

Grotesque-Dominated Postmodernism.
Are the Normative Systems to Survive? Focusing on Monumental Art

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Motto: "Tragedy is comedy plus time." Woody Allen ("Annie Hall")

We live in times of tough cultural clashes that we watch on TV news on daily basis. European fear of Eastern and Southern newcomers is economic, political, and ethnic, but most of all – cultural by nature. Today we realise that that we do not understand the co-existence of cultures at all (the failure of the infamous ‘multiculti’ ideologies), but then it would be natural to start at least some microanalysis of cultural shifts in our own culture. Thus, unexpectedly, the latest developments in postmodernistic¹ culture – of its normative systems (law, ethics, aesthetical standards) – obtain more significant value than that of semiotic theorising.

The “best before” of postmodernism is over and before we can start to draw some first blueprints of “new academism” (= postpostmodernism) it might make sense to look at how postmodernism started to fade away as a cultural phenomenon (as we have stated earlier and agreed with Amy Adler – postmodernism does not have or even structurally cannot have a positive definition as such (1.)), and whether it is going to restore chances for the newly legal regulation of the society. (Keeping in mind that postmodernism denies legal norms in principle – with some exceptions like feminist jurisprudence, etc.)

Therefore, we first have to agree on the minimalistic concept of postmodernism and here is the one I offer:

- (a) deconstruction (Derrida et al); and the
- (b) tolerance (practical and gnoselagic) of alternative truths.

The latter one points at the peaceful co-existence that is not at the same time eclecticism. If eclecticism is the accidental co-existence of artefacts in time (that is why we prefer term ‘room’ to the more traditional ‘landscape’ while talking about the urban environment), then postmodern co-existence includes some intentionality or shared cultural values towards the fundamentals of culture – art, technology, ways of life, etc.

Search for What Postmodernism “IS” Through Simple Phenomena. Mainly: Sculpture

For Noam Chomsky, but also Umberto Eco, Brian McHale, Kirby Olson, then Rosalind Krauss on Avant-Garde, John Frow, Douglas Kellner, and for many others, postmodernism is never considered as something self-sufficient (and that can be completely described by tolerance and deconstruction) and thus it has inevitably been conceptualised in its relations to modernism. The latter is quite an ambiguous notion itself. Postmodernism is not just a school or trend in some specific field of culture (although it started from architecture) but a pan-European cultural phenomenon. It is manifested in art (from impressionism to cubism, fauvism and Dali), in technical sciences, music, court procedures, interior design, etc. Postmodernism in gas-technology (based on LNG) is the technological equivalent to Prokofiev’s music, although separated by about a century.

Thus, we have a double problem here: (a) postmodernism is defined in these examples by references to modernism, and (b) modernism itself is a quite an unknown variable.

¹ The term ‘postmodernism’ is sometimes used very loosely to designate the areas of jurisprudence that fall outside of its classical boundaries, like – feminist jurisprudence, environmental law, race law, etc. All these areas have nothing to do with postmodernism as an intellectual method and manifest just the expansion of 19th century thinking – basically the proto-sociological school – into the 21st century.

To put it cynically: we'd like to know what modernism was (or sometimes – is), but it is a matter of intellectual curiosity. On the other hand, POSTmodernism is something that we have today and it costs a lot (like an LNG terminal or shale gas drilling with postmodern technology) or is asking for a lot (of money from the state budgets or corporations, who are unable to resist these demands because of social pressures). In other words, postmodernism becomes a significant budgetary and political issue.

Therefore, it is not only an intellectual task but a practical one as well (how to finance postmodernism) – to define at least in some initial sense what we are talking about in the first place.

Knowing that the situation of not knowing what postmodernism is even in its fading phase can't be cured easily. Let us try to simply describe postmodernism as something existing (and by now – fading) by itself and to define it by using the simplest case as proof and as an example. Thus, my additional statement to what postmodernism is will go like this:

POSTMODERNISM NOT ONLY LEADS TO NEW PRIMITIVISM. (Not to confuse with naivism as a school in arts.) IT IS UNWILLINGLY ITSELF THE GROTESQUE.

