocene, Anglocene, Obscene, Growthocene, Plantationocene, Plasticocene, Technocene, Chthulucene, Necrocene, Thanatocene, etc.—which, through their construction, highlight the mechanisms that produce the overall order of modern reality.⁵⁶ Thus, the “Boomerocene” points to the most causal factor of the Anthropocene or Capitalocene, just as the Oliganthropocene or Anglocene points to the subject that benefits from the system. Realising the call to “End the Boomerocene” would mark the end of the era of the privilege of those who support and profit from the patriarchal status quo, namely the baby boomers, the dotards, the fossils, and therefore a system based on the principle of subjugating the weak subjects. At the same time, the formative ingenuity was a manifestation of the need to create a system based on a different definition of social justice.

It is not difficult to conclude that Tomczak's stance fits within the framework of the “Boomerocene.” His action was aimed at defending the status quo and the system, of which he is not only a supporter, but also a benefactor. The activists' performance also had an interesting side effect: in a way, it ended the hegemonic monopoly that Tomczak had commanded for decades on the “interpretation” of Cattelan's installation. *The Poisoned Spring* wanted to rekindle the semantic potential of *The Ninth Hour*, but it never had the power to do so. Only the “protest in blood” took Kalina's installation out of the case of a “media scandal” and an online outrage, shifting the discourse to the topic of overt and covert narratives of Polish culture as well as modernizing significations.

Mechanisms and Continuations

The performances surrounding *The Ninth Hour* and *The Poisoned Spring* can be seen, in the most general sense, as two sides of the same mechanism. The artworks disrupted (2000) / represented (2020) the order of legitimate culture, and therefore triggered performative actions aimed at defending and maintaining (2000) / disrupting and changing (2020) the status quo. In both cases, the dominant image of John Paul II in the discursive space was violated (in 2000 by

⁵⁵ At this point, it is worth mentioning the ironic term “Neologismcene”—Steve Mentz's name for the increased activity of humanists in creating alternatives to the term “Anthropocene.” “Bommercene” would probably join the list Mentz has compiled. Steve Mentz, “The Neologismcene,” *Arcade: Literature, the Humanities, and the World* blog, <https://arcade.stanford.edu/blogs/neologismcene>.

⁵⁶ Franciszek Chwałczyk sorted out the “-cene” terms according to their meaning, “Antropocen, kapitalocen – urban age, urbanocen? Czyli nie tylko ‘iS’ oraz ‘jak’, ale i ‘gdzie,’” *Kultura i Historia* 2, no. 34 (2018): 90–121.

an artwork; in 2020 by a performance of female activists). Both performances damaged the materiality of the work of art, which led to legal consequences for the actors involved. The defamers consciously used their social position in their actions—a representative of authority, protected by parliamentary immunity (2000) / a weak subject (2020). The significant discrepancy—in terms of its mechanism, not its meaning—can be described as a tension between a kind of exclusivity and inclusivity of actions. In fact, MP Tomczak's performance was accompanied by only one further attempt, by Cejrowski, which was made with a similar intention but was not completed. *The Poisoned Spring*, on the other hand, became the object of many travesties, as part of various activities, a variety of news and media, and a wide range of narratives. The performance staged by the activists is therefore only one interpretation. Simultaneously other attempts regarding an exegesis of the Polish Church's entanglements have appeared, which are similar in terms of instruments or semantics, while alongside them there have been ironic interpretations, playing on absurdity instead of literalism, in the form of countless memes⁵⁷ or a performance in which an inflatable duck (a play on Jarosław Kaczyński's surname, which derives from the word "duck") was released into the pool by the Lotna Brygada Opozycji (Flight Brigade of the Opposition)—the duck was quickly "arrested" by museum security.⁵⁸

The more far-reaching effects of this incident remain unclear.⁵⁹ *The Ninth Hour* was removed from the exhibition and never shown again in Poland.⁶⁰ However, it exerted a significant influence on the public perceptions of the Pope's image in contemporary art for two decades. Similarly, *The Poisoned Spring* was removed from the museum's courtyard after a period of just over a month, only to end up in the permanent collection of the National Museum in Warsaw.⁶¹ The controversy surrounding *The Ninth Hour* did not disrupt the prevailing model for the papal image, maintaining its legitimate position. Will it be different with *The Poisoned Spring*? The potential impact of associating Kalina's work with the sexual abuse scandals involving prominent figures of the Catholic Church

⁵⁷ "Zatrute źródło Jerzego Kaliny [MEMY]," *Magazyn Szum*, September 25, 2020, <https://magazynszum.pl/zatrute-zrodlo-jerzego-kaliny-memy/>.

⁵⁸ "Aktywiści wpuścili do sadzawki z pracą Kaliny dmuchaną kaczkę: To 'symbol powrotu Polski do PRL,'" *Magazyn Szum*, September 25, 2020, magazynszum.pl/aktywisci-wpuscili-do-sadzawki-z-praca-kaliny-dmuchana-kaczke-to-symbol-powrotu-polski-do-prl/.

⁵⁹ This text was written in November and December 2020, and deals with recent and ongoing events.

⁶⁰ When Cattelan returned to Warsaw in 2012 with the exhibition *Amen*, its conservative approach to religious topics was noted.

⁶¹ See Urzykowski, "Papież zniknął z dziedzińca Muzeum Narodowego."

remains to be seen. Will it change the image template that, as more and more data suggest, is currently being effectively compromised?⁶²

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⁶² See Piotr Kantor-Kozdrowicki, “Jan Paweł II coraz mniej święty,” *Kultura Liberalna*, nr 534 (2019), <https://kulturaliberalna.pl/2019/04/03/projekt-polska-jan-pawel-ii-kozdzrowicki/>.

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