The statement “postmodernism defined positively is new primitivism” can be argued analytically, philosophically and through empirical evidence in the spheres of art, education, engineering, psychopathology, the works of the European Commission, etc. But here I shall present as proof to the argument (“postmodernism is neoprimitivism, grotesque”) the references or examples from the sphere of **monumental art** in the spatial dimensions of urban environment.

Impersonality of Monumental Sculpture and its Semiotic Implications.

Monumental political sculpture has certain features that make it a very good example for theoretical discussion – it is relatively unsophisticated as a medium and also collective-minded. The scale of the sculpture in a city and the need to find a common denominator for it do not leave much room for an author to shade away too many hidden or ambivalent meanings in his work, since monumental sculpture is – monumental, i.e. big, visible, ambitious.

As political sculpture is expensive and it needs to be socio-politically or communally and collectively relatively widely accepted by the public (to be approved by the public authority, the land owner, the municipal administration, etc.), emotional, aesthetic, and accidental elements related to the individuals are almost completely excluded. The creation of a sculpture combines at least some commissioning entity, then a sculptor, an architect, a designer, workmen, an engineer, and a crane driver in a joint effort. Their motives might be very different (from eternal fame for the sculptor to a six-pack for men on the site, like in Dovlatov's *Suitcase*²), and the result is de-individualised. Political sculpture represents a more stable trend in the society than verses of a teenage poet in love or of a romantic political dissident aching for prison.

The same can be said about the practical level of ordinary political thinking: being collectively formed (by propaganda, public sentiments, headlines, ads, catch phrases, superstitions, stereotypes, etc.) it is relatively primitive as well. Thus, it has to be stated that although here we are talking mainly about sculpture in an urban environment and only about its political semantics, we use these phenomena as an intentional simplification of the problem: what is postpositivism? Although postpositivism has a primitivistic trend, we can not argue that here yet because we have taken the examples that are simplistic intentionally for the sake of a clearer statement of the main thesis. (Although examples from elsewhere can be used – the *déjà vu* of romantic literature in TV soap-operas, the kitsch of Christ the Saviour Church in Moscow in confrontation with its destroyed original; the ‘coalition of the willing’ to fight Taliban as the simplistic and primitive reincarnation of the Crusades, etc.)

² Dovlatov, S. *The Suitcase*, Counterpoint Press, 2011

Political sculpture in this study is not an object of research but proof and argument for the statement:

If postmodernist sculpture is at the same time newly primitive, then it is highly probable that so is postmodernism as such.

However, it is proven only if we can (with natural reservations) extrapolate its features to postmodernism in general.

One of the most evident and essential features of modernism have been classifications. Examples of these classifications in politics are: political right and political left; in art – impressionism and expressionism; in architecture – funk and *art nouveau*; in theology Hegel and Kierkegaard. Those quite strict distinctions make it possible to find semiotic correspondences and semantic overlapping of meanings between these classifications. *Art deco* has corresponding meaning in cubism. Look: the Miami Beach *art deco* seashore is visually cubistic and both of these qualifications are covered by being postmodern.



Miami Beach Embankment

Beethoven can be attributed to the different stages of the French Revolution, etc. These correspondences between schools, parties and styles are possible because they exist in the minds of those societies and there is a general understanding of the frames and limits of the classes in them.

The fundamental situation of connotation is never completely clear, of course, especially on the margins of the designated core (or in the 'grey areas'), but the principal relations between the coordinated parties to the relation of designation are always there. "The question is whether you can make words mean so many different things," asked Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*. In our case, political monumental art must always mean something and that 'something' must be quite evident. (Here we omit the fundamental semantic deviation of the meaning by the means of graffiti, as graffiti – although almost as old as sculptural art – is, strictly said, not a part of an original artefact but its interpretation through the semiotic means of another form of art.)

Isomorphism (Translatability) Within Postmodernism: Sculpture and Politics.

It is then just natural to assume that the clarity of the system of the modern world, able to make clear distinctions in politics, chemical elements, sexual orientations and academic degrees (everything is classified and the true hero of modernism is not Darwin, but Linne; the truly modern science is not evolution but taxonomy) will manifest itself in the simple form of political sculpture that did not exist in this sense before. (In the pre-modern era, sculpture was more a decorative element of the interior or a cult item in totem and taboo based religions.)³

The proof that something went “wrong” with postmodernism is that the mechanisms of semantic connotations start to fail – the pieces of art do not fall into the semiotic room pre-designed for them and – more than that – they start to mean something else. In the extreme case, artefacts of sculpture meant seriously (by the authors, commissioners, art critics and other semiotically unsophisticated folks) may turn out grotesque.

It has to be noted that it happens unintentionally and within intellectually sophisticated communities, which differentiates it from stupidity – the kitsch. I will give only one example of the latter: the so-called “Brugge Embankment” (sic!) in the Republic of Mari EL capital of Yoshkar Ola (Russia) – this is meant seriously, but by people who do not construct the foundation of the semiosphere.



“Brugge Embankment”

The “normal” relation between sculpture and politics may be demonstrated by sculptures being destroyed in times of sharp political changes – dismantling of the statues of Saddam Hussein and of Dzerzhinsky (visually, footages of these episodes are carbon copies of each other) has become iconic in modern times. The sculptural history of the Soviet period in Moscow precisely reflects the different stages of the developments and intrigues in the CPSU. Khrushchev’s policies that led to cultivating virgin lands in steppes have been reflected in various pieces of monumental art (including VDNKh). The metro Station Voykovskaya, named after a member of the squad that shot the late Czar and his family, tends to represent the corresponding deco.

The semiotics of destruction is even more meaningful than that of creation: like the demolition of the Church of the Christ the Saviour in Moscow, the Pussy Riot action in its kitsch version (girls were arrested for that by Putin’s orders), or the removal of the *Bronze Soldier* in Tallinn. Deconstruction is a sign in its own right.

³ Freud, S. *Totem and Taboo*, Beacon Press, 1913.

Postmodernism can't destroy classificational connotations because it has destroyed them already. Adler points out an important fact: the creation of new boundaries is a self-destructive activity because it provokes new trespassing of them. (1.) Classification needed intellectual effort, declassification – just some courage. Classification presupposes repetitiveness: things falling into the same classes must resemble each other, i.e. reproduce each other to some extent. Here we see the embryo of postmodernistic decadence. Something to be repeated is normal, but something repeated too many times is comic. Not necessarily and not immediately, but over the course of passing time. To quote Karl Marx, “History repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce.”

Here is an example of the simple semiotic phenomenon of political propaganda. Two sculptures coming seemingly from different foundations of primary modelling systems. A statue of George Bush (Sen.) at the Houston airport and one of the thousands of Lenins around the USSR – they are semiotically equivalent. (Picture 1.)



Picture 1: George Bush (USA) and Vladimir Lenin (Soviet Russia).

In this particular case, the transformation of postmodernism away from its pretence to intellectualism raises the question: would it make sense to dismantle Bush from Houston airport because it has turned into a parody of many truly meaningful things?

The Change of Semiotic Context Makes Text Grotesque. It Might Be the Case with Law too.

Sculptural art that is placed in an urban landscape is fundamentally political due to its monumental character – it requires significant material resources, time and labour and, thus, can be commissioned by either big money or by big politics (or by both of them). Even a nude next to a swan lake represents some kind of communal power behind it. Thus, all the sculptural art has been (in the modernistic paradigm) political, whether explicitly (the Statue of Liberty or *Let Us Beat Swords into Plowshares* in the yard of the UN HQ) or implicitly (Michelangelo's *David* is not only a symbol of Florence but of an exiled Medici as well). I believe that this idea – monumental forms of art require monumental resources (time, people, money, common will) has been proven by the case of the semiotic genesis of New York City – adequately expressed by Woody Allen and Alan Alda (the latter's monologue in “Annie Hall”, also Allen's introductory text to his movie “Manhattan”) and Milan Kundera (in his novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, part 3.5, titled *The Beauty of New York*.⁴)

Some tendencies that are titled as postmodernist ones are in reality just only NON-modernistic. In politics, these include the diffusion of political discourse (for instance – the rise of True Finns in Finnish elections, April 2011; the disappearance of political agenda in Russian presidential elections; the collapse of the structural role of the euro zone; the elimination of all international law in the refugee crises in Europe, etc.). It would be natural to assume that this process would be manifested in the sculptural public room as well. Conversely, it might be a case of something opposite: the semiotic revolution that occurred earlier elsewhere (Twitter, Wikileaks, Snowden, then in architecture and even in our own “soul-searching” – in

⁴ Kundera, M *Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Harper and Row, 1984.

the academic semiotic community – what is semiotics as an academic discipline? As a science? Why study it? How to sell it?) and had been manifested most visibly in the political sculpture that actually preceded the events that are now going on in the “real” social “realities”.

Fundamentally, two democratic practices based on the atomism of an individual civic being, those of Pericles and of Facebook, are somewhat similar. To quote Lyotard – the big narratives of history are replaced by tales, anecdotes and graffiti, and nobody really understands what they mean in their complexity⁵.

Let us take the example of the Beat Generation writers: there were three of them, each having his own decade – Jack Kerouac in the 1950s, Allen Ginsberg in the 1960s, and then William S. Burroughs in the 1970s, whose *Naked Lunch* is definitely outside of any sort of a narrative and consists of intentionally separated fragments of different styles, topics and genres. The fact that it was written in the 1950s is without relevance here – the book was published in the 1960s and became a fact of culture in the 1970s. To complete the case of the Beat Generation development, I draw a dotted line from here to Tucker Max, as a postmodern Beat *par excellence*, although he was not born then yet. This is the case of text developing in harmony with its context and, thus, remains semiotically equivalent to itself for a culturally long period of time. In other words: **time as context matters. At times.**

It would be analytically simple to assume that if there were no classes or classifications, there could be no belonging to any semiotic space that presupposes at least some minimal structure (like the relation between the sign and the designated). Elsewhere I have tried to express that the fundamental idea of Kafka in his novel *The Trial*⁶ was: being means being within a semiotic space and bearing at least some minimal system of connotations. That is what makes his case possible – *das Prozess* of K. does not have any content whatsoever but it has meaning due to being a legal structure.

For example, if there were no institution like the Academy of Arts or its *Salon de Paris*, there would have been no rules to follow and the birth of modernism (in an artistic sense – impressionism, etc.) would have been impossible. See our reference to Adler above.) Whatever the rules are, they are to be learned to be performed, to be practiced and to be adopted. A good example of that is the distinction between the material and procedural law in legal theory and practice. (The contradiction between them constitutes the comic plot of the quasi-legal film “My Cousin Vinnie”.) Procedural rules may be different, but they need to include at least this one among them: under what conditions this or that orally expressed regulation is considered to be a valid law. In theory of law, Hart calls them the “rules of recognition”⁷. A similar function is performed by paradigms in Thomas Kuhn’s theory of the history of science (rules that determine which statements are scientific, permissible, arguable versus those that do not belong to the realm of “recognised” science at all.)

The pan-European failure of ACTA was not related so much to its intentions but to the procedural rules (search and seizure in the straightforward meaning of the US Constitution’s IV Amendment). Thus, European pro-ACTA politicians were not seen by the IT community as evildoers but as comedians.

Part of the rules comes through the system of official learning and education; thus, in the postmodern era being trained is not so fundamental anymore. We call those untrained, un-connected reactions to the realities and expressions of a human soul primitive ones. (I hope to look into the case of postmodernism as “educated” dilettantism in later research.)

Primitive things need not to be produced by primitive intellectuals (naive art by Pirosmanni was discovered by impressionists as something intellectually significant), but they still may be (H. Rousseau was definitely primitivist within the impressionist tradition).

The Russian radio station Euro FM has a catch phrase for one of its programs – “Time runs by, but the times do not change“. Isn’t that a methodologically valid paradigm for some semiotic research?

⁵ Lyotard, Jean Francois. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis Univ Press, 1989)

⁶ Gräzin. I. „Law Is Myth“ *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law*, 2005, v 18, pp 23-51

⁷ Hart. H.L.A. *The Concept of Law*. Oxford, 1961

The New Context is Hard to Perceive. Involuntary Deheroisation

Neither selfies nor drones can produce, it seems, any true revolution in the human semiosphere, but since they are “cool” today we can use them as an analytical tool for a fictional experiment.

Let us start from a temporal statement: statues stand longer than their immediate urban surroundings and people. (I use the word “immediate” surrounding here to separate it from parts of the urban landscape of monumental character – cathedrals, city walls, towers – they may stand long enough as well: Notre Dame, The Tower, etc.)

The statue as a piece of monumental art that by the definition is monumental gains its meaning from being anchored into a socio-political and ideological environment. The political tensions arise once the site they are anchored to disappears. The classical case here being the dispute about the Eiffel Tower after the World Exhibition was closed. Estonian events in the case of the removal of the *Bronze Soldier*/Monument to Soviet War veterans (authors: Enn Roos and Arnold Alas) manifested itself as a political event, but essentially it was one of the new acts of postmodern primitivism against neo-classicism (that in Stalinist version was primitive too, but not primitivistic). (Picture 2.)

Here we are going to reference three pieces of monumental art in the capital city of Estonia – Tallinn. For simplicity, we shall use their nicknames: the *Schoolboys’ Monument* – dedicated to the college students’ who as volunteers fought for the independence of Estonia against Soviet Russia in the War of Liberation of 1918 – 1920; *The Cross* – a recently established monument to the same war as to a historical event; and *The Bronze Soldier* – a monument honouring the fallen soldiers of the Soviet Army who fought the Nazis and “liberated” Estonia in 1944 – the monument had become the symbol of the Soviet occupation and Russification of Estonia. All the necessary references can be found in the text of the essay.



Picture 2: *The Cross* and the *Bronze Soldier*

To make this point clear, I also want to present another pair – the same *Cross* as opposed to another piece commemorating the same actual historical event, one produced in 1927 (authors: Ferdi Sannamees, Anton Soans Picture 3). *The Cross* was installed in 2009. Spatially, they both stood some 500 hundred meters apart, but were not part of the same urban-spatial room. None of the three had been visible at the same time. Two of them – *The Cross* and the *Schoolboys’ Monument* – represent the same myhtologeme. But one of them – *The Cross*, being a part of the world of sculptural art in theory is not a piece of art itself in reality. The design of *The Cross* is visibly a copy-paste produced phenomenon and that was almost exactly the case indeed – the authors are anonymous virtually forever (although their names are known, of course, for the purposes of copyright, at least) engineers, who aimed at producing a technologically sophisticated artefact by primitivisation of the structure of semiotic links.



Picture 3: *The Cross* and the *Schoolboys' Monument*

Thus, here we have a double-motion combination of semiotic development – first, a primitive postmodern sculpture destroys another one for seemingly political reasons (the artistically valuable *Bronze Soldier* is removed from the town and *The Cross* of no value as symbolic opposition to the former Soviet regime is installed. Putting ideologies aside – it is the replacement of art by postmodern non-art). Then, second – it is the even more evident aggression of non-art against the truly modern one (not physically, but semiotically).

Officially, these two monuments bear the same political content. *The Cross* and the *Schoolboys' Monument* both refer to the Estonian War of Liberation, 1918-1920; thus, the removal of the latter could not be the issue. But its downgrading within the urban life was. Official delegations honour *The Cross* now, but not the *Schoolboys* anymore. Semiotically, it is non-art honoured over art.

To avoid sidetracking, it needs to be specially mentioned that the removal of the *Bronze Soldier* from its original location was an extremely public event with pan-European political consequences. Interestingly, these events provoked the first ever cyber attack in history that led to the foundation of a NATO cyber defence centre and its establishment in Estonia. This is extremely powerful semiotics. Its complexity is the extrapolation of a semiotic event almost to perfection.

Norman's book is not just a catalogue but a collection of the most basic texts, quotations and references referring to the perhaps the most outstanding semiotic event of the 20th century. (Both world wars are definitely incomparably larger than the *Bronze Soldier* "riots" in all other senses, but not in the semiotic one.)

A monument is a sign. Its installation is a very strong sign. But its removal or demolition is a SUPER-SIGN, kind of a nuclear blast in the semiotic world.

The design of *The Cross* and its erection were arranged and supervised by the Ministry of Defence. This fact includes an element of the grotesque element in and of itself. Then: the "thing" (to avoid the word "sculpture") did cost a huge amount of money (costs estimated at 3.5 million EUR, in reality - more) for technical reasons. The structure of *The Cross* is made of crystal glass, the lighting system of the "thing" (the monument) was extremely complicated and consisted of 250 000 LEDs controlled by a computer. That lighting system COLLAPSED (= the monument was damned dark) in a matter of months after it had been completed. Constructive and material malfunctions started before the completion of *The Cross* and still continue. *The Cross* is lighted according to the same principles as a candle lighted the desk of Shakespeare or Pushkin's Tatyana. (By simple sources of light from outside and from within.) Bulbs instead of candles – that is the only sign of

technical progress for the last 400 years.) This leads us to the conclusion that *The Cross* as a piece of postmodernism is grotesque. Its primitivism had been shadowed (or better for this case – illuminated) by technological trickery and its size. The comparison of the sizes of two artefacts with the same social connotation (both are dedicated to the same event – the War of Liberation of Estonia) seems to be noteworthy. *The Cross* is huge, the *Schoolboys' Monument* is soul-touchingly small. (Look at the photos – the size is visible from the size of people and cars next to both of them.) The new primitivism wants to be as big as possible. The survival of brainless dinosaurs required them to be big...

As the last 20 years of my research have been occasionally related to legal issues in Kafka's works, I can't *volens-volens* avoid the metaphysical background of the example discussed here. Not only was *The Cross* commissioned from a foreign contractor (i.e. the monument that supposedly intended to appeal to the national-historic feelings of Estonians was contracted out to a foreign country). Furthermore, that contractor was a company from the Czech Republic, deeply embedded in its advertising campaign in its own national identity – its slogan ran: "800 years of Bohemian crystal". *The Cross* has never been placed as an example of the company's products on the front page and in 2012 Sans Souci merged with the Dutch Glass Deco and, thus, even the possibility of a continuation of possible scandal with that monument in Tallinn had been put behind. The Czechs are definitely among the emotionally and culturally closest nations for Estonians in the world. But one of their symbols is the Brave Soldier Schvejck. He can stand next to classic art only in a postmodern world and under the strict condition that the latter bears its primitivistic appearance. Kafka, Vaclav Havel and Milan Kundera have repeatedly noted that Schvejck is not simple at all. But he is not as deadly serious as the perception of their War of Liberation by the Estonians.

Shift from "Simplicity" to "Grotesque"

The company that erected *The Cross* bears a name of semantic significance: Sans Souci, translated from French as "no problems!"⁸ It leads to further connotation. Sanssouci Palace in Potsdam represents the highest level of European sophistication in architecture and beauty and connotes the highest levels of spiritual sophistication *with* a Voltaire Room in it. In other words: the fundamental artistic and technical failure of *The Cross* is underlined by being related to the most sophisticated levels of European culture. To the best of my knowledge, neither the authors nor the commissioners or the government had ever been aware of the connotations, neither with Potsdam nor Voltaire. But the chain of signs: *The Cross* – Schvejck – SansSouci – Voltaire creates a somewhat perverse linkage between sophistication and stupidity.

Woody Allen has given the definition of "comedy" through the formula: (Alda's monologue in "Crimes and Misdemeanours"):

Comedy = Tragedy + Time.

The Cross = War + Postmodernism. The tragedy of war had turned into a comedy with a multiplicity of grotesque meanings: Schvejck, blind LED-bulbs, "sans souci", copy-paste design, etc., that could co-exist only due to the primitiveness of the whole artistic concept behind that piece.

The fact that none of the officials of the Ministry of Defence never even resigned due the issue of *The Cross* mishaps leads us to the conclusion: *The Cross* is socio-politically accepted and it truly represents the new being of minds in general – the one definitely primitivistic in opposition with the state of modernism. Semiotically, *The Cross* does not make sense in the late postmodern urbanistic room without its history of technical failure. In other words, *The Cross* makes all its sense only due to the fact that it is an ongoing technical failure. Without its technical misery, its ideological, artistic and political failure would become evident and that would be worse in many senses and for too many people. The essence of meaning here is the conflict between two sets of semiotics – the set of the semantic aspect of technology and the set of primitive essences of postmodern art. The more often *The Cross* fails (now it turns out that the turf supporting it has been washed away by rain! Can we call it an agro-botanical failure?), the more heroic it becomes. To exaggerate it slightly: the battle for the technical survival of the Monument for the War of Liberation has surpassed the battles of the war itself. And now that battle has become a part of the definition of postmodernism in general, i.e. it has become for us an item of metaphysical significance for the science of semiotics.

Which brings us to another feature of postmodernism as primitivism – its comic and grotesque modality.

First, let it be remembered that the equivalence of grotesque and primitivism (in the early era of modern jurisprudence) was revealed by Jeremy Bentham. His idea of an auto-icon (i.e. of the sculpture to be made of his own stuffed dead body)

⁸ See www.sanssouciint.com

is an expression of the most sophisticated primitivism and of “black humour“ at the same time⁹.

When we refer back to the examples already presented, we can notice that the Bush sculpture is, after all, unintentionally comic and even grotesque if we add just the 15-metre wider context of Houston Airport. Being titled as *Winds of Freedom*, they “blow” over the airport security machinery and grim personnel working just next to the Bush statue and within the same range of visibility. The surreal mood of the whole situation is sharpened by an additional twist – there is a sign next to the Bush sculpture at Houston Airport and the screening machine. It says that mocking security personnel of the airport is punishable by law! The image of Bush suggests the image of a brutal and slightly drunk Texan who could be considered the prototype of a potential terrorist under the rules inspired by himself. (Texas is not the birthplace of the rule of law anyway.) Look at the image once again: whether Bush looks like a freedom fighter or like a guy determined to commit a suicide bombing? Does he look like, say, Lincoln, or like Stalin?

The most productive concept of “grotesque” has been produced outside the scientific and analytical studies. It was a man of letters Sherwood Anderson, who gave his collection of short stories *Winesburg, Ohio* its subtitle – *Book of Grotesque*. The essence of his (and our) concept is – the stable solitude of the subject of semiotic process and then an instantaneous and short period of its exposition to something “else”, which we call a “semantic event.” Under current circumstances of co-habitation between the modernistic environment and the postmodern visual art, this has produced effects that aesthetically can be called – comical. Anderson described the mechanism – solitude suddenly exposed – and here we witness the aesthetic appearance: grotesque as something related to the comical, primitive, stupid, ignorant, uneducated.

Self-Awareness of Failure to Come: the Hope for Something New

The intentional grotesque is something modernistic in its essence, most of its forms like parody, art criticism, other meta-textualisations are sophisticated, and they assume the existence of the structures of the texts, classifications, parties, roles, systems of signs and languages, etc. Postmodern grotesque manifesting itself in its comical mode might be described in a human way by the word “failure”. Just as the art of rap required the band members to have at least some minor criminal record, so must a good postmodernist have his record of being laughed at. A perfect example is George Bush N 2.

The most tragic semiotic event of the postmodern world was the attack on the WTC in New York (9/11). It had been arranged by an NGO, a non-for-profit civic institution – thus, by a social entity of a clearly postmodern nature. Its semiotic essence is grasped by a set of semiotic signs like “terrorism” and “war on terror”, “9/11”, etc. Even a modern technological term – “weapons of mass destruction“ has become a pure semiotic label within an emotionally loaded discourse. “Weapons of mass destruction”, once a horrible expression does not mean anything today – after Colin Powell’s direct lies about Iraq, nobody takes them seriously, even if the argument might be used again. (Like in Syria, intelligence agencies report about them, but who can trust the intelligence agencies after their fundamental failures? As the American joke goes: what does the “T” stand for in the acronym “CIA”?) The invention of the new word – NUCULAR by Bush junior (comic twist!) manifests the existence of the grotesque in Sherwood Anderson’s sense. The misspelling of the word “potato” by Vice President Dan Quayle did not change the world, but the switch from “nuclear” to “nucular” did.

Inspired by the tragic events of 9/11, infamous sculptor Zurab Tsereteli (Russia) designed a monument called *The Teardrop* to be installed in New Jersey next to the place where the terrorist-driven planes hit the Twin Towers. Tsereteli, to be noted, is a successfully enterprising and mass-producing sculptor (search for “Tsereteli“ images in Google.)

It was Tsereteli who had performed the interchangeability of sculptural meanings in the postmodern urban environment in the literal sense: by replacing the head of Columbus with the head of Peter the Great in what now stands as a monument to Peter the Great in the Moscow River (but still dressed in Columbus’ clothes and on a Columbus era ship) – the act of fast transformation of one statue into another one by replacing its head is of semiotic value by itself.

⁹ See: www.ucl.ac.uk/Bentham-Project/who/autoicon



Peter's head on Columbus' torso

Anyway: *The Teardrop* stands in New Jersey, and according to the story behind the installation, it represents a tear that mourns for the victims of a tragic event. But actually we have here a copy of another sculpture – located at the Institute of Microbiology of Tübingen University. The sculpture is properly titled in the accurate modernistic (i.e. NON-postmodernistic) way – *Vulva*. It is based on modernistic semiotic elements like “anatomical taxonomy”, “higher education”, “physiology”, all the mythologema that I may call “Tübingen academia” or rather “Tübingen STYLE of academia”. Visually, it also has to be projected against the background of a fairytale mood and visuality that Tübingen and its University present.



Picture 4: Tübingen *Vulva* and New Jersey/Tsereteli *Teardrop*

The *Vulva* in Tübingen is definitely a piece from the world of modernistic semiotics, while *The Tear* is unquestionably a piece of postmodern world of tabloids, where even pornography has lost its erotic tension. The introduction of piercing airport screening of human bodies by security officers and the mass production of images of naked bodies of all the people on their screens is just the manifestation of the eradication of any eroticism of the human body. (Regarding the semiotics of the situation of surveillance see: (11)).

To quote a senior security officer at a big European airport (who asked to remain anonymous), “Now people have to figure it out whom to f... or with whom to do that. Other humans seem to be out.”

Conclusion

We are in the middle of a transfer from modernism into something else. We have to keep in mind that in monumental art the artefacts of previous semiotic spaces stand longer than in many other spheres of semiotic interest. The classical (or modern, for that sense) pieces of sculptural art may create new tensions in societies that go through their rebirth through structural (or destructural) changes of the postmodern era. Thus, there is a meeting point and the joint life time of sculptures from the former semiotic ages and the new ones that are created technically very fast – the switch of heads from Columbus to Peter the Great by Tsereteli, the erection of *The Tear* and the establishment of *The Cross* in Tallinn (by irrelevant engineers-turned-artists) happened in the blink of an eye and even here most of the time was spent on the legal issues (planning, zoning, contracting, recontracting, litigating). The lawyers' contributions to these pieces of sculpture were definitely more creative and artistic than those of the sculptors – one more fact in the case of postmodernism degraded to grotesque.

And it is just one step away from not being taken seriously anymore